

HAFTARAH EXHORTATIONS: Haftarah Chayei Sarah

by Mark Huey posted 22 November, 2008 www.outreachisrael.net

1 Kings 1:1-31

“Life’s End: Triumphant or Tragic?”

What has always seemed an ironic twist to the Torah portion entitled, “Sarah’s Life” (Genesis 23:1-25:18), is that the beginning and the end of this selection actually record the deaths of Sarah and Abraham, the esteemed predecessors of Ancient Israel. In between their life-ending moments, the Scriptures record some revealing aspects of why the Holy One perhaps chose Abraham to be father of the faithful. Additionally, the linkage to the Haftarah selection from the opening words of 1 Kings 1, declaring King David to be “old and advanced in age,” with the parallel comments about Abraham in Genesis 24:1, gives the reader an excellent opportunity to contrast not only their lives but the concluding events surrounding these two figures of our faith. When analyzed objectively and applied personally to your own walk of faith, one can conclude that the consequences of choices made during a lifetime can definitely impact whether a person’s inevitable transition from life to the hereafter can be either triumphant or tragic.

Both Abraham and David received unconditional, unilateral covenants from the Creator God. The Abrahamic Covenant is conveyed and expounded upon in different promises made to him seen in Genesis chs. 12-15, essentially establishing Abraham and his descendants as the human vessels through whom the Redeemer would eventually arrive on Earth to atone for the sin of mankind. Abraham and his descendants were also promised material and spiritual blessings, as well as land for future generations. Since Abraham was totally aware of God’s blessings, as he got older and saw death approaching, he made some explicit instructions so that the Promised Seed, coming through the line of the chosen Isaac, would be directed toward seeking the Almighty. The following request was made by Abraham of his servant Eliezer:

“Now Abraham was old, advanced in age; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in every way. Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he owned, ‘Please place your hand under my thigh, and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live, but you will go to my country and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son Isaac’” (Genesis 24:1-4).

Abraham knew that Isaac was the recipient of the Lord’s blessings and not Ishmael, the firstborn son of the handmaiden Hagar. After the death of Sarah, Abraham has six more sons with Keturah, another wife he took to himself. Abraham made explicit plans for his death, seeing to it that he not only gave most of his material wealth and lands to his designated heir Isaac, but he also passed blessings and gifts to his other sons, including Ishmael and the six birthed by Keturah:

“Now Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac; but to the sons of his concubines, Abraham gave gifts while he was still living, and sent them away from his son Isaac eastward, to the land of the east. These are all the years of Abraham’s life that he lived, one hundred and seventy-five years. Abraham breathed his last and died in a ripe old age, an old man and satisfied *with life*; and he was gathered to his people. Then his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, facing Mamre, the field which Abraham purchased from the sons of Heth; there Abraham was buried with Sarah his wife” (Genesis 25:5-10).

As a result of Abraham’s actions during his lifetime and proper estate planning (if you will), the incredible fact is that when Abraham finally dies, his first two sons by Hagar (Ishmael) and Sarah (Isaac) actually come together in a period of mourning, and they bury their father Abraham without any noted conflict. Somehow down through the years, despite the estrangement that certainly came when Hagar and Ishmael were sent away from the family compound (Genesis 21:9-21), Abraham was still respected by Ishmael. The ultimate respect is shown when at his

father's grave, he is able to be at peace with his half-brother and accept his station in life. This could be termed a **triumphant** departure to the next life.

On the other hand, as one reviews the life, and particularly, the waning days of David's life, the adjective to describe his last days would be **tragic** rather than triumphant. Still, King David was the recipient of an unconditional, unilateral covenant, as summarized by the Prophet Nathan:

"When your days are fulfilled that you must go *to be* with your fathers, that I will set up *one of* your descendants after you, who will be of your sons; and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build for Me a house, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his father and he shall be My son; and I will not take My lovingkindness away from him, as I took it from him who was before you. But I will settle him in My house and in My kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever" (1 Chronicles 17:11-14).

