

Vayeshev And He settled From Better to Worse to Best

Torah: Gen. 37:1-40:23

(1) **37:11:** *His brothers were envious of him but his father kept the memory of these things in his heart.* Jacob's life did not settle down in the home front and the growing sibling rivalry became increasingly harsh and destabilizing. His brothers were both jealous of their father's love for Joseph and also of the prophetic dreams he was given. Instead of rejoicing in G-d's selection, they sought to undercut him and eventually decided to get rid of him – like Cain did with his brother Abel.

(2) **37:27:** *Come let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and let us not put our hands upon him, for he is our brother and our flesh.* Judah was just as disgusted with his brother as the rest, but he set limits to what he was prepared to do and began to take the leadership role away from Ruben, who was only prepared to use deception to protect his brother. Judah saved Joseph's life, because he never would have survived with all the jealousy and intrigue in his family. Sometimes being removed from a situation is better than being destroyed by one.

(3) **38:26:** *Judah recognized them and said: she is less guilty than I am because I did not give her to Schela, my son and he did not know her anymore.* This is not a very flattering story about Judah but it shows the quality of his character because he did not shirk from accepting responsibility when he was confronted with his sin. He did not shoot the messenger or deny his role in the folly. He did something about it. Reuben has lost the leadership position as have Simeon and Levi. The rest of the story hangs on Judah and Joseph.

(4) **39:12:** *The L-rd was with Joseph and stretched forth His goodness upon him.* Kidnapped, sold and falsely accused, Joseph is blessed through the trials and not protected from them. They became the source of future blessing because of the way he handled himself in his trials. How are you handling yourself in the midst of your trials? When you are delivered from, do let Him deliver you through?

Haftarah: Amos 2:6-3:8

(5) **3:3:** *Can two men walked together unless they are in agreement?* Joseph and the L-rd agreed and walked together through the trials. Israel and Judah took matters into their own hands and violated both the mandate of the L-rd and His morality. Taking things into your own hands is never a good deal if you take things out of the hands of the L-rd.

(6) **3:7:** *Surely the L-rd does nothing without revealing His secret to His servants the prophets.* This does not mean we will know everything which the L-rd does, but that we will always be able to see the biggest big picture, because we know what He is ultimately going to do and why He is going to do it. Are you one of the prophets He is talking with or are you one of the flaky people \He is talking to the prophets about.

Brit Chadashah: Matt.1:1-6, 16-25

(7) **1:22:** *All of this shall happen in order that it may be fulfilled what the L-rd announced by the prophet.* The birth of our L-rd, the less than stellar behaviour of the ancestors mentioned in the genealogy, were all used to fulfil the highest purposes of G-d. Things may go from better to worse, but in Him they will always end up going for the best. Are what the prophets foretold and how the prophets told us how to live being fulfilled in your life and in the life of our congregation? We will never have a lesser agenda.

(Mike. pp. 100, 101) **Ps. 112** **Jewish Hero:** Foreign aid workers in the Philippines

We are dealing with the fruit of the Spirit as character building blocks that the L-rd wants to activate in each one of us as well as in our entire community. These should not be seen as a skill set we acquire when we become believers, which we did not possess before we came to faith. They should be seen as characteristics which reflect our potential because of the image of G-d we all possess, but which the impact of the flesh often deactivates or crowds out of our lives. As we learn who our Messiah is and as we learn who He wants us to become, our renewed character becomes more and more who we are and how we live.

Today we begin the last three of the nine fruit which are listed and it is a Greek word which is usually translated either as faith or faithfulness. Either word reflects the English equivalent, but if your translation uses the word faith, we must not confuse it with having faith in the L-rd or with the content of that faith. It refers more to our ability to demonstrate that people can have faith in us or trust us and trustworthiness may be a more precise term for the meaning which is being conveyed.

The ability to have faith in G-d and to believe is dealt with in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews and is not being referred to here. Paul is referring to being faithful and trustworthy. Now immediately we have to deal with the difference between being faithful or trustworthy as a response to our faith in the L-rd and as some kind of means to access the L-rd or earn His approval. It should never be seen as a contest to see who is more deserving of G-d's favour. Rather it should be seen as part of the image of G-d which the L-rd has built into each of us and which is being more and more activated as we walk with Him.

Some parallel terms might be reliable, cooperative, dependable, as well as trustworthy and faithful. It is sort of that part of our spiritually liberated character which wants to be helpful and which takes an interest in seeing the job or task through until it is completed – and also that it is completed well and without doing what we do for approval or to get attention.

There are numerous examples in the Scriptures of people who say they will do something and who will readily admit that something needs to be done, but when it comes time for action, they abandon the Little Red Hen and also cannot come to the banquet for any number of reasonable sounding excuses which are really what are called today “cop-outs”. Matthew 25 deals with the judgement of the nations and focuses on cop-outs.

