



## **Parasha Vayera**

November 7, 2020

*Torah:* Genesis 18:1-22:24

*Haftarah:* 2Kings 4:1-37

*Ketuvim Sh'lichim:* Ya'acov 2:14-24

*Shabbat Shalom Mishpocha!* We live in uncertain times, but our task has never been clearer. We have much work to do. As a part of Yeshua's body, our task as His disciples is to make disciples for Him. I believe that the coming few years will be a time in which not only the Gospel will spread, but there will also be increasing understanding regarding how to serve ADONAI and being obedient to Him. We cannot sit on the sidelines as observers of what is going around us any longer. We will be shown what to do and we will do it!

Our *parasha* today is *Vayera*. It begins with three men coming to *Avraham's* tent and *Avraham* extending his hospitality to them. One of the men is more than a man or perhaps even more than an angel. The *parasha* begins this way: *1 Then Adonai appeared to him at Mamre's large trees while he was sitting in the entrance of his tent during the heat of the day* (Genesis 18:1 TLV). The Hebrew says:

וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה, בְּאַלְנֵי מְמָרָא; וְהוּא יוֹשֵׁב פֶּתַח-הַאֹהֶל, כְּחֹם הַיּוֹם. *Vayera elav Adonai be'Elonei Mamre vehu yoshev petach-ha'ohel kechom hayom.* It clearly says *Yod Heh Vav Heh*, which we who don't try and pronounce His name, would read as ADONAI when reading in Hebrew. This verse and several others in the *Torah* present a challenge to us with regard to the identity of this individual. Who is this who not only spoke to Abraham, but ate with him?

This *parasha* is chock full of important events. Sodom and Gomorra are destroyed because ten righteous individuals could not be found there. Lot's wife is turned into a pillar of salt and Lot's daughters got their father drunk and with them he procreated the founders of the nations of Ammon and Moab. Then Abraham acted in less than the faith which he was initially credited with; he told Abimelech that Sarah was his sister to protect himself. Fortunately, Abimelech was warned by G-d that she was Abraham's wife and he returned her to him. Isaac is born and circumcised at eight days of age. Hagar and Ishmael are banished from the camp. G-d tested Abraham by commanding him to sacrifice Isaac and Abraham passes this faith test with flying colors. The *parasha* closes with the news from *Padan Aram* that *Riv'kah*, Rebecca, has been born to Abraham's nephew, *Betu'el*.

The title of our message today is "Faith." In Hebrew, it is *emunah*, אֱמוּנָה. There is much in these verses about Abraham's faith, but today, we will be talking primarily about our faith. At this point in time, faith is what we really need. The shocking events of the election this week have raised many questions in us. We don't understand why ADONAI allowed this to happen. We have been praying and fasting faithfully for months. What is faith and how are we to walk in it? What knowledge should we receive by faith and what knowledge should we seek for ourselves? How can we have the *shalom* which comes through faith? In our *parasha* today, there is a verse which we will use to examine an element of our understanding of faith.

Who is this individual whose name in Hebrew is represented by the letters *yod, heh, vav heh*; יהוה? Is He the Father Himself Who has taken human form? In theological circles, a representation or appearance of the Father is known as a theophany. It is a representation of ADONAI which will not kill us to look upon Him. Or, is this individual an angel? Thoughts on this are divided. Some think that this individual is an angel, a messenger, in Hebrew, a *malakh*, one who is functioning with ADONAI's name and under His authority and with His power. Or is this individual the pre-incarnate Messiah, whose appearance which could be called a christophany? Although the term christophany formerly applied only to visions of Christ by individuals, such as *Sha'ul* had on the Damascus Road, lately, it is also being applied to what some think are His appearances in the *Torah*.

In recent years, the christophany, this individual being the pre-incarnate Messiah, has seemed to receive the most emphasis. There are both Christians and Messianic followers of Yeshua who teach that this individual, the one called YHVH in Hebrew, is the pre-incarnate Messiah. Should they be doing that? Is there enough evidence to say with certainty that this was Messiah Yeshua in a pre-incarnate form? And, what is the evidence that this might be true?

