

16 Kislev 5776 (28/11/15) **His Grace is Always Sufficient For Us** J. M. Terrett

**Vayishlach                      And He Settled                      Blessing Always Trump Our Troubles**

**Torah:**                      Genesis 32:3-36:43

**Haftarah:**                      Obadiah 1:1-21

**Brit Chadashah:**                      Hebrews 11:11-20

(Julie p. 153) Ps. 140 Jewish Hero: Jochebed, Moses' Mother. Torah Carrier: Angelo

This week's Torah Portion deals with both Jacob's "touch and go" reconciliation with Esau and with the trials and tribulations which his family encountered as they settled back into the land. This is also the last portion which deals with Jacob as an individual. From this portion forward the history of Israel becomes the history of the redeemed community.

It opens with Jacob sending a considerable appeasement offering to his twin brother, some twenty or so years after his hasty departure from Canaan. He calls Esau his lord and himself Esau's servant, which is more the formal language of an appeasement than the actual description of their status before G-d. After taking precautionary measures which represent a desire to be prepared for all eventualities, more than they do a lack of faith, Jacob takes some alone time where he spends a lot of time in supplication and prayer.

During the night, he has a vision where he wrestles with the angel of the L-rd, or, said another way, with the L-rd through His angel. The angel is unable to prevail over Jacob and blesses him, though the blessing causes him to have a permanent limp as a reminder of the tenacious, