

**Parasha Vayeshev (And He Dwelled)  
December 20, 2003/25 Kislev 5764**

**Torah:** Gen. 37:1-40:23

**Haftarah:** Zech. 2:14-4:7

**Brit Chadashah:** Acts 7:9-16(L); Mt. 27:15-46(F)

Because today is the first day of Chanukah, I will be presenting this week's portion in a slightly different order, with Torah first, Brit Chadashah second, and Haftarah third.

**Torah**

This week's portion tells the story of Joseph, who was favoured by his father resulting in jealousy by the rest of his brothers. When Joseph receives the decorative coat from his father, this is the final straw for his brothers and they plot to kill him. Changing their minds at the last minute, instead they sell Joseph into slavery and make it look to their grief-stricken father as though he was murdered.

The portion then goes into the situation of Judah's firstborn, Er, who dies without having a child with his wife Tamar. Judah instructs his other son Onan to have a child with his brother's wife – this was called a "levirate marriage" which was followed by the ancient Hebrews, through which the widow and her husband's surviving brother would have relations in order to produce an offspring who would be considered the heir of the deceased brother, with all the privileges of that brother. Because the child would not really be his therefore, Onan would not complete the sexual act with Tamar and was punished by G-d for this, through death. Judah gave his last boy to someone else and after the death of his wife, Tamar and Judah end up having twins after she poses as a harlot. This began the Davidic dynasty which sprang forth from Judah, ultimately leading to Yeshua.

The portion then continues with Joseph's predicament, which slowly goes from bad to worse. While serving Potiphar as his slave, Potiphar's wife hits on Joseph, who refuses her advances. Offended, Potiphar's wife accuses Joseph of attempting to rape her, and he is imprisoned. But instead of falling into bitterness, Joseph maintained his faith in G-d, and his attitude and conduct made him admired by other prisoners, as well as the warden who put Joseph in charge of the prison. Joseph also had a gift for dream interpretation, and interpreted dreams for two fellow prisoners, a cupbearer and a baker. He told the cupbearer that he would be set free, and to try and intercede on Joseph's behalf to have him set free, but when the cupbearer was released he forgot about Joseph.

When you are obedient to G-d, He is with you, no matter who you are or where you are. G-d was working through Joseph even in the pit of a prison, through false accusations, through his family rebelling against him.

Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined.

But while Joseph was there in the prison, the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

Genesis 39:20-23 (NIV)

It's G-d's will that counts, not your own will, because when you are not obedient to G-d, there are consequences – Onan died, even though he believed he was justified in what he was doing. Alternately, Joseph was probably very hurt, even angry that everything in his life seemed to be going wrong. Yet his faith in G-d never wavered – even when his own attempts to get himself out of the situation failed, such as when the cupbearer forgot him for two years, he did not fall into bitterness or sin.

### **Brit Chadashah**

Even for people of faith, sometimes it can be very difficult to keep your focus on G-d – especially when things are going horribly wrong. In Feinberg's recommended portion of Matthew 27:15-46 it is told of how Yeshua's fate was sealed by the Pharisees and the Romans through His crucifixion. As he hung on the cross, Yeshua cried out to His father:

About three, Yeshua uttered a loud cry, "*Eli! Eli! L'mah sh'vaktani?* (My G-d! My G-d! Why have you deserted me?)" Matthew 27:46 (Jewish NT)

But G-d never abandoned Yeshua, even though He momentarily may have felt that way – He was sent to atone for our sins, which could only be completed through His death.

### **Haftarah**

Today is the first day of Chanukah, and as a result, a different Haftarah is read than would normally be the case for Parasha Vayeshev.

In this Haftarah, the prophet Joshua, the High Priest, is defended in Zechariah's vision, being rescued from Satan by an angel, with the clear warning that he must obey the commandments. Obedience to G-d, as we have seen in the Torah and Brit Chadashah sections, results in being blessed and used by G-d.

The Haftarah portion ends, appropriately for Chanukah, with Zechariah having a vision of a menorah.

He asked me, "What do you see?"

I answered, "I see a solid gold lampstand with a bowl at the top and seven lights on it, with seven channels to the lights. Also there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left." Zech. 4:2-4 (NIV)

This menorah is constructed in such a way that the olive trees supply fuel continuously so the menorah may stay alight.

All of our needs are supplied continuously by G-d. We just have to be able to see it, even in times of adversity. It is easy to walk with G-d when things are going well, but it can be a challenge when things aren't. Joseph was able to, when he was in prison. So did the Maccabees when they put their faith in G-d and fought to overcome a seemingly invincible foe. When you keep your faith and focus on G-d, the menorah of hope shines every day.