

TORAHSCOPE: Bereisheet (In the beginning)

by Mark Huey posted 05 October, 2007 www.outreachisrael.net

Genesis 1:1-6:8
Isaiah 42:5-43:10

“Let There Be Light”

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light” (Genesis 1:1-3).

The beginning of the weekly Torah cycle includes a tremendous amount of information that has been preserved throughout the ages by the followers of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. When you consider that in these opening chapters of the Scriptures, the text takes us from beginning of the universe to the introduction of the generation of Noah, the amount of material covered is overwhelming. So many critical foundational aspects of our faith are mentioned that one could literally spend a lifetime considering the topics discussed. Contemplating the concept of Creation, and its implications for interpreting life, has generated voluminous material that can fill countless libraries.

One of the challenges that presents itself when a Torah student approaches the opening chapters of the Bible, and the beginning of the annual Torah cycle, is to ask the Lord, just what to focus your attention upon. Perhaps this is why Psalm 1 reminds us of the benefits of meditating upon the Torah, and making reflection upon it an integral part of our weekly discipline:

“How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! **But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.** He will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers” (Psalm 1:1-3).

As I consider the text of *Bereisheet*, and meditate upon the significance of all the different passages, one aspect of it keeps coming to my mind. For some reason, each time I read the words, “let there be light,” the image of the benefits of illumination constantly come to mind. Our Creator is so powerful that He simply spoke the word “light,” and there was light. After all, the future statements from the Psalmist remind us of that reality, by his saying, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105).

Here, the Psalmist reminds us that the Word of God is indeed a lamp to our feet and a light to our paths. Without the Word of the Lord, just where would we be headed? How would we interpret life? What would life be like if the Holy One of Israel had not given us His Word? What would we know about Creation? Would we all be evolutionists? How would we know about Him?

A Light Unto the Nations

As I consider these questions and a multitude of others, the Haftarah portion introduces us to the concept of light. In Isaiah 42:5-43:10, the Prophet Isaiah declares what the Most High is communicating to him about the Creation. The opening statement parallels the beginning parts of the Genesis account:

“Thus says God the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and its offspring, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it, ‘I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, and I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon and those who dwell in darkness from the prison’ (Isaiah 42:5-7).

After the Creation account is briefly summarized, the Lord turns to His people Israel, and reminds them of His protective hand and the covenant that He has established with them. He

describes Israel in a very powerful way as “a light to the nations.” In other words, it is the responsibility of Israel to bring the truth of the Creator and His words of life to the rest of Creation. Israel, as a nation, has been preserved to perpetuate the illumination of truth that comes forth from the pages of the Holy Writ, and in particular, the Torah of Moses. Isaiah states this reality two additional times:

“He says, ‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth’ (Isaiah 49:6).

“Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness will cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples; but the LORD will rise upon you and His glory will appear upon you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising” (Isaiah 60:1-3).

The Apostle Peter reiterates this concept centuries later, when he communicates the principles of being a holy nation to the Messianic community, who has been given an understanding of who and what “light” truly is:

“But you are A CHOSEN RACE, a royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR *God's* OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

Light of the World

In pondering the subject of light, I recognize that light or illumination is a concept absolutely fundamental to our faith. In fact, when considering the various aspects of light, I am reminded of some of Yeshua’s words. In the Sermon on the Mount, Yeshua characterizes His listeners as the “light of the world”:

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does *anyone* light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:14-15).

Juxtaposed between the Beatitudes and a description about the validity of the Torah, Yeshua reminds His audience that they are indeed the light, shining in a world that is darkened by sin. In John’s Gospel, we see further explanation concerning Yeshua, the Light of the world, and those who testify of Him:

“In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the Light, but *he came* to testify about the Light. There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him” (John 1:4-10).

Yeshua Himself reiterates this theme about who the Light is in his talk with Nicodemus:

“This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God” (John 3:19-21).

“Let There Be Light”

As you consider *Bereisheet*, you can focus on a great number of profound subjects that have their roots in these opening chapters of the Bible. The details of the six days of Creation and the institution of the *Shabbat* (Sabbath) rest are recalled. The creation of Adam and Eve and their fall from grace are articulated. Aspects of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, as compared to the Tree of Life, can be contemplated. The admonitions to be fruitful and multiply and to take dominion over the created order can be discussed. The particulars of man’s rebellion and the

judgments brought upon Adam, Eve, and the serpent can be diagnosed. The arrival of offspring in Cain and Abel, and the conflict that ensued between these brothers with contrasting sacrificial offerings, can be debated. The birth of Seth and the promised seed that will carry the blessings promised to Adam and the generations that follow could be discussed. Finally, the birth of Noah and God's regret that humanity had devolved to great debauchery could be analyzed.

But, in order to even begin to properly analyze these profound foundational subjects related to our faith, you are required to have the light and illumination of the Holy Spirit. Without the Spirit, you will certainly be in the dark.

Interestingly, what seems to be consistent with His Word is the fact that the more time you spend in the light of the Word, the more you are able to understand the profound aspects of it. In other words, I believe it would be beneficial for you to spend a specified period of time in His Word in order to receive the benefits of additional illumination. Maybe this is why our Jewish brethren have developed a system of study that annually takes us through the Torah to learn more and more about our Creator each year, and the light He is sharing.

Perhaps as we study the Torah, He will again illumine our hearts and minds, and we will hear His voice proclaim, "Let there be light!" In His mercy toward us, we will then become a bearer of truth and light to all we encounter.

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