There are verses in Scripture which tell us that that Messiah was present before the "foundation of the earth." John 1 says: *1 In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God, and the Word was God* (John 1:1 TLV). No argument there. And we also understand that "the Word" is Messiah who was with ADONAI in the beginning. And then we have Yeshua's own words to a group of Pharisees: 58 .... "*Amen, amen I tell you, before Abraham was, I am*" (John 8:58b TLV). In this verse, Yeshua tells us that even before the time of Abraham, He was with ADONAI. There is also implication that He is G-d Himself, although we are not told in what form. We don't know how or in what form He existed before He was born as a man, a Jew of the Tribe of Judah. There are other Scriptures as well. We'll cite just one more. At His last Passover, Yeshua said: 5 "*Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world came to be*" (John 17:5 TLV). There is no question for us that Yeshua was with the Father before the foundation of the earth. He said in those exact words. But, we don't have evidence which tells us how or in what form. Are these and the other Scriptures in the *Ketuvim Sh'lichim* which also tell us essentially the same thing, evidence enough to "teach" that the individual who appeared to Abraham in Genesis 18:1, to Jacob, to Sampson's parents, and to Moses and the elders on Mount Sinai is the pre-incarnate Messiah? The truth is that there is no Scriptural evidence in the *Tanakh*.

A question which comes to my mind is, "why do we need to know?" *Sha'ul* wrote this to Timothy: 20 "*O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, turning away from pointless chatter and the contradictions of so-called knowledge— 21 by professing it* (the so-called knowledge), *some have missed the mark concerning the faith. Grace be with you*" (1Timothy 6:20-21 TLV). The word translated knowledge here is from the Greek word *gnosis*. An online dictionary translates this as "knowledge of spiritual mysteries." *Sha'ul* said that because of some so-called knowledge, some have missed the mark concerning the faith! If we have faith, do we also need hidden knowledge?

In the 1<sup>st</sup> century during *Sha'ul's* time, there were those promoting Gnosticism, the seeking of hidden knowledge, and as a theology became much more developed in the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries. These people's hidden knowledge included believing that the material world was evil and only the spirit world was good. Developing out of that are several present

day so-called Christian denominations and they espouse gnostic dogma today. This is not about them, but about us. Are we without realizing it being gnostic? If we have faith, do we need this hidden knowledge?

*Sha'ul* also said something similar to the congregation at Corinth. He said: 22 *"For Jewish people ask for signs and Greek people seek after wisdom"*,.. (1Corinthians 1:22 TLV). The Greek word translated wisdom is *sophia*, meaning wisdom, insight, skill or intelligence. Regarding the Greeks, *Sha'ul* was referring to Gnosticism within the Corinthian congregation, a philosophy which was begun by Plato and other Greek philosophers. To those who believed Gnosticism, the second part of *Sha'ul's* statement was heresy: 23 *"but we proclaim Messiah crucified—a stumbling block to Jewish people and foolishness to Gentile people, 24 but to those who are called (both Jewish and Greek people), Messiah, the power of God and the wisdom of God"* (1Corinthians 1:23-24 TLV). In Corinth, a Greek city, *Sha'ul* was not only challenged by the pagans, the former idol worshippers, but also those who believed gnostic philosophy.

My question is, "why, beyond what we are told in Genesis 18:1, do we need to know who is this individual?" As a body of Yeshua's followers, we loudly proclaim *Sha'ul's* words:: 7 *"For we walk by faith, not by sight"* (2Corinthians 5:7 TLV). But if we have to believe that this individual who was speaking with Abraham is Yeshua in order to have our understanding complete, then we are walking more by sight than by faith. In 1Timothy 3 with reference to the attributes of a *shamash*, a deacon, *Sha'ul* said: 9 *"They must keep hold of the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience"* (1Timothy 3:9 TLV). In theology, an article of faith or a doctrine which defies one's ability to fully understand it, is called "a mystery of the faith." It is something which transcends reason. In the strictest sense, it is a mystery hidden in G-d, a mystery which can never be known unless it is revealed by Him.

