

The Hebrew Corner

There is an old adage that the reader may have heard, "History repeats itself." The Tanach demonstrates the wisdom of this saying in many passages. Let's first examine the following passage from Genesis concerning Abraham and his journey through the land of Egypt (Genesis 12:9-20):

"And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south. And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land. And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon: Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive. Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee. And it came to pass, that, when Abram was come into Egypt, the Egyptians beheld the woman that she was very fair. The princes also of Pharaoh saw her, and commended her before Pharaoh: and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. And he entreated Abram well for her sake: and he had sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she asses, and camels. And the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram's wife. And Pharaoh called Abram, and said, What is this that thou hast done unto me? Why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife? Why saidst thou, She is my sister? so I might have taken her to me to wife: now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way. And Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him: and they sent him away, and his wife, and all that

he had.”

The Hebrew word in this passage translated as wife are from the noun isha (אִשָּׁה, ee-SHAH) meaning woman, wife, or female. Here the possessive forms used (my, his) indicate that wife is the intended meaning. This is contrasted with the references to sister, which is the Hebrew word achot (אָחוֹת, ah-CHOHT). Abraham acts out of fear, instead of faith, in this situation, and if God had not intervened, the result would have been disastrous. The next passage indicates that Abraham had not learned anything from this experience (Genesis 20:1-18):

“And Abraham journeyed from thence toward the south country, and dwelled between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar. And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah. But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife. But Abimelech had not come near her: and he said, Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation? Said he not unto me, She is my sister? And she, even she herself said, He is my brother: in the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands have I done this. And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her. Now therefore restore the man his wife; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live: and if thou restore her not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that are thine. Therefore Abimelech rose early in the morning, and called all his servants, and told all these things in their ears: and the men were sore afraid. Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said unto him, What hast thou done

unto us? and what have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? Thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done. And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing? And Abraham said, Because I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake. And yet indeed she is my sister, she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said unto her, This is the kindness which thou shalt shew unto me; at every place whither we shall come, say of me, He is my brother. And Abimelech took sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and womenservants, and gave them unto Abraham, and restored him Sarah his wife. And Abimelech said, Behold, my land is before thee: dwell where it pleaseth thee. And unto Sarah he said, Behold, I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver: behold, he is to thee a covering of the eyes, unto all that are with thee, and with all other: and thus she was reprov'd. So Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children. For the LORD had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah Abraham's wife."

What is most incredible about this passage, is that the event occurred after Abraham had met face-to-face with the Lord and his two angels in the plains of Mamre, where he announced the impending judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah. This indicates that even though we may have a close relationship with God, that we must be wary of attempts by Satan and the demonic forces to bring fear and doubt into our hearts. If it can happen to such a man of faith as Abraham, it can happen to us. One of the ways Satan and his forces attempt to deceive us is by pointing out a half-truth, such

as in the case of Abraham, hoping that we will deceive ourselves into believing that it is true, and then acting upon that belief. We need to prepare our hearts for these deceptions by testing everything against God's word, and asking God in prayer to reveal the truth to us.

Another old adage is "Like father like son," and sure enough, Isaac, the son of Abraham, uses the same deception, as described in the following passage (Genesis 26:6-11):

"And Isaac dwelt in Gerar: and the men of the place asked him of his wife; and he said, She is my sister: for he feared to say, She is my wife; lest, said he, the men of this place should kill me for Rebekah; because she was fair to look upon. And it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out at a window, and saw, and, behold, Isaac was sporting with Rebekah his wife. And Abimelech called Isaac, and said, Behold, of a surety she is thy wife: and how saidst thou, She is my sister? And Isaac said unto him, Because I said, Lest I die for her. And Abimelech said, What is this thou hast done unto us? One of the people might lightly have lien with thy wife, and thou shouldest have brought guiltiness upon us. And Abimelech charged all his people, saying, He that toucheth this man or his wife shall surely be put to death."

