

GENESIS

Week 15, chapters 14 and 15

It's amazing what becomes clearer when we put the Jewishness that was removed like an inflamed Appendix out of the Bible, back into the Bible.... And a prime example is the story of Abraham and Melchizedek. The traditional Roman and Western Church's answer to "who is Melchizedek" has been that he was Jesus. Much like the way the Church also suggests that anytime a human attribute is ascribed to God, like when God was walking in the Garden of Eden during the time of Adam, it must have been Jesus. I don't want to get too far in to that, nor do I wish to sound at all dogmatic about my views because this side of Heaven, this deal is a mystery for sure. But I must admit I am not convinced by the Church tradition in this matter.

Long ago, the great Hebrew scholar Maimonides stated what is obvious if one will simply read the Scriptures: the entire human like descriptions of Yahweh's thoughts and actions are figurative, not literal. Yahweh doesn't jump with joy. He doesn't swing a glittering sword over his head. He doesn't "come down" to earth to see what's happening, and then travel back up to heaven to ponder it. God does not have emotions the way we think of them: He doesn't get angry, then sad; He isn't happy one moment, and displeased the next. He doesn't seek pleasure. He doesn't need to be reminded of anything. Yahweh is spirit. He is not a man than He should change. The reason those figurative words are used, is because there is simply no other way for us to communicate about Him. Words as we think of words, and communication as we think of communication, are strictly products of the physical and material world. There are no "spirit words" that exist for a human to speak or communicate to another human being. Everything that we use to describe the attributes of God are insultingly inadequate. But, we must use something.

The same goes for ascribing the figurative statements about God to Yeshua just because at a momentous time in the history of the world, some essence of the supreme spirit being called Yahweh was made into flesh and blood and placed on planet Earth. If Yeshua was every human form that was convenient for some purpose in any and every era, then the fact that the Messiah, Jesus, had to come from the line of David, and he had to be born of a virgin, has it's meaning awfully watered down. As concerns the errant belief that Yeshua was Melchizedek, Melchizedek fit none of these parameters. And, if Jesus and Melchizedek were actually one in the same, the rather lengthy homily in Hebrews would have been a perfect place to explain that the parallels drawn between the two were because they were the same guy! But no such thing is said.

Consider this: the Shekinah was a physical manifestation of sorts; for it was sometimes in the form of a visible cloud or a pillar of fire. Are we to assume that the Shekinah was also Jesus because it apparently had at least some physical properties? What about those other visible manifestations that the Bible calls the Angel of the Lord? Yet, when that term is used, the "Angel of Lord" is never a messenger or a go-between (which is the typical occupation of an angel), but rather he seems to be the very presence of God with full power and divine authority and refers to himself as God. So, is the Angel of the Lord also

Jesus? How about the visible finger of God that wrote the stone tablets for Moses, and said His name was YHWH? Was that not quite the truth....was it actually Yeshua's finger? How about the burning bush itself, on Mt. Sinai; that was tangible and seeable, so was that Yeshua, too? You get my point.

We should not, in my opinion, run around subscribing the name and person of Yeshua to every Divine manifestation that seems to have human, or even simply material, characteristics ascribed to it. Jesus, Yeshua, was the name given to a specific man, born at a precise time in history, in a precise set of circumstances, for a precise purpose..... Savior. That this man, Jesus of Nazareth, is also the Son of God, and is God, and is Messiah is solid biblical truth. However there are no biblical words or thoughts that Jesus came at some number of earlier times in other forms..... this seems to me to be just a somewhat pained defense of a long-held GENTILE church tradition that tends to oversimplify complex and infinite spiritual realities that go well beyond human abilities to comprehend; and does so in a way that packages these things neatly and cleanly so there can be no grey areas. In fact, the scriptures that emphatically state that in the future Jesus will come for a **2nd time**, in and of itself completely refute the notion that he appeared **several other** times in the past. In order to come a second time, He could only have been here once before.