With regard to understanding Genesis 18:1, I, myself, prefer to err on the side of caution rather than jumping headfirst into something which Scripture does not directly support. Yes, I believe that it is possible that this was a christophany, an appearance of the pre-incarnate Messiah, but without further evidence, or until it is revealed to us by Yeshua Himself, I cannot teach it as truth. We want to be not only truthful in what we teach, but also careful what we teach and in this case, we just don't know if it is the truth. It might be, but is that enough evidence for us to "declare" that it is so? The question of the identity of YHVH in Genesis 18:1 is one of those "mysteries of the faith" which *Sha'ul* warned Timothy about. In regard to who this individual is, I accept in faith that it is a mystery without knowing the answer. In faith, I believe that it is true, but I don't know how it is true. *Avraham aveinu*, our father Abraham, was the first to set this example for us. The writer of Hebrews tells us this: 8 *"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place he was to receive as an inheritance. He went out, not knowing where he was going"* (Hebrews 11:8 TLV). Abraham didn't say, "ADONAI, where are you sending me? I won't go unless I know." But, without question or comment, he went. May we all seek to have this kind of faith, a faith that we could call: "going without knowing."

Regarding this same verse and any verse which refers to YHVH, there is another theological interpretation which has arisen. Some believe that this individual in Genesis 18:1 is not only the Son, but also the Father. Quoting from a website entitled "The Oneness of God In Christ," they say: "We proclaim Jesus and God are "One and the same" person (Jesus is God and God is Jesus) and although the Bible does not explicitly make these statements verbatim, our justification is based on scriptures we say **"implies"** this understanding to be correct." I didn't add the bolding in this statement. It is theirs. They chose to emphasize

it. Before I go any farther, I must say that we should not let our theological differences divide us. There are plenty of differences throughout Yeshua's body. We all see through a glass darkly. None of us is completely correct. Because of this, we must continue to strive to love each other and promote the unity of the faith regardless of where each stands theologically.

But this statement opens up more discussion. To be thorough, we must also consider the Scriptures which reveal both Father and Son separately. In the *Tanakh*, there is only one that I know of, Daniel chapter 7. 13 *"I was watching in the night visions. Behold, One like a Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days, and was brought into His presence. 14 Dominion, glory and sovereignty were given to Him that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will never pass away, and His kingdom is one that will not be destroyed"* (Daniel 7:13-14 TLV). Here we see both the Ancient of Days, the Father, and the Son pictured together separately. ADONAI said that the One like a Son of Man's kingdom, Yeshua's, will never pass away. *Sha'ul* spoke about the Father and the Son separately: 27 *"For God has "put all things in subjection underneath His (Messiah's) feet"* (1Corinthians 15:27a TLV). In saying this, he was referring to Psalm 8: 6 *Yet You made him a little lower than the angels, and crowned him with glory and majesty! 7 You gave him dominion over the works of Your hands. You put all things under their feet...* (Psalm 8:6-7 TLV). The TLV translated *raglav* as "their feet." I don't know why because this is translated "his feet" numerous times in the *Torah*. But, that's what *Sha'ul* was referring to. Psalm 8 is a Messianic psalm. Here is the complete statement which he made: 27 *"For God has "put all things in subjection underneath His (Messiah's) feet But when the psalmist says that "all" has been put in subjection, it is clear that this does not include God Himself, who put all things under Messiah. 28 Now when all things become subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also become subject to the One who put all things under Him, so that God may be all in all"* (1Corinthians 15:27b-28 TLV). Here again, we have a mystery of the faith. We are told that when Yeshua returns and defeats all of His enemies, including sin and death, that He will make Himself subject to G-d. Whether that means that they are the same person, as the Oneness doctrine states, we don't know. It could be true, but at best it is only implied. We also don't know at which point Yeshua turns everything back over to the Father. What we do know is that in the last chapter of Revelation, we still see both of them together: 3 *"No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in the city, and His servants shall serve Him"* (Revelation 22: 3 TLV). I see the point of those who teach Oneness. It could be true. But, for me, there is another question. Is this Gnosticism? If we seek to know that, are we seeking to know hidden spiritual truth when in reality it is a mystery and we have been called to accept it by faith?

