

Triennial Torah Study – 4th Year 28/12/2013



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This week's Triennial Torah reading can be found at:

https://sightedmoon.com/sightedmoon_2015/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf

Gen 17	Judges 10-11	Ps 35	Mat 21:23 – 22:22
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Circumcision; New Names; Future Greatness (Genesis 17)

Once again, the promises to Abram are expanded, this time to include a multitude of nations and kings. As a token of His covenant with Abram's descendants, God commanded circumcision. It is a visible sign in the flesh of every male Israelite that they are part of a family with whom God has a special relationship and for whom God has a special work. Every male is to be circumcised on the eighth day of life. It is interesting to note that in male babies vitamin K—the blood clotting factor—rises sharply from birth and peaks on the eighth day, before declining to the normal level. While this could not have been known by Abram and the Israelites, it was perfectly well-known to God.

Genesis 17 also records the renaming of Abram and Sarai. Up to Genesis 16 the Scriptures always use the birth names Abram, which means "Exalted Father," and Sarai, meaning "Princess." But, here in Genesis 17, God bestows new names on them. Abraham means "Father of a Multitude" and Sarah, while still retaining the sense of "Princess," seems to mean one of an even higher station (e.g., it is derived from the same word translated "queen" in Isaiah 49:23). Interestingly, both new names differ from Abram and Sarai by the addition of one letter in the Hebrew—the letter He, pronounced, like the English H, as a breath of air, which is often a symbol of God's Spirit. Though there may be no significance to this, becoming new persons and circumcision can both picture spiritual conversion. In any event, whether Abraham and Sarah received the indwelling of God's Spirit at this particular time or not, we do know for certain that they did receive it at some point (compare 1 Peter 1:11)—for they will be in the Kingdom of God, and only the converted have that honor (Romans 8:9, 11).

Also of interest in this chapter is the hint at future national greatness we are afforded here. While the primary national blessings were to come through Isaac, God promised to make of Ishmael a great nation also (Genesis 17:19-21; 21:18). Ishmael became the father of many of the Arab peoples. And the world has certainly seen a period of Arab greatness. American author Louis L'Amour described this period in his bestselling novel *The Walking Drum*, set in 12th-century Europe and Asia: "In the space of one hundred years following the death of

Mohammed in 632, the Arabs had carried the sword of Islam from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean, holding at one time most of Spain, part of southern France, the isle of Sicily, all of North Africa and Egypt, all of Arabia, the Holy Land, Armenia, Persia, Afghanistan, and almost a third of India. The empire of the Arabs was larger than that of Alexander the Great or of Rome. Under the flush of greatness for more than five hundred years the Arabs carried the torch of civilization” (1984, pp. 171-172).

Consider, then, what that must mean for the descendants of Isaac. If Ishmael becoming a “great nation” meant an empire more vast than Rome’s, which preserved civilization through the Dark Ages of Europe, then think what must have been in store for the descendants of Isaac—who were to become many nations and inherit far greater blessings! Have the Jewish people ever been the recipients of such greatness? No. Even today, Arab national territory is far greater than the land of the modern state of Israel by a ratio of 540 to 1. Yet God’s amazing prophecies have been fulfilled—surprising as it may sound, through the modern descendants of Joseph in the form of the British Empire and the United States of America.

Tola, Jair and the Ammonite Oppression (Judges 10)

After the reign of Abimelech, which does not appear to have included much territory other than Shechem and its surrounding villages, Tola judged Israel and worked some kind of deliverance, although we do not know against whom. He judged 23 years.

Following Tola, Jair judged 22 years. His 30 sons were noblemen and rulers of as many cities in Gilead, thus indicating that Jair had a rather large administrative apparatus, which exercised significant influence in Gilead and probably further afield. Since no mention is made of a deliverance made by Jair, it appears that he continued the era of peace produced by Tola.

The 45 years of peace and relative fidelity to God were shattered upon the death of Jair. Israel ran wholeheartedly back into idolatry, embracing the gods of not just the Canaanites, but also of the Syrians, Sidonians, Moabites, Ammonites and Philistines. And so, for 18 years God sold His people into the hands of foreigners—the Philistines and Ammonites, two of the very peoples whose gods Israel adopted. From the catalog of pagan gods, and the scanty notes of the Ammonite invasion into the territories of Ephraim and Benjamin, it would appear that the greater part of the oppression fell on the tribes east of Jordan, and that the Ammonite invasion might have been a coordinated effort with the Philistines to divide Israel down the middle.

When the 18 years elapsed, Israel came to its senses and, for the first time, the cause of their misery is actually stated by them in the account—their rejection of God and attachment to the Baals. But when they cried out to God, He rejected their pleas and told them He would not save them. Nevertheless, Israel repented and served God. Eventually, God could no longer endure the misery of Israel.