So, without necessarily advocating that Shem was Melchizedek, it certainly would make a lot of sense and is a much better guess than Jesus. First, Shem was still alive. Second, the land of Canaan, which is where Shalem was located, was a very pagan place. And, yet, in the midst of this, here is this man who speaks of the God Most High..... the God Abraham was just beginning to get to know. And, he seems to speak with deep understanding of the One True God, yet never does he make himself to be God. Third, Abraham seemed to know who this man was, and he had the deepest reverence for him. In fact, Melchizedek's presence seems just matter-of-fact and expected. Without any explanation at all, Abraham gives one-tenth of all the recovered property to this man. And, by the way, be careful not to attach the tithing label as we think of it in the church today to this act. This 10th that was given was standard payment due a King for the spoils of war. This is a ONE-TIME payment, not an ongoing obligation.

Let's bring some other scriptural mention of Melchizedek into play and follow that line of inquiry. The next mention of Melchizedek after Genesis is in Psalms 110, which is accepted by Jew and Christian alike as a prophetic, messianic Psalm.

READ Psalm 110: 1-4.

Here, in an **OT** Scripture, we see this reference to the future Messiah in V4 as being of the "order of", or in other versions "compared to", Melchizedek. What does that mean? Well, the word translated "order of" is in Hebrew "dibrah". And, it has the sense of meaning "in the manner of", or "similar in intent". So, the Messiah, being of the "manner of" Melchizedek, means the Messiah would be both a high priest and a king, just as was Melchizedek..... something that was rare, but not unheard of, in bible times. But, it also likely meant there was some genealogical connection.

So, we have the original story of Melchizedek in Genesis 14, we have a follow up in the Psalms, about 900 years later, and then in the NT in Hebrews 7, about 1900 years later more of Melchizedek's attributes are brought out. And, they all connect.

Here's the thing: the order of, or the manner of, Melchizedek is all about a very special priestly system that will be higher than the Levite priesthood; because this priest will also be a king. Now, as of the time of this story, there was no Levite priesthood..... because there weren't even any Levites, yet. The Levite clan would not come for at least 200 more years. Then, at least 400 years after that, the Levite priesthood would begin with Aharon, Aaron, brother of Moses, who would be the first high priest of Israel. No earthly priest was to be higher than the High Priest of Israel. It was the High Priest ALONE that could enter the Holy of Holies in the Temple, and only ONCE per year, to meet God. But, the priesthood that Melchizedek represented was of a type higher than the Levitical High Priesthood. It was representative of the type of priesthood that the Messiah Himself would have before God..... Perpetual and it includes kingship.

So, what can we say in conclusion about Melchizedek? He was a real man, the High Priest and King of the city of Shalem that possibly eventually became called Jerusalem. He was a type of Christ, but he was NOT Christ. He was a shadow of the Messiah that was to come. And, very likely, he was Shem, son of Noah.

Now, lets look at the last part of Chapter 14.

RE-READ GEN. 14:17 - end

Melchizedek, is either delusional, or he bears great authority and understanding of just who God is. Because he pronounces that Abraham is blessed by El Elyon, and that El Elyon is to be blessed. Abraham offers utterly no response that was written, as he seems to know to whom he is submitting. And, Abraham gives Melchizedek a tenth of everything.

The king, the ruler, of Sodom says to Abraham, give me the people, you keep the loot. Why would he say such a thing? First, the King of Sodom had authority over the recovered loot. It was his to keep or to give away. Yet, it is obvious that in some way or another Melchizedek had even greater authority than the king, because part of that 10% Abraham gave to Melchizedek resided in things that belonged to the King of Sodom.....and the king didn't protest one whit.

