

Chayei Sarah - Rabbi Lerner - November 13, 2011

The Death of Yishmael

25:7-9: *These are the days of the years of Avraham's life which he lived: a hundred years, seventy years and five years. And Avraham expired and died at a ripe old age, mature and content, and was gathered to his people. His sons, Yitzchak and Yishmael, buried him in the cave of Machpelah...* **Rashi**: the names are listed out of the birth order, since Yishmael was 14 years older; from here we learn that Yishmael did teshuvah, and he gave kavod to Yitzchak, letting Yitzchak play the role of the pre-eminent son; this was the good old age promised to Avraham at the bris bayn habesorim.

25:12-18: *These are the generations of Yishmael the son of Avraham who was born to Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's maidservant...these are the sons of Yishmael and these are their names by their open cities and their strongholds (**Bechatzreihem Uvetirosum**); 12 chieftains for their nations. These were the years of Yishmael's life: 137 years, when he expired and died and was gathered to his people. They dwelt from..., over all his brothers he dwelt (**al penai kal echav nafal**). **Rashi**: this language is used only for one who dies a tzaddik; Yishmael had done teshuva and died as a tzaddik. **Ramban**: he was indeed a tzaddik, a ba'al teshuva, and the Torah treats him like one of the avos in the description of his death. **Rabbeinu Bachya**: he did teshuva and this language is used for tzaddikim who go onto eternal life in Gan Eden.*

There is a gemorrah in **Megilla** (17) that asks why does the Torah give us the years of Yishmael? In order that we can use his years to figure out what is going on in the life of Yaacov; it was used to do calculations about things going on in the lives of Yitzchak and Yaacov; this was how we come up with the 14 missing years of Yaacov's life, when he fled from Esav, and he learned in the yeshiva of Shem Ve'Eyver. This taught us the famous principle that talmud torah is greater than kibud Av Va'Eym. On this question, **Rashi** in the Gemorrah asks why should we be counting the years of Resha'im? But this goes against what Rashi said here! **Gur Aryeh**: even though he did teshuva, the torah should not have counted his years because he only did teshuva at the end of his life - most of his years were wicked. **Rav Hartman**: this is somewhat difficult - Yishmael did teshuva much earlier - the first indication of this is his behavior at the death of Avraham, as Rashi said - he was 89 at that time - it was 48 years before his own death - that is not a small amount of time, but maybe it is because it was still a minority of his overall years.

We first hear of Yishmael in 16:11, after Hagar leaves the house of Avraham the first time. Hagar initially became pregnant and began to act in a haughty manner to Sarah, who then came down hard on her, she then fled to the desert. An angel tells her to return to her mistress and submit to the servitude; she will have a boy whom she will call Yishmael, whose name means that God heard her prayer; and he will be a 'wild-ass' of a man, and his hand will be against everyone - al penai kal echav yishkon. Later in 17:16-18 Hashem tells Avraham that he will have a child through Sarah; he is worried about Yishmael (*Lu Yishmael Yichyeh Lefanecha*), and Hashem tells him that he too will be blessed, and 12 princes will come from him - we see the fulfillment of this at the end of our parsha; there will be 12 princes, just like the children of Yaacov. Then in 21:8 we have the birth of Yitzchak, and a big party was made for him. In 21:9 it says that Sarah saw Yishmael at this party *Metzachayk* - Sarah wants him driven out, away from their home, away from her son. **Rashi**: the word *Metzachayk* can mean the sin of avodah zarah, immorality or adultery; or it can mean murder - the word *Tzachek* is used for all three of these cardinal sins of Judaism in different places in the Torah. In 21:10 **Rashi**: from Sarah's comment

(*Ki Lo Yirash Ben Ha'amah Hazos Im Bni Im Yitzchak*) we see that Yishmael's issue was contending about who would inherit Avraham; Yishmael was making claim that he was the first-born of Avraham and deserved the double share of a bechor; and he would shoot arrows at Yitzchak "playfully" in the field; the issue was the fight over the real yerushah of who gets Eretz Yisrael.

Rev Shessinger: Rav Yitzchak Hutner said on 25:16 that the words *Chatzreyhem and Tirosum* - open cities and strongholds - mean that Yishmael did not have fortified cities, or large permanent settlements. When we contrast this with Esav in 36:6, it says that Esav gathered up his whole family and all their possessions and left the land because of Yaacov his brother.

Abarbanel: the reason they did this was that between both of them they had enormous cattle, and the land did not have enough room for all of them; Esav, because of his love of Yaacov later in his life, leaves the land of Israel to Yaacov - he ups and leaves and finds another place out of love of Yaacov, whom he allowed to keep the land of Israel; he goes to find a permanent settlement in Eretz Sa'ir; he willingly gave up the land to Yaacov - he had no designs on the land of Israel, and he did this out of love. **Rashi:** the Torah says that Esav left because of Yaacov, his brother - the Torah means that Esav knew that the inheritance of this land comes at a great price, the galus and slavery in Mitzrayim - Esav knew this and decided to opt out and find another land; he was not willing to have his descendants suffer; it was out of self-preservation rather than love of Yaacov. That is why the description of Esav's settling is so different from Yishmael. Esav builds a real permanent land - he had 8 kings in his land before we had anyone; they built up a powerful land; they were permanently ensconced in their land, and they had no claim on the land of Eretz Yisrael. And throughout history, his descendants never really wanted to conquer our land to own it. However, Yishmael never gave up on possessing the land of Israel. When Yishmael first ridiculed Yitzchak at his weaning party, he was saying Yitzchak might not even be a child of Avraham - he could have come from Avimelech. **Meshech Chachmah:** at the death of Avraham, Yishmael did teshuva and finally did admit that Yitzchak was the true son of Avraham; he confessed he did hear one of the three angels promise that Avraham and Sarah would have their own child. But he did not pick up his family and leave. He did teshuva at this time but did not follow through with his children - he did not set them straight; they never relinquished the land to us; that is why he had 12 tribes - they claimed they were the legitimate heirs. This is why we have problems with his descendants to this day. **Rav Chaim Vital:** there were four major exiles of the Jewish people - Bavel, Media, Greece, and Edom. But there is a fifth one, the one of Yishmael; the original four were kingdoms of outsiders that took over the land; Yishmael was the internal enemy who never left the land and never relinquished the land. They feel it is theirs because the land was promised to Avraham at bris milah; and Yishmael also had milah, was part of this bris, and they continue to keep this bris. But the **Ba'al Haturim** says that when Yishmael falls at the end of days, there will no longer be the battle of who controls and owns the land of Israel.