Ammon gathered in Mizpah, and Israel met them. But who would deliver Israel?

Jephthah's Vow (Judges 11)

We come now to one of the most difficult passages in the book of Judges—the story of Jephthah. The story is more important than one would at first suspect, for the critics have seized upon it as evidence that God is self-contradictory, bloodthirsty and devoid of any sense of equity and justice. Similarly, those who adhere to the belief in the divine inspiration of Scripture have found the story to be a stone of stumbling, especially since the book of Hebrews includes Jephthah by name in its famous catalog of the heroes of faith (Hebrews 11).

If the common understanding of the story is correct, we surely have a very odd series of facts to explain. Jephthah demonstrated a detailed knowledge of the history of his people, a history he could only have learned from the books of Moses (see Judges 11:12-28). Yet, if this is so, how do we explain his apparent ignorance of the blaring prohibition against child sacrifice contained in the books of Moses? (Leviticus 18:21; 20:2; Deuteronomy 12:31-32; 18:10-12)

Again, immediately after sending the ambassadors to Ammon “the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah” (verse 29). But if this is so, how could a person led by the Holy Spirit be so absolutely callous as to sacrifice his own child? In fact, Jephthah's vow is made immediately after receiving the Spirit (verse 30)—how is that to be explained? Moreover, if the common understanding of the story is correct, God gave Jephthah the victory over Ammon knowing full well that Jephthah would sacrifice his child, and yet He never said a word—not in person, not in a dream, not by a prophet.

And further, how could a man who was so scrupulous to keep his vow (verse 35) be so unscrupulous as to murder his innocent child in flagrant disobedience to God's law? Additionally, when his daughter learned of her father's vow, she encouraged him to keep the vow and asked only to be able to go and mourn her virginity for two months, at the end of which time she voluntarily returned so that her father could carry out his vow. Jephthah's daughter exhibits no terror, no pleading for her life—even the friends with whom she mourned her virginity allowed her to return! How is that to be explained?

And why didn't Jephthah avail himself of the laws for redeeming things vowed (Leviticus 27)—he said, “I cannot go back”—when such an option would have been open to him?

And finally, if the common understanding of Jephthah's vow is correct, where is that marvelous and self-evident faith that caused the writer of Hebrews, probably the apostle Paul, to unhesitatingly include him in his catalog of the heroes of faith?

The confusion can be cleared up by carefully examining Jephthah's vow. Let us notice it in the New King James Version: “If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering” (verses 30-31). First, notice that it is a conditional vow (if...then). Second, the phrase

“whatever comes out to meet me” is actually “the one who comes forth to meet me” in Hebrew, an apparent reference to a person. The Nelson Study Bible concurs: “The phrase to meet me seems to refer more appropriately to a human than to an animal” (note on 11:31).

How then are we to understand Jephthah’s vow? The Hebrew of verse 31 is the source of the difficulty—or rather, the translation of the Hebrew text is the source of the difficulty. The next phrase could just as well be translated, “...shall surely be the Lord’s, OR I will offer it a burnt offering.” The Nelson Study Bible notes, “The conjunction in Jephthah’s pivotal statement in v. 31, that whatever or whoever came out of the door ‘shall be the Lord’s, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering’ could be translated or. Thus, if a person came out first, he would dedicate that person to the Lord, or if an animal came out first, he would offer the animal as a burnt sacrifice” (note on Judges 11:39). This explanation, however, has left out the possibility of an unclean animal, such as a dog, coming out. Presumably, a clean animal in this scenario would be sacrificed while an unclean animal would be dedicated like a person. But there is a possibility that this translation is not entirely correct either, as it leaves out the possibility of nothing or no one coming out to meet Jephthah. This brings us to the next apparent problem in translation.

The clause “or I will offer it up as a burnt offering” could also be rendered, “or I will offer Him a burnt offering.” If that is correct, then we are left with Jephthah imagining a person coming out to meet him and stating, in a perhaps corrected rendering of verse 31, “The one who comes forth to meet me I will consecrate to the Lord, or [if no one comes out] I will offer Him [i.e., the Lord] a burnt offering.” This changes the complexion of the difficulty entirely.

What emerges from a clear understanding of the Hebrew is significant. First, let’s note that Jephthah was making a conditional vow with God. If God would give Jephthah the victory and bring him safely home, then Jephthah would either dedicate a person of his household to God or he would offer a burnt-offering to God if no one came out. Once God performed His part of the vow, Jephthah was bound to fulfill his part.

Second, and most important however, Jephthah left the choice in God’s hands! Jephthah could not control who would come out of the doors of his house to greet him (or whether anyone would), just as Abraham’s servant had no control over who would give him drink (see Genesis 24:12-14). The vow contained a choice to be made by God: either accept a consecrated person or a burnt offering. Therefore, Jephthah was perhaps, to a degree, acting on faith, allowing God to choose how Jephthah would fulfill his part of the covenant.

