

Avram & the Fight for Freedom

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Question: What is the relationship between the Biblical Patriarch Avram and the American Founding Father Benjamin Franklin?

Answer: The statement, "Rebellion against tyrants is obedience to G-d." Franklin said these words, whereas Avram actually lived them thousands of years before.

In Genesis 12, the Bible picks up recording episodes from the life of Avram only when he is 75 years old. By this time, the Torah clearly indicates that Avram is already a man of prominence and is special in the eyes of G-d. Why else would G-d have singled him out from all human beings to be a conduit for both blessing and curse. Those who bless him and his progeny are blessed, those who curse him and his progeny are cursed. No such a blessing has ever been given to another.

Yet, why this is so, the Torah does not elaborate. We must remember that the Torah is not a history book. It's purpose is not to be a comprehensive historical record. The purpose of Torah was to relate to us spiritual truths, moral lessons and Divine mysteries. Above all, the purpose of Torah is to reveal to us the Law of G-d. Now, we all know that the entire Book of Genesis contains very few laws and very many stories. Still, those very stories themselves relate to us life lessons that are themselves to be followed as if they are the laws of life!

The written Torah since the days of its reception on Mt Sinai was always understood in a greater context. Throughout the centuries oral traditions about the lives of the Patriarchs were passed down from generation to generation. Many of these oral legends were eventually recorded in written form and some of them have survived to this day. These legends may or may not be actual history, but their historicity is mostly irrelevant. The Torah Sages who recorded these legends did not seek to write history. Instead, like the written Torah before them, they were interested in relating spiritual truths, moral lessons and Divine mysteries. In this the Sages succeeded, creating the body of Rabbinic literature that has capsulized the essence and meaning of Torah, teaching us how to properly live a godly life. When we review these legends of ancient days, we discover much that helps us recognize the context of the Torah stories, to realize just how important these ancient events actually were and how their lessons are to be properly applied today.

When we met Avram he is already a man of 75. Yet, the Torah account makes it clear that we are introduced to him right in the middle of his story. Being that it can be argued that Avram the man might possibly be the most influential human being ever to have lived, it is worth our time and effort to delve into his life to understand why and how he has risen to such a position of stature that over one half the population of the planet looks upon him as the father of their religions.

Torah legends speak of Avram being a political revolutionary who emphatically spoke of the inalienable human rights of freedom, to serve G-d and to live morally and righteously as G-d so

desired for man. Avram was chosen by G-d because of his defiant character. Yet, it was this same character trait that brought Avram into direct political and social opposition with the powers in his day. Avram was a man who stood up against injustice. He was the first to be defined as a hero. Long before Benjamin Franklin coined the words, “rebellion against tyrants is obedience to G-d,” Avram lived this.

Avram fought tirelessly against the ruthless oppressive government of the evil Nimrod, who Torah records was the first “mind-controlling” dictator. In this battle against oppressive government and imposed idolatrous religion, Avram lost his brother, who was murdered by the government authorities for having followed Avram. As a single man, leader of a small band, there was not much he could do to change the system from within, therefore by Divine command, Avram removed himself from the corruption of his society and went to what was in his days the hinterlands, the then equivalent of the wild wild west, the land of Canaan. It was there that he could live in peace and build his movement. And this is exactly what he did.

Once in Canaan Avram walked with G-d, lived his life in righteousness and spread his teachings of the truth of the One G-d and all humanities obligations and responsibilities towards Him and towards one another. Avram was no mere social philosopher. He was also well trained and prepared to fight for his cause and his rights. When his nephew Lot was captured by enemy troops, Avram assembled his followers to launch a blistering attack upon the enemies of righteousness, thus freeing his nephew and many others.

So impressed was Heaven with Avram and his righteous zeal to do what is right that G-d chose him to become the next in a line of special succession that dated back to the days of Adam. The Torah recounts that Avram is met by Melchizedek, who tradition identifies as Shem, son Noah. Shem was a priest, a High Priest. Following in the footsteps of his father Noah, Shem served as humanity's High Priest to G-d, called here El Elyon (the Most High G-d). The encounter between Shem Melchizedek and Avram was far more than just a chance meeting. It was a ritual initiation and rite of passage. The interchange between Avram and Shem was the passing on of the priesthood of Melchizedek from Shem to Avram. By Avram's righteous actions he was chosen to be the next High Priest, a heritage he would pass down to his children. This priesthood is for the service of G-d to bring His Divine light to all humanity. In non-Jewish literature this is called the Melchizedekian priesthood.

