

## APOSTOLIC SCRIPTURE REFLECTION:

### for *Chayei Sarah*

by Mark Huey posted 14 November, 2009 www.outreachisrael.net

Matthew 8:19-22

Luke 9:57-62

Hebrews 11:8-16

### "Burial Fitness"

Turning to *Chayei Sarah* (Genesis 23:1-25:18) this week gives the Torah student a wonderful peek at what I might describe as the "infectious" nature of faith, as it is seemingly transferred from Abraham to his main servant Eliezar. Evidently, despite the detailed descriptions of the death and burial of Sarah, and ending with the death of Abraham, the focus of our *parashah* is actually Abraham's insistence that Eliezar secure a suitable wife for Isaac, the child of the promise, from his relative's offspring. For those following in the footsteps of this father of faith, it is critical for every generation to consider the ongoing human juxtaposition of sustaining a life centered on faith in the Creator, in spite of the inevitability of death. We learn that *it is important to bury the dead properly*. But even though he experienced grief in the loss of his beloved Sarah, faithful Abraham was extremely concerned that his son obtain a proper lifelong companion, in order to prolong and sustain an ongoing intimacy with God.

Abraham's example left for the faithful was followed by Isaac regarding Jacob, and to a certain extent, those who Jacob would father. However, when we survey some passages in the Apostolic Scriptures, we find Yeshua expanding the requirements to be faithful from not only the need to physically bury the dead, but most critically, the spiritual need to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God. In two parallel Gospel accounts from Luke 9 and Matthew 8, we find Yeshua responding to a scribe proclaiming that he will follow Him wherever He goes. Naturally, Yeshua uses the moment to remind His followers that He does not even have a permanent place to rest His head, because His duty is to demonstrate to them what it means to be totally committed to the Heavenly Father:

"As they were going along the road, someone said to Him, 'I will follow You wherever You go.' And Yeshua said to him, 'The foxes have holes and the birds of the air *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.' And He said to another, 'Follow Me.' But he said, 'Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.' But He said to him, '**Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God.**' Another also said, 'I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home.' But Yeshua said to him, 'No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God'" (Luke 9:57-62).

"Then a scribe came and said to Him, 'Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go.' Yeshua said to him, 'The foxes have holes and the birds of the air *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.' **Another of the disciples said to Him, 'Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.' But Yeshua said to him, 'Follow Me, and allow the dead to bury their own dead'"** (Matthew 8:19-22).

When you read these passages, we see someone who asks if he can bury his father before making a total commitment to a life of following the Messiah. What would this mean in a Jewish society that normally buried people within a day of their deaths? Surely, the Lord would have enough compassion on a person who has recently lost a loved one to bury the corpse in a cemetery or family tomb. Yet, any one of us who has had to be involved in a funeral knows that burying a loved one is only a small part of the process. Executing a will, dividing up the deceased's estate, and seeing that any previous debts the deceased had are paid can take well over a year. What about selling the deceased's home or going through family heirlooms? This can be a very grueling process that can occupy a great deal of one's time and energy—so much so that if a spouse has died and experienced great grief and anguish, it is not uncommon for the surviving spouse to die once the will has been finally executed.

Those who commit themselves fully to following Yeshua and His ministry can let another family member handle such matters. Yeshua's response is simply, "let the dead bury the dead, but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God." This is because dedicating your life to following Him, proclaiming the gospel, and focusing one's energies completely on the work of seeing people transformed—is easier said than done. Too often, people will allow the cares of the world, *even funerals and wills*, to consume them to the point of neglecting the bigger call. No one should allow the inevitability of death to be so overwhelming, that all focus on the work of God's Kingdom is lost.

In Luke 9:61-62, we see someone who is concerned about saying good bye to some of his relatives at home, before joining Yeshua's entourage and living a life of serving Him exclusively. It is here that Yeshua responds with a statement that personally had quite an impact on my life that continues to affect how I view ministry.

Back in 1998, our family was living in McKinney, Texas, and we were preparing to participate in a missionary shortwave radio outreach in Central Honduras. The great test was to sell our assets, place our belongings into two containers, and then move to Central America where we would help establish a transmission base. I vividly remember struggling over this decision for a number of weeks, as I prayed and consulted with many about this life-changing decision for the family. There was no doubt in my mind that the Lord was giving us an opportunity to step out in faith and begin serving Him in a full-time capacity. The challenge was mustering enough faith to follow His lead and disconnect from all of my business and family entanglements in North Texas.