In this case Isaac engaging in full deception, as Rebekah was not his sister, but only a cousin through Abraham's brother Haran. Later in Genesis we read that more deception followed, as Isaac's wife Rebekah and his son Jacob deceived Isaac into thinking that Jacob was the elder son Esau, and stealing his blessing. In spite of the imperfections of these people, he used them to found the nation of Israel, a lesson for each of us, who are also imperfect, to consider. A

point of interest here is that the Philistine kings were both named Abimelech (אבימלך, ah-vee-MEH-lehch), which means either my father is king, or, as some propose, Melek (Molech) is king, referring to the idol. Some commentators think that this was a generic name for all Philistine kings, similar to Pharaoh in Egypt.

The entire book of Judges chronicles the nation of Israel before they became a kingdom, whose people were constantly turning away from God, but then crying out to God in times of national distress. God would then send a judge to deliver them. The failure of the Israelites, resulting in the constant turmoil during those years, is made clear in the following passage (Judges 2:1-5):

“And an angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I sware unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you. And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this? Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you. And it came to pass, when the angel of the LORD spake these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice, and wept. And they called the name of that place Bochim: and they sacrificed there unto the LORD.”

Disobedience to God's instructions resulted in the outcome that God had warned them about. They did not drive the inhabitants of the land, and they were corrupted with worship of the local deities Baal and Ashtaroth. The judges sent by God would deliver them temporarily, but they would revert back to idol worship. The place

name Bochim is from the Hebrew verb baka (בכה, bah-KAH), meaning to weep. What we can learn from this, is that the time to seek out God, is all the time, not only in time of trouble.

There is a familiar passage in the B'rit Hadesha (John 9) in which Jesus heals a man who was blind from birth. Jesus made some clay by mixing his saliva with some soil from the ground, and then rubbed the blind man's eyes with the clay. He then told the man to go wash in the pool of Siloam. He followed Jesus' instructions, and received his sight. The neighbors who knew that the man had been blind from birth, asked him how he had received his sight, and he told them what had taken place. This led to an encounter of the formerly blind man with the Pharisees, as related in the following passage (John 9:13-29):

“They brought to the Pharisees him that aforetime was blind. And it was the sabbath day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes. Then again the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. He said unto them, He put clay upon my eyes, and I washed, and do see. Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them. They say unto the blind man again, What sayest thou of him, that he hath opened thine eyes? He said, He is a prophet. But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind, and received his sight, until they called the parents of him that had received his sight. And they asked them, saying, Is this your son, who ye say was born blind? How then doth he now see? His parents answered them and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind: But by what means he now seeth, we know not: he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself. These

words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue. Therefore said his parents, He is of age; ask him. Then again called they the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner. He answered and said, Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see. Then said they to him again, What did he to thee? how opened he thine eyes? He answered them, I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear it again? will ye also be his disciples? Then they reviled him, and said, Thou art his disciple; but we are Moses' disciples. We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is.”

There is a well-known quote from the philosopher/poet George Santayana, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” The Pharisees in the above encounter were giving such weight to the authority of Moses, that they could not see that Jesus (Yeshua) was sent by God to heal this man, much less to be the Messiah. Next let's turn to the Tanach for a passage from the book of Exodus (Exodus 31:12 – 32:1):

“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you. Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be

put to death. Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed. And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon Mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God. And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.”

So the Pharisees, descendants of these same Israelites, used very similar language in the rejection of Jesus and the new covenant based on grace, as the Israelites did in rejecting Moses and the old covenant based on the law. They reviled Jesus for not keeping the sabbath day, in which people were to be stoned for doing any work on it by Mosaic law. Yet they failed to recognize that Jesus was sent by God to enact a new covenant, in which a sinner was not subject to the full penalty of the law, but by the blood of Jesus, and through faith in him, would be set free from the eternal consequences of disobeying the law. Had they carefully read their scrolls of the Tanach, and asked God to help them to understand them, they would have found abundant references to the son of God and his purpose for coming in the scripture that was available to them at that time. They might also have come across this passage, and realized that they were making the same mistake their forefathers made almost 1500 years earlier.

May we as Christians stay close to God through constant prayer and

obedience to the word of God, so as not to miss out when God wants to direct our lives. May you have a blessed month, and (as I am writing to you on Saturday), Shabbat Shalom!