G-d's plan for humanity existed from the beginning. The souls of Israel were predestined to enter this world and serve the purpose for which they would become incarnate. Because of his righteousness, Avram was chosen to become the father of this nation of souls. The entire nation of Israel, the Jewish people were chosen by G-d and given this Divine burden to bare throughout the ages, to act and serve and G-d's servants, to shine His Divine light, to minister to all humanity. This is why at Mt Sinai G-d called Israel His “nation of priests.” This is because the entire Jewish people, the bloodline descendants of Avraham, Isaac and Jacob are the authentic and authoritative Melchizedekian priesthood. No one else can legitimately lay claim to this title.

Following his receipt of the priesthood G-d reveals to Avram Heaven's future plans for his progeny. For this Avram was required by G-d to first offer a strange type of sacrifice, the Covenant Between The Pieces and then he is foretold that his yet unborn descendants will be dwellers in a land not their own, that they will be subject to enslavement and from there G-d will bring them forth.

Avram's descendants being strangers in a land not their own is said to last for 400 years (Gen. 15:13). However in verse 16, G-d states that it will be the forth generation that is brought back to the land. This appears contradictory, but in reality, when viewed properly, it is not such thing.

When one looks at the later Biblical story, recorded through the rest of the Torah, one can easily recognize and count the four generations. Jacob goes down into Egypt along with his son Levi. This begins the Egyptian exile, together father and son (and the whole house of Israel) go down into exile. Levi is the father of Kohat, he is first generation born in the time of slavery. Kohat fathers Amram (father of Moses and Aharon), he is generation two born into slavery. Aharon witnesses the redemption (generation three) and his son, Eliezer (generation four), is the High Priest who along with Joshua Bin Nun enters into the Land of Israel and possesses it in accordance with G-d's word.

So, as we see, G-d's word was fulfilled quite literally. However, we are left with the question, what then was the 400 year period mentioned previously, or better to ask, when did it actually start? It could not have started when Jacob went down into Egypt because the Biblical time-line so well documented throughout the Torah clearly shows that the period spent in Egypt itself was far less than 400 years. So, when did the count begin?

To understand this we must return to the verses themselves. For G-d originally said, "your seed will be a stranger in a land that is not theirs." So, in order for this prophecy to be fulfilled, first Avram must have progeny (seed). Without offspring, this could never be fulfilled. If one looks carefully at the Biblical record, from the time Issac is born until the time of coming into the Land, 400 years transpired. Therefore it appears that the measure of time began with the birth of Issac.

Now, when G-d spoke the prophecy saying that his seed would be strangers in a land not theirs, this was literally as true of Issac and Jacob in Canaan as it was of Jacob's children in Egypt. And the second part of G-d's word that speaks about the slavery and oppression does not specify the period of time that such was to last, nor does it specify when it would begin. We assume by a surface reading of the text that the slavery was to last the entire 400 year period, but the prophecy says no such thing. That is a matter of interpretation, an interpretation that we see from all other Biblical accounts is wrong.

The nature of this Covenant Between The Pieces was based on a peculiar sacrifice the likes of which we do not see repeated in later scripture. Five animals were selected for sacrifice, three large ones were to be split in half, while two smaller birds were to be placed one on each side. Essentially what we have then is four parts on the right corresponding to four on the left, with Avram in the middle. This explains why the covenant is called "Between The Pieces." It was at this time that G-d chose Avram to become the father of Israel and informed him that those who were to become Israel would be subject to the coming exile and more.

The pieces were four in number, four to the right and four to the left. The significance of this is not lost to anyone familiar with Torah numerology and symbolism. G-d's holy name has four letters in it, Yod Hey Vav Hey and the number of exiles to be faced by Israel in the future would be four, under Babylon, Persia, Greece and Edom.

What is interesting to note about the sacrifices is that the first three are halves of the same whole, with Avram/Israel in between them. However the final one is different. These are not two halves of the same whole but rather two separate wholes that act and serve together as one. These pieces represent the four exiles, with the first three being Babylon, Persia and Greece. Yet, the fourth one is different. It is made up of two parts, one distinct from the other, yet serving as one whole.

This same imagery we see repeated centuries later in the vision/dream of King Nebuchadnezzar that was interpreted by Daniel (ref. Daniel 2). In this dream, there was pictured statue with a