One night as I was debating with the Lord, I received a call from a Messianic Jewish friend who was from Hawaii. Upon sharing my dilemma with him, he simply responded to my comments by quoting Luke 9:62: **"No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."** If you have ever had the Word of God cut to the very marrow of your soul (Hebrews 4:12), then you know what it is like when I heard those words.

What I was wrestling over was not a matter of going somewhere to bury my father or a relative. It was not even the need to go home and make sure that everything was in order before venturing out in following the Messiah. **Instead, it was and remains a test of faith to realize that when called, are you sincerely going to drop all personal ambitions and follow Him?** The mental image of placing your hand to a plow and focusing on Yeshua at the end of the field came immediately to mind.

As I hung up the phone, the concept of "looking back," resulting in unfitness for the Kingdom of God, began to haunt me. For the next few days as my final decision was being made, this verse scrolled up in my thoughts over and over again. Needless to say, I ultimately made the decision to place my hand on the plow, and by God's grace, despite some challenges along the way, I have never looked back. This was over eleven years ago, and thankfully, the Holy One has sustained me to this day!

So as I think about the example set forth by Abraham, and his unflinching willingness to keep his eyes focused on God, I am encouraged that he looked beyond the temporal concerns of burying his beloved wife and saw something much further in the future. As the author of Hebrews puts it, Abraham like many others, was looking for a lasting city and country whose foundations have been laid by God:

"By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign *land*, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, *as many descendants AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE* [Genesis 5:24]. All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the

earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that *country* from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better *country*, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them” (Hebrews 11:8-16).

Obviously, as followers of Yeshua, we do need to take care of the necessary business of burying the dead properly. But what should occupy our minds more than the process of life to death, is **possessing faith in the One who has overcome death**. Abraham himself believed that God could and would raise people from the dead, recognizing that He is the One who ultimately has power over something that mortals frequently wrestle with (cf. Hebrews 11:17-19). So if God has the power over what lies beyond, is there any better occupation or vocation available to all who believe in sharing the great news of the resurrection power of Yeshua? Consider how such resurrection power is accessible right now (Colossians 2:12), long before the future resurrection. **Too many people think that death is the end of everything**, but for those of us who believe, burial is not the end. Born again Believers have already partaken of the power of the resurrection, by possessing faith in Yeshua.

Each one of us, short of the Messiah’s return, will one day die and be buried. But figures of faith like the Apostle Paul considered death to be a gain, as it meant being immediately welcomed into the presence of his Savior (Philippians 1:20-23). Paul was a citizen of Heaven, who recognized not only that the Believer’s hope rested with seeing the Lord in glory, but that his own frail body would ultimately experience a transformation and be restored (Philippians 3:20-21). Looking beyond the grave, we should be able to picture a day when we will all be united with the host of faithful in the presence of Yeshua. We should be thinking about what it will mean to meet people like Abraham, Sarah, Eliezar, Isaac, and countless others who down through the ages have believed in God’s promises. What a glorious reunion it will be when we are united with all of our believing predecessors in the faith!

There is one final description that more fully articulates what Abraham and others hoped for as they buried their dead, and looked forward to the future age. Paul describes the resurrection in 1 Corinthians:

“But someone will say, ‘How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?’ You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own. All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one *flesh* of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish. There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the *glory* of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. **It is sown a perishable *body*, it is raised an imperishable *body*; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.** If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual *body*. So also it is written, ‘The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL’ [Genesis 2:7]. The last Adam *became* a life-giving’ spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly. Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, ‘DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O

DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING? [Hosea 13:14] The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Yeshua the Messiah. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:34-58).

Upon reading and meditating on this passage, one's readiness for burial should recognize that our Messiah Yeshua has the final victory over the power of death. His resurrection assures us that not only will we be resurrected, **but that we can have a restored relationship with the Father.** Yeshua has assured us the final victory. *Now this is something worth shouting about!*

Until the restoration of all things...

Mark Huey (B.A., Vanderbilt University in History and Graduate Studies at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University) is the Director of Outreach Israel Ministries ([www.outreachisrael.net](http://www.outreachisrael.net)). He is the author of several books, including: *TorahScope, Volumes I & II*, and *Counting the Omer: A Daily Devotional Toward Shavuot*. He is also co-author of *Hebraic Roots: An Introductory Study*.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard, Updated Edition* (NASU), © 1995, published by The Lockman Foundation.