But, there is more to know about ADONAI's nature. The following information is elementary for you, but in order to make a point, we will look at it again. In Genesis verse 3, G-d created light and He distinguished it from the darkness. What He did next introduces us to our first number, the number "1." In verse 5 the text says: 5 *God called the light "day," and the darkness He called "night." So there was evening and there was morning—one day* (Genesis 1:5 TLV). In this verse we see the first use of the Hebrew word *echad*, which means "one." In this verse, *echad* refers to a day which is composed of two parts, night and day. But it also illustrates another very important concept. The verse says: *So there was evening and there was morning—one day*. In Hebrew one day is *yom echad*, יוֹם אֶחָד. Here we get the very first indication that the word *echad* does not just mean a singular one. *Echad* is called a "compound unity" and we see this in our example of "one day" where the two parts of a day make one day. Another example of a compound unity is seen in chapter 2 of Genesis. After G-d had created Eve from Adam's body, He said in verse 24: 24 *This is why a man leaves his*

father and his mother and clings to his wife; and they become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24 TLV). One flesh is *basar echad*; בָּשָׂר אֶחָד. In a married couple we have two persons, a male and a female, and according to G-d they are to become “one flesh.” They become *echad*, one, not only by sexually knowing each other, but also by becoming spiritually one.

There is also another important usage of *echad* which we need to understand. In Mark 12 Yeshua was asked: “what is the greatest commandment?” He said: 29 ...”Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is One” (Mark 12:29b TLV). This verse is translated from the Greek text, but since Yeshua was actually quoting Deuteronomy 6:4, we know which word He spoke when He said “One.” It was *echad*.

שְׁמַע, יִשְׂרָאֵל: יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ, יְהוָה אֶחָד.

He said: *Shema Yisrael, ADONAI Eloheinu, ADONAI echad*. “The *Shema*,” the ancient confession of Judaism, is the bold proclamation that “G-d is One.” Since we don’t pronounce the name represented by the Hebrew consonants, *YHVH*, we insert *ADONAI*, the plural form of the Hebrew word which means “My Lord,” an epithet, a substitution. This phrase called the “*Shema*,” describes G-d as being *echad*, One. But as we know, *echad* is a compound unity and can include more than one element. While we do understand that *ADONAI* is One, we also understand that included in His oneness is Yeshua and the *Ruach HaKodesh*, the Holy Spirit. How these three are One is beyond our limited human understanding, but Scripture regarding this is extremely clear and we accept this by faith as truth. Understanding the things of Scripture which we can understand help to bring us to a point where we can accept by faith those things which we cannot fully understand. On day six when man was created, verse 26 says: 26 Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness” (Genesis 1:26a TLV). G-d in this verse is *Elohim* and the “Us” is not angels! It’s *ADONAI* the *echad* One, the Father, the Son and the Spirit which precedes from them, the *Ruach HaKodesh*! *ADONAI* is *echad*, one, but He has revealed Himself as more than one.

If *ADONAI* is really a “single One,” He would have described Himself differently. Yeshua could have used another Hebrew word for one which means “absolute one.” It is *yachid*. Yeshua could have said “*Shema Yisrael, ADONAI Eloheinu, ADONAI yachid*.” If He had said this, He would have been saying that *ADONAI* is an absolute and total “one and one only.” But, He didn’t. He said *ADONAI* is *echad*.

We must be careful that we don’t base our beliefs on what others believe without being Berean. We must search the Scriptures to see if these things are true. Because rabbinic Jews don’t believe in Yeshua, they confess that *ADONAI* is *echad*, one, but they really mean *yachid*. Maimonides, a rabbi of the 12<sup>th</sup> century is an important figure in Jewish understanding. His Thirteen Principles of Jewish Faith are still the standard for the orthodox and ultraorthodox. His Principle Number 2 says: “I believe by complete faith that the Creator, blessed be His name, is a Unity, and there is no union in any way like Him. He alone is our God, who was, who is, and who is to be.” By saying this, Maimonides was saying that *ADONAI* is one, but is *yachid*, an absolute One. But, we believe that this current understanding of the Jewish people will change when they look upon Yeshua and mourn for Him as one mourns for an only son as it says in Zechariah 12:10. “Only” in this verse is *yachid*, meaning absolute one. In this verse, *ADONAI* through Zechariah identified His only Son Yeshua.