It talks about some of the essential practical moral and spiritual applications of our faith and those who fell short of doing what they knew they should have because, somehow it was not enough of a priority to actually get busy and do it. They were sadly lacking in faithfulness.

Faithfulness (reliability, trustworthiness, dependability) is that which moves us from merely contemplating our duty or our calling and joyfully and with determination, sets about to fulfil that duty fully and completely. It is also that character trait which rejoices in the task for the task's sake and not for the attention or the advantage it potentially offers.

One of the sad and annoying aspects of my scent allergy is the cloud which descends on my mind and the fog which I have to wade through to get anything done, once I am perfumed. When I have neither the physical energy or the mental wherewithal to do what I know needs to be done, I have learned to hunker down and wait until I feel better, which is one way I am learning about faithfulness and my increasing level of energy and my decreasing reactivity are both sources of great joy to me.

Faithfulness looks around to see what needs to be done and wants to help – wants to be helpful and people possessed of this helpfulness and faithfulness can be counted on to bring a degree of enthusiasm and energy to tasks which do not offer these perks to those willing to bite the bullet and do some of the less pleasant tasks which we all have to face.

Faithfulness does not measure the personal benefit or gain which a task offers as a primary source of motivation to getting involved and one of the features I appreciate about faithfulness is the commitment to see a task through to completion as part of what it means to become involved.

This does not mean that leaving somethings unfinished is never an option, because when it becomes clear that a certain task does not have the resources to be followed through on, it is not seen as a defeat or as a personal affront. It is seen as the understanding that if the task cannot be completed under current conditions and with current resources, then patience and wisdom take over and wait for more favourable conditions or more adequate resources.

Faithfulness (reliability) is kind of like a cross between a British Bulldog, a Rottweiler and a Labrador retriever with a Saint Bernard. It will see the task through with tenacity, but it will never let the task become a task master because it knows why it is doing what it is doing and how the task should be completed.

One feature of faithfulness reminds me both of our Gospel imperative and of Zionism. Once our people were driven out of our land, the desire to return has never been far from the surface as well as the determination not to let go of the drive to come home even in the face of increasing opposition, intimidation and negative propaganda.

Our calling is never primarily determined either by the amount of opposition we encounter or by what people think of us as we go about the business of working to fulfil our calling.

Faithfulness guides us both in what we do and in how we do it and in the history of the spread of the Gospel, a similar level of zeal and commitment needs to guide us as we seek to work for the coming kingdom. We have been maligned, persecuted and yet believers remain committed to our task nearly 2,000 years after it was first given and we will not give up until it is completed – even in the face of increasing personal and societal opposition of every kind.

Faithfulness is able to hold onto a call and a mandate and not be knocked off course by the opposition which rises up against it.

In our increasingly hostile secular society both our beliefs and our morality will be called more and more into question and we will be less and less well received as we come more and more under the dictatorship of political correctness which will want to impose limits on both what we are allowed to believe and how we are allowed to live. Now we will always be law abiding citizens who live peacefully with our neighbours as we go about our business and earn our living as responsible citizens.

This is not because we are looking for approval or that we have confidence in our society's ability to provide for our physical and spiritual needs, but because faithfulness to the Gospel requires we respond a certain way to opposition and never become enemies for our neighbours.

There is one more aspect of faithfulness which I want to deal with this morning – even though there are so many more things which could be said about this aspect of the character which the L-rd wants to build into us. Faithfulness rebounds from defeat and admits fault so that it is never one of the problems people have to deal with when we look at what needs to be accomplished as we move through our lives.

This desire never to give up and to recover and to still be around means that we are willing to learn and also that we are not trying to protect a positive image of ourselves and avoid taking responsibility for our mistakes. If at first we do not succeed or if how we did things become part of the problem, then we are more committed to the task than we are to our image and we want that image to be based on telling the truth and on recovering from failed attempts without either placing unfair blame or in avoiding responsibility for our mistakes.

Faithfulness places a high premium on telling the truth and on maintaining however steep a learning curve we need to, in order to stay focused on the job as part of our commitment to the highest values and standards.

How is your faithfulness doing? How is your reliability doing? Are you trustworthy? Are you dependable? Can you be counted on to do your best and not give up?

Do you need constant approval to get the job done?

As we approach the season of Chanukah and as we remember the faithfulness of Judah Maccabee, we need to understand that faithfulness is part of what the L-rd is growing in our lives. We need to allow Him to show us how to be dependable and how to be there and be counted on, because our task will always be to work for the coming kingdom and not be scared off or distracted by the world which just does not want to understand who we are and what we are about.

May our faithfulness use as His faithfulness to us as the model we want to emulate and may we see it as both our duty and as our privilege.

Lets pray.