Understand the king of Sodom was the king over perhaps the most wicked city in all of Canaan, if not the world. This guy was evil, and under the control of evil. The king of Sodom is a type of Satan or anti-Christ, just as Melchizedek was righteous, under the control of righteousness, and is a type of Christ. This scene is reminiscent of Jesus' encounter with Satan when Satan said just bow down to me, and I have the authority to give you incomparable material wealth. Just as Abraham never challenged the king of

Sodom's authority and possession of the recovered wealth, neither does Yeshua challenge Satan's authority over the material wealth of the world; neither Abraham nor Jesus said, "it's not yours to give".....for in fact it WAS the prince of evil's to give. Notice also that Satan was eager to give away as much wealth as it took to get Yeshua to, in essence, NOT redeem humanity, and instead, allow the Devil to have them. This is parallel to the king of Sodom saying to Abraham, keep all the wealth you recovered, just give me the people you have saved.

We've talked a lot about God principle's; well, here's a Satan principle: Does Satan want your wealth, or does he want YOU!? Satan could care less about material possessions: he wants to own your soul. In the end, the battle between Satan and Yahweh is over people.

Anyway, Abraham rebuffs the king, understanding whom he is dealing with, and tells him 'no thanks'. Besides, says Abraham, I don't want you (as a representative of the Evil One) to ever be able to say that my abundance had anything to do with you. Whatever I have, be it little or much, comes from God, and I don't want whatever it is you can offer me. A wise lesson for all of us: the most important characteristic of ANYTHING is not WHAT it is; it's the *source* it came from.

Read Genesis chapter 15 all

How true it is that after we have visited the victorious mountaintop, we can easily slide down into the valley of despair below. Abraham, sometime after this great victory over K'dorla'omer, was allowing his fears to surface. Here he was, in wicked Canaan, outnumbered thousands to one, realizing that even though he had a substantial and growing family, that it was the result primarily of the births of his female slaves; plus his hold on the land was tenuous at best. Besides, how was Abraham going to have all these descendants to inherit the land God promised, if he didn't even yet have children? Abraham wonders in V2 if his purchased servant, Eli'ezer (whom we're told is from Damascus), is going to wind up as the sole inheritor when Abraham dies.

Verse 1 begins with the words, "some time later"; so we don't know just how long it was after the battle with the kings from Mesopotamia, and the rescue of Lot, that this episode of chapter 15 takes place. However, it would appear that it was not long at all. "Fear not", God says to Avram. Fear? What exactly was the fear Avram was experiencing? Had he not just flexed his muscles and defeated those northern armies? It was the fear that those kings would come back to take retribution because of Avram smiting them. After all, it was not only a humiliating defeat for these powerful kings of the north, but the guy who beat them wasn't even harmed by what they had done. They had not come to make war with Abraham, and had done nothing to Avram except to unknowingly capture a relative who lived far away from his uncle.

God, knowing Abraham's fears goes on to explain that He will protect him, and even reward Avram. Reward? Reward Avram for what? For refusing to be enriched by the evil king of Sodom; for choosing to place his faith in Melchizedek's god. Avram apparently was rethinking his idealistic and principled refusal to accept ALL that he had liberated

from Chedorlaomer and had returned to the king of Sodom..... except for that 10% given to Melchizedek. Avram would have been instantly an even wealthier man if he simply had accepted the ruler of Sodom's most generous offer.

But, the worrywart continues to wring his hands, and in a really revealing and unflattering dialogue, Abraham starts pouring out his fears and suspicions and anxieties to Yahweh; He doesn't easily accept God's promises to him. Now, we...you and me....we wouldn't ever do that, now would we? God says I'm going to do thus and so for you.....but how often do we respond "yeah, God, but how? How are you going to do it, WHEN are you going to do it? It sure doesn't look like it's happening or is there any evidence it ever will." Yes, Avram may have been God's man, but he was still just a man.