Yet it still appears that the vow was rash and unwise. Jephthah had apparently not thought this through well enough. He was shocked and deeply grieved that his daughter was the one who came out to meet him, stating that this had brought him very low (verse 35). He was clearly expecting it to be someone else—probably a household servant. No doubt, he learned a powerful lesson that day.

Thankfully, as the evidence seems to support, Jephthah did not sacrifice his daughter—he devoted her to the service of God, much as did Hannah devote Samuel to the service of God. As

such, Jephthah's daughter would remain a virgin as she served at the tabernacle as part of a special class of dedicated women (compare Exodus 38:8; 1 Samuel 2:22; Luke 2:36-37). It appears that they acted as door porters, singers, musicians and workers in cloth (most valuable and needed when the tabernacle stood, as it did in Jephthah's day). This dedication meant that Jephthah would have no grandchildren—for his daughter was his only child—and thus no heir.

As we know, the Israelites viewed barrenness as a stigma, and for the family line to end was considered virtually a curse from God. Now becomes very clear the grief of Jephthah (for he would have no inheritor) and of his daughter (for she would have no children) and of her friends (for their friend would never become "a mother in Israel," and possibly mother of the promised Messiah) and of the people of Israel (for their hero would not leave them descendants and his name would "perish out of Israel")! It is interesting to note the contrast between Jephthah and the judges immediately before and after him. They both had 30 sons (Judges 10:3-4; 12:8-9), while Jephthah had just this one and only daughter.

As a final observation, we must note verse 39 again. The sacred historian records that Jephthah "carried out his vow with her which he had vowed" and then adds, "she knew no man." It is not recorded that Jephthah sacrificed her—that is apparently a conclusion based upon an incomplete understanding of the above scriptures. Some will argue that this last clause just magnifies the tragedy of her death—that she died young without ever marrying. But if, indeed, Jephthah's daughter was sacrificed in gruesome and flagrant disobedience to God, this added statement about knowing no man would seem to be superfluous and inane; it only appears to make sense if she continued in a state of celibacy after Jephthah fulfilled his vow.

The writer of Hebrews, then, is vindicated for including Jephthah in the heroes of faith. Though Jephthah was evidently rash and unwise in making his vow to start with, he nevertheless obeyed God's command to pay one's vows to Him (Deuteronomy 23:21-23), even when it was to his own hurt (compare Psalm 15:4). In that sense, Jephthah's fulfilling of his vow may be seen as a real act of faith! He was willing to give up his only hope of grandchildren and perpetuation of the family line, enduring a social stigma, in order to obey God. Why? Because he looked forward to the promises that he had seen and embraced (Hebrews 11:13), which would be bestowed in that country of God (verse 14) when he would be raised in that better resurrection (verse 35)! Truly, then, Judges 11 reveals Jephthah to be, in the end, a courageous man of integrity, faith and vision!

Psalm 35

In Psalm 35 David proclaims his innocence and calls on God to destroy his enemies. "Some of the most troubling psalms are those that contain prayers asking God to curse the wicked. These imprecatory psalms are sometimes thought to conflict with the sentiment of the gospel, but in fact they accurately reflect God's abhorrence of evil" (Nelson Study Bible, introduction to Psalms).

David is not specific about his trouble, but he speaks of betrayal and injustice—“they hid their net for me without cause” (verse 7). David asks God to intervene: “Plead my cause!” “Fight for me!” “Rescue me!” (verses 1-3). David calls for God to pour out judgment on his enemies: Bring on them “shame” (military defeat). Make them “chaff” (worthless and scattered thin). Lead them into “dark and slippery” paths (troubles and uncertainties). Orchestrate their “ruin” (sudden and complete desolation) (see The Expositors Bible Commentary, notes on verses 48). After God has dealt with these enemies, “Then,” David says, “my soul will rejoice in the Lord and delight in His salvation” (verses 9-10).

David is dumbfounded that people for whom he had shown concern (verses 13-14) have become enemies, detractors and false witnesses (verses 11-16). They gloat, “Aha! Aha! With our own eyes we have seen it” (verse 21, NIV). David’s distress in the face of people who hated him without cause (verse 19) and “ruthless witnesses” (verse 11, NIV) foreshadowed the suffering of Yeshua Messiah (see John 15:24-25; Mark 14:57-59).

The closing section of the psalm states that those who rejoice at David’s hurt will be “ashamed” (verse 26)—figuratively “clothed with shame” (same verse). This refers “not to simple embarrassment, but to the revelation of the complete emptiness of wickedness before the judgment seat of God” (Nelson Study Bible, note on verses 26-28).