While we are on this subject, I think it is also important to mention another use of *yachid* which we find in Judaism. *Kabballah*, Jewish mysticism, is sometimes a snare to

curious Gentiles. In reality, it is a Jewish Gnosticism which seeks knowledge beyond what Scripture teaches. In *Kabballah*, *Yachid* refers to: “I am quoting”- “the essence of God’s Infinite light as it is concealed within *Atzmut* (which is described as the divine essence; ADONAI), before it becomes revealed even to Himself, as it were. *Yachid* is thus understood to be the absolute omnipotence of God, the fact that God Himself is *able* to do all.” And, it identifies Him as an absolute “one.” But, this is hogwash and nothing but the foolishness of men who believe they have been given “inside information” that others don’t have. But, they’ll be happy to share it with you. Anyone can succumb to the temptation to know more than is allowed if they are not careful.

Shifting gears now, we go back to our *parasha*. One place where we see *yachid* in the Hebrew Bible is when G-d told Abraham to go and sacrifice his son Isaac. *2 Then He said, “Take your son, your only son whom you love —Isaac—and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains about which I will tell you”* (Genesis 22:2 TLV). In Judaism, this event is called *HaAkedah*, the binding of Isaac. More importantly, this verse tells us that Isaac is Abraham’s *yachid* son, יחיד, *yachid* being a reference to Isaac being the chosen son and not Ishmael. (Information: The LXX, the Septuagint, a Bible translation, does not say “only” son, but “beloved son.”) Here in *Torah*, Isaac is also a “type of Messiah,” a spiritual picture of the innocent sacrifice which *Yeshua* would become for us in the future and Abraham a picture of the faith we would need to receive this truth.

It should be no surprise to us that we would find a word meaning *yachid* describing *Yeshua* in the *Ketuvim Sh’lichim*. *16 For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16 TLV). “One and only Son” is translated from the Greek word *monogenes*, meaning “only and unique.” It means to us the very same thing as *yachid*. *Yeshua* is ADONAI’s *yachid* Son. Most Bible translations of John 3:16 say, “gave His only Son,” and that is certainly a correct translation. However, the translators of the *Tree of Life Bible* have used “one and only” to render the Greek *monogenes* to emphasize that it has the same meaning as *yachid*. It is very clear that ADONAI is being extremely specific in His use of *echad* and *yachid*. When referring to Himself, He is not *yachid*, but *echad*, “One.” *Echad* being a compound unity, means that in this mystery, He is also in some way “three.”

Abraham’s faith led to his obedience. Last week we saw in *Lekh Lekha* that he got up and went when ADONAI called him. This week in *Vayera*, ADONAI appeared to him. He later lacked faith when he told Abimelech that Sarah was his sister, but he completely made up for it when he obeyed without question when ADONAI told him to sacrifice his only son.

Just as Abraham’s faith led him to be obedient, our faith should also lead us to obey G-d’s Word. And, it does. We do obey. But, our faith should also lead us to believe by faith the things which we do not fully understand. ADONAI’s Word is truth and it is truth that we seek. But, we don’t have to know the answer to everything. The “mystery of faith” which *Sha’ul* described includes many things which we will not know completely until *Yeshua* returns.

What should *emunah*, faith, mean to us? The writer of Hebrews explains what it is: *1 “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of realities not seen”* (Hebrews 11:1 TLV). Substance is translated from the Greek *hupostasis*. It can also mean confidence or assurance. By faith we are assured that what we believe is true, especially in things “not seen” such as the two thorny questions we have examined. *Sha’ul* tells us how we receive faith: *17 “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Messiah”* (Romans 10:17

TLV). Faith comes through hearing the Word and, the Word includes the whole of Scripture, Genesis to Revelation. By faith, we know that it is all true and as we hear it, our faith grows. After Yeshua died, Thomas had not seen Him and would not believe that He was alive without the actual evidence; seeing Him. Yeshua said to Thomas: 29...*“Because you have seen Me, you have believed? Blessed are the ones who have not seen and yet have believed”* (John 20:29b TLV). We have not seen Yeshua, but we believe with perfect faith that He rose from the dead and will soon return to gather us to Himself. If we can borrow Maimonides way of presenting his 13 principles, this should be our goal of faith.: "I believe with perfect faith in everything which the Scriptures explain and in the truth of those Scriptures which are not explained."