The House of David, according to this covenant, was "established forever." A descendant of David would rule over the world forever, thus identifying the Messiah Yeshua and His ultimate role as King of kings, ruling and reigning from the right hand of the Father. Once again, this unconditional covenant does not necessarily require anything of David, just like Abraham's promises. However, what one does notice is that David's approach to life was significantly different than the Patriarch Abraham. Take a look at the parallel passage that links this Haftarah passage to our Torah portion this week, and note the differences that emerge:

"**Now King David was old, advanced in age;** and they covered him with clothes, but he could not keep warm. So his servants said to him, 'Let them seek a young virgin for my lord the king, and let her attend the king and become his nurse; and let her lie in your bosom, that my lord the king may keep warm.' So they searched for a beautiful girl throughout all the territory of Israel, and found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought her to the king. The girl was very beautiful; and she became the king's nurse and served him, but the king did not cohabit with her. Now Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, 'I will be king.' So he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen with fifty men to run before him. His father had never crossed him at any time by asking, 'Why have you done so?' And he was also a very handsome man, and he was born after Absalom" (1 Kings 1:1-6).

Here we discover that rather than the peace that was surrounding Abraham's final days, instead we have turmoil that is on the verge of outright rebellion by the offspring of David. Many of David's problems came as a direct result of him having multiple wives and sub-families during his years as king of Israel. Adonijah, the son who attempts to declare his kingship as David is dying, was actually born of David's fourth wife Haggith (2 Samuel 3:4).

The more you study the life of David and the multiple wives he married undoubtedly for political, military, and strategic partnership purposes—you realize that King David did not spend much time in raising children who would respect their father as his life came to a close. In fact, just the opposite occurred as different sons vied for succession rights. One can imagine how tough it would have been on David as in his old and increasingly feeble age, finding himself mediating between different factions established by his different sons. But the blame for these circumstances rested clearly on David who took many different wives with whom he had multiple children. The ultimate disgrace came when Adonijah proclaimed his kingship before David has even succumbed to death. This action is actually used by God to firmly establish Solomon as the heir that David proclaimed would build his Temple to God (1 Chronicles 28).

It is instructional to consider these two examples, for those of us living today who might have either aging parents whose death we may have to witness, or children who will be there to oversee our own funerals and burials sometime in the future. As you contemplate the differences between the events of Abraham's death and David's waning days, consider the following questions:

- How are you going to handle the death of your parents (if you have not already)?

- Will you show them the respect they should have as your parents, regardless of whether or not they have been “perfect”?
- Are you going to make their final days a blessing to them, or make it difficult by treating them disrespectfully?

Take a look at the Fifth Commandment and recognize that honoring your parents includes a promise attached:

“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you” (Exodus 20:12; cf. Ephesians 6:2).

Despite any perceived or real inadequacies as parents, the command is to honor your parents (and *all* of your forebearers) regardless of their character flaws, or perhaps what they have done or not done to you during your lifetime. In demonstrating their due honor to them, the result is prolonged life and blessings from the Lord. Considering your possible relationship to your parents today, what kind of a parent do you want to be toward your offspring?

- What kind of a legacy do you want to leave your children?
- Have you been conducting your life in such a way as to warrant their respect?
- Have you been training them up in the way that they should go, so that in the end, they will not depart (Proverbs 22:6)?
- Do you want to leave in a triumphant way where your children stand up to bless you, or do you want to leave children who are bitterly and tragically fighting as you are being buried?

Take some time to remember this simple reality: life often will end much sooner than any of us plan for it to end. We can choose to have it end triumphantly by choosing to honor our parents, and training our children up in the ways of the Lord so that they respect our departure. Or, by choosing to do nothing when it comes to honoring our parents or training our children, we can expect the results of our neglect to be accompanied by tragic consequences by ourselves or by our descendants.

When the end comes is not a choice, but how it comes is a choice. **Choose now and expect a triumph like Abraham rather than tragedy like David.**

Until the restoration of all things...

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