This section also informs us that there are other people on David’s side (verse 27), evidently from among those referred to in verse 20 as the “quiet ones in the land.” David is confident that they will shout for joy and praise God with him when he is at last delivered.

Mat 21:23 – 22:22

Verses 23-27

Here Yeshua begins to reveal the character of the Pharisees to the people. Much of what He states in His parables is directed to them, though the people who tolerated their leadership are not without accountability.

43 The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation

This verse, in conjunction with verse 19 (the fig tree) is often used to teach that God changed His mind and did away with the faith of Israel (as given in Torah), and began something new (i.e., “the Christian Church”), about the time of Acts chapter 2.

The reality is that God did not do away with His Torah (i.e., Matthew 5:17-21, Romans 3:31), but the offer of the Kingdom, along with the task of spreading the news of Messiah, did indeed “pass from” Israel proper, to the nations (via the faithful Jewish remnant in the diaspora), after Yeshua’s death — though not for long. (Much of chapters 9-11 of Paul’s Romans letter addresses this.)

The offer of the Kingdom through Messiah was indeed intended for Israel and not the gentiles:

Matthew 10:5-7 – These twelve Yeshua sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Matthew 15: 22-24 – And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

The seeds for what was to come indeed began in Acts 2, but not as the Christian church depicts. Here we find Jews (not “Christians”) gathered in Jerusalem for the feast of Shavuot. The Ruach haKodesh (Holy Spirit) descends on these Jewish followers of Messiah as an indication that God’s will and intent were being served through those who trusted in Yeshua. (This experience was similar to that of Mount Sinai. Our [Revelation study](#) goes into much more detail about this.) These Jews then returned to their homes throughout the Roman empire, continuing in their Torah-based faith, with a knowledge of Messiah in Yeshua and empowerment of the His Ruach.

We know that the Kingdom offer had not completely been taken away from Israel at the time of the events in Acts 2, for we see Peter extending this to His Jewish brethren, following the events of that Shavuot in the very next chapter:

Acts 3:12-26 – And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Yeshua; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled. Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. And he shall send Yeshua Messiah, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many

as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Yeshua, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

We also see Paul continue to teach that this offer of salvation/Kingdom was for the Jew first:

Romans 1:16 – For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Israel did not heed the warnings however. This was followed by the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD and subsequent Roman war of 132 AD. During this approximately 100-year time period, a process began whereby the baton of Torah-based Messianic faith was passed along to the remaining faithful remnant of Israel in the diaspora, and those gentiles who congregated with them (i.e Romans, chapters 9-11). It was in this manner that nations other than Israel were “given” the Kingdom offer to take to the world.

It was not long however before Babylonian paganism crept in and took the place of the faith of Yeshua and His disciples, resulting in the formation of gentile Christianity. By the time of Constantine (early 4th century) anyone continuing to follow the original (authentic) Torah-based Hebraic faith in Yeshua was considered a heretic. For a historical summary of this time period, see [Not Subject to the Law of God?](#) in the YashaNet library.

Conversely, some would argue that the phrase “a nation,” here still refers to Israel, but a different generation. This argument is made no doubt, with the intention to combat the aforementioned false teaching that God deserted the Torah-based faith of Israel in favor of Christianity.³

It would seem however that the context (from the cursing of the fig tree on Yeshua’s way into Jerusalem, to His words as He left the Temple in 33:37-39), indicate a rebuke of Israel, (other than the faithful remnant). This has nothing to do with God’s faithfulness to Israel (i.e., as seen in Jeremiah 31 and Romans chapters 9 through 11), only to their role of bringing the truth of God’s Kingdom, as it will be established through Yeshua, to the nations.

In short, although the main body of Israel did not carry out its mission of the Kingdom (and has never accepted Yeshua or taught others about Him since that time), neither did the gentiles when given the chance.

1 And Yeshua answered

Chapter divisions were obviously not present in the original documents. Yeshua’s comments are a continuation from the discussion of chapter 21.

2 The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king

See our previous comments on the Kingdom parables. As He mentioned in chapter 21, the Kingdom offer, meant exclusively for Israel, was slipping from their hands.

11 he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment

See our previous study on this particular parable.

14 For many are called, but few are chosen.

This would allude to His parable of the sower as discussed in chapter 13. Many hear the Torah preached, but few truly adhere to it. See also Matthew 7:13-14.

The “call” of God can be traced to the Shema (Deuteronomy 6) which is a call to enter the Kingdom. (See comments to verse 37 below.) The Shema can be considered God’s “plan of salvation,” as it gives instruction to place our trust in the One true God, and to seek Him and be conformed to His image, by being both hearers and doers of His Torah. All of these principles are reinforced in the various “New Testament” letters.

16 they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians

Yeshua’s enemies now play their “secular card,” bringing in the ruling family with ties to Rome, prior to asking Him a question about loyalty to Caesar.