

January 21, 2012

VAERA (I Appeared)

In this week's *parasha*, there are a number of topics that are of interest. There is, for example, Abraham's hospitality to strangers, the appearance of HaShem in the flesh, the encounter with Abimelech, and the binding of Isaac. I originally intended to focus on the compassion that HaShem has for those who love Him, but changed my mind, so you will notice that the Scripture readings have nothing to do with my d'rash. The reason I changed my mind is that every time I read the story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, I come up with questions. In chapter 19:16, why did Lot delay in leaving the city even after the angels of HaShem had told him to hurry? And in verse 26, why did Lot's wife look back when she was told, "Flee for your life. Don't look behind you and don't stop anywhere in the plain."

Most commentaries offer the same observations. They point out that Lot was a relatively pious man, as shown by his insistence on protecting the two mysterious guests from the men of the city. And he is favorably contrasted with his two sons-in-law who did not take his warning to get out of town seriously and decided to stay in Sodom. His behavior is also contrasted with that of his wife. When told to not look back, Lot marches resolutely forward while Mrs. Lot, rebel that she is, looks back and suffers the consequences.

We don't know much about Lot's wife. We don't even know her name. All we have is this story about how she turned into a pillar of salt. The one fact we do know about her is that she had four daughters. Two were married, and their husbands refused to take Lot's warning seriously. In addition to those two married daughters, there were two remaining daughters who are described in some translations as virgins. When the time came for Lot and his family to get out of the condemned city, he and his wife had to leave the two married daughters behind with their husbands. This must have torn at Lot's heart. He knew the city was destined for destruction and that all who stayed there would die. Maybe he delayed his departure making one last plea to convince his sons-in-law to change their minds. And maybe Lot's wife wasn't such a rebel after all. Perhaps a mother's heart could not let go - could not bear that two of her daughters were trapped in the flames. Her head knew that she had to live for her surviving children, but her mother's heart tugged her toward Sodom and the children she left behind. "Just one more look - maybe it's not too late to help them." And so she had to suffer the consequences.

AI 18:32-33

18:31-33

2 Kings 17:26-32

Luke 17:26-32 remember Lot's wife.