So, after being assured that God will protect him from the bad boys from the north, and then further be assured that his prosperity will be further increased, God promises Abraham the thing he is most worried about: an heir.....a son. In all fairness, we of the modern Western world just can't grasp the importance of a son as an heir to a man in that era. It was not just a matter of passing on wealth and land holdings; to Avram and to virtually all humans of the known civilizations of that time; the belief was that a man lived on THROUGH his heir. Not so much a reincarnation, as that the ethereal substance that was invisible and unknowable..... that which makes each person a unique individual.... the life force which contained the bloodlines of that family, was carried forward through human reproduction. In some mysterious, undefined way, the fundamental nature of the father lived on in his son. For a man to die without an heir meant an end to his family line, and therefore an end to his own human essence. For a woman to be unable to give a son to her husband was the most shameful thing for her; her primary reason for existence as a human female was to produce an heir for her husband. To fail was tantamount to being useless. For people of Abraham's day, there was no concept of dying and going to Heaven and living with God for eternity. A son was Abraham's only hope of seeing all of God's promises realized, and he was well aware of it.

Yahweh tells Abraham that he **will** be a father, so Eli'ezer will not have to be the inheritor of the family wealth. Abraham is encouraged when God tells him to look up into the night sky and count the stars; because that's how numerous his descendants will be. And, then in V6, we are told something that so many modern Believers are so sure it was only a NT promise, one brought by Jesus: "***He (Abraham) believed God, and God credited it to him as righteousness***". Here was the essence of God's plan of salvation: trust God, and God will credit it to us as righteousness. This is the very meaning of grace. Grace was Adam's hope, it was Noah's, and it was Abraham's. Grace was the foundation of the Torah given to Moses and is the foundation of the New Covenant in Yeshua; it is precisely our hope today. It has never changed.

Now that the matter of Abraham's heir has been addressed.....or at least Abraham thinks it has.....God brings up the matter of the Promised Land in verse 7. And, He says, "look Avram, I brought you from Ur to this place to give it to you." In other words, don't

you get it yet? What do you think this has all been about? You're going to get the land...nothing can prevent it..... because I've decided it.

Then, Abraham asks in V8 a curious question that smacks of the highest skepticism if not downright distrust: "How am I to know I will possess the land?" I say curious, because God had, at an earlier time, already promised the land to Abraham; did Abraham not believe Yahweh? Did he just not get it? The fact is Abraham's faith was wavering a bit. How many times do we in our Spirits KNOW that God has spoken to us, but time goes by, and there is no further visible, tangible, confirmation of the subject of that conversation? So, we begin to wonder, is my imagination just working overtime, or did God REALLY speak to me? We've all been there, and we will be again.

Now, let's get practical. The fact is, that by all custom and tradition of humans in Abraham's era, promises that were real had structure. That shouldn't be surprising to us; our promises today also have structure.....it's called a contract. In our society there is precious little we will accept as legitimate or trustworthy from another person, unless it is put to paper, made to fit the laws of our civil code, and then signed by all involved parties; that's just how we do it. Nobody questions why. It was the same in Avram's day; there was a procedure when a promise was made, and that procedure had not yet been carried out in God's promise to Avram.

We may not realize it, but we perfectly well expect to deal with God in our cultural terms. What good is it to give us Americans a proof or a word in a form that only a Japanese person would recognize for what it is; it would mean nothing to us. The same thing goes in reverse; a person living in the Sudan is going to need a proof or a word from God that he understands.....something that is normal and customary in his Sudanese society..... not something that may seem normal for us Americans. Avram was waiting for the promise of God to be put into a structure that he recognized as valid.

God is merciful. So, what happens next is that a VISIBLE form of a covenant making procedure.....done within the cultural norms for the time..... is performed for Abraham. I say visible, because Abraham could actually see it with his own eyes, and it was recognizable for what it was. And, I also say visible, because when God speaks and makes a promise, it already is a covenant far superior to anything that can be written down or sealed via a ritual. The fabric of space and time is altered when God makes a covenant; the entire Universe is re-shaped and focused around that covenant. That is not allegory or poem; it is the absolute reality of the situation. There doesn't have to be some human procedure performed in order for His promise to become a legal covenant; Yahweh did this to give Abraham peace about it.

So, God in His graciousness lowered Himself and performed the standard human covenant ritual as a sign to Abraham of the validity of those promises of land and blessing, of a son and descendants.