We have spoken several times in recent months about “the non-*torah*,” a reference to the *Talmud*. It, for some, is considered to be truth equal to and requiring the same obedience as the written *Torah*. We do not believe that it is authoritative for us and we must guard against establishing non-*torahs* of our own. We are to seek the truth and not rely on what someone said or theologies based upon flimsy evidence. The non-*torah* of many Christians has just caused them to vote for those who support abortion and homosexuality as a lifestyle, a contradiction in our holy Scriptures. The two examples which we just cited regarding what some believe about Genesis 18:1 are non-*torahs*. Those who seek to find truth in the Gospel of Thomas, or the Gospels of Mary or Judas, the Book of Jasher or the Book of Enoch or any other such source other than the written Scripture are seeking guidance from a non-*torah*. But, as there are believers within different denominations and different streams of Yeshua’s followers, we have to give each of them the right to believe what they choose. Yeshua has given that freedom to us and we must give it to others. In this regard, my caution is not to others, but to you, my *mishpocha*, that you would guard your hearts and that you would not seek after those things which ADONAI has not clearly revealed. As you follow Yeshua, have faith and walk in faith, but respect the “mystery of faith!” *Shabbat shalom!*

**Addendum:** I have more to add for you, my *mishpocha*. It seems almost certain right now that our president will lose his office. We still don’t know the outcome, but hope is very slim. We can look at this with doom and gloom or we can look at it as opportunity. I choose to believe that ADONAI has given us an opportunity. We are to get out and build Yeshua’s body. *Lekh lekha*, get up and go, the same call which Abraham received. We need to focus on evangelism for those who have never met Yeshua and on ministry to those within the body who have been led astray.

While meditating on the situation, the thought came to me that we are to begin building an ark, a spiritual ark which will carry the body of Messiah from now until Yeshua returns. When I say “we,” I am speaking of the body of Messiah. We recently spoke about Noah and that the ark required 100 years to build. My mind sometimes wanders in strange directions, and I decided to compare Noah’s lifetime with our lifetimes and compared Noah’s lifetime of 950 years with our three score and ten, our 70 years. When Noah was 500 years old and began building the ark, in our equivalent years, he was 37 years old. When he completed building the ark at age 600, in our years he was 44. And, when he died at 950 years of age, in our years, he was 70. It took Noah from age 37 to age 44, 7 equivalent years to build the ark.

Do we have 7 years to build this spiritual ark? I don't know, but I do know that things have changed. We have to be much more proactive as Yeshua's disciples. Each of us must step up and be more active in our walk with Yeshua.

There is probably no question that there was much fraud involved in the voting process. Whether or not the recounts and discoveries of uncounted ballots will change things, we don't know. If it does, we will rejoice and if it doesn't, we will still rejoice for the opportunity which ADONAI has given us.

As Mary Louise and I closed our *erev Shabbat* dinner last night, Psalm 126, a part of the blessing after meals, leaped out to me. *1 A Song of Ascents. When Adonai restored the captives of Zion, it was as if we were dreaming. 2 Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with a song of joy. Then they said among the nations, "Adonai has done great things for them." 3 Adonai has done great things for us —we are joyful! 4 Restore us from captivity, Adonai, like streams in the Negev. 5 Those who sow in tears will reap with a song of joy. 6 Whoever keeps going out weeping, carrying his bag of seed, will surely come back with a song of joy, carrying his sheaves with him* (Psalm 126:1-6 TLV). If we plant now, we will certainly reap a harvest. Maybe even a hundred fold! *Shalom aleichem and Shabbat Shalom!*