In V9 & 10, we see a typical covenant ceremony performed; and it revolves around the use of animals as agents for the promise; these animals.....CLEAN animals..... are

killed, cut into pieces, and separated into two groups (remember, the Hebrew word for covenant, B'rit, means cutting or dividing).

Now, I want to be careful in my terminology, here; and I'd like you to notice that this covenant ceremony was NOT a sacrifice. The animals were not "sacrificed" in the strict sense of the word. There was no altar; there was no burning up of the animals. This was **not** a presentation of a gift, or the seeking of acceptance, or a plea for atonement to God, by Abraham. Rather, this is God's gift to man. This is God raising His right hand and swearing upon Himself to be true to His oath. This is a 100% God action; Abraham was simply the recipient of the promise. God promises a national identity to a people who didn't even yet exist....a people who at first would be called Hebrew, and then eventually Israel. Ancient records of various Middle and Far Eastern peoples are full of covenant ceremonies essentially like the one we are witness to in these passages; but, nowhere, ever, is there record or even a tradition of a god promising a land, and a title that is irrevocable as long as time exists.

Suddenly, in verse 11, birds of prey appear and try to escape with the carcasses of the dead animals. Abraham drives them away. What is the meaning of these few words about these birds? Birds of prey...really, we're talking about vultures, scavenger birds..... are symbolic of death and evil: this was Satan trying to disrupt and stop the covenant because he knew well what it was going to lead to. How often we are warned in the Scriptures that when God promises us good things, Satan will come and try to steal it away. Whether it be to steal the thing itself, or our faith and trust in God's promise, or just our Shalom, Satan wants you to have what he has to offer you, not what God has already given to you. As those birds swooped down, Abraham could have simply sat there and thought, "well, easy come easy go", and not fought the evil. Or, more in tune with the modern Church attitude, he could have been completely passive, deciding, "Well, if God wants the promise to go forth, HE will have to do battle with that vulture, the Devil". Wrong. We are Yahweh's warriors on earth. We are going to have to get our hands dirty, and put ourselves at risk. Prayer does NOT replace action; prayer prepares us for action. Avram driving those birds away is the Torah equivalent to James' famous N.T. saying: "resist the devil, and he will flee from you".

God now recites an oath, always central to the covenant making protocol. But, before He does, a deep sleep comes upon Abraham. This does not mean that Abraham fell asleep because he got tired; we see several O.T. and N.T. equivalents to this when it speaks of "visions within dreams", or even of "being taken in the spirit". Even more, it says a great sense of dread overcame Abraham in his sleep; it was a "dark dread" the Bible says. Let's turn to our Hebrew for a minute: the word used here, in Hebrew, for "dark dread" is chashekah. This word ought to sound familiar to us, for its root is the word choshek. And, choshek simply means darkness; but as we learned back in Genesis 1, this doesn't mean nighttime. It is a spiritual term....it means dread, evil, death, blindness....so chashekah is a negative term and it indicates that its source is from the spirit world.

And, what follows helps us to understand the disturbing nature of what Abraham saw.

What Yahweh says, in V13, scares the pants off of Abraham: God tells him that Abraham's descendants are going to become slaves in a foreign land, and they will be in that foreign land for 4 centuries. That they will be oppressed; oppressed is not a throw in word. Slaves to Abraham were simply purchased family members. He did not oppress his slaves. But, Avram's offspring WERE going to be subjugated and they WERE going to be badly treated. And, it was NOT going to be here in Canaan where they'd be enslaved.....because Yahweh says it will be in“ a land not their own”.

Then God says He will punish that foreign land, and Abraham's descendants will be released. Even that they will go with great wealth. Of course, with the benefit of hindsight, we now know that Egypt would be that foreign place, and that a succession of Pharaohs will be the oppressors; we even know that indeed the Israelites DID leave with much of Egypt's wealth. Yahweh also tells Abraham that he will live to a ripe old age, and that his clan is soon going to leave this place, not to return until the 4th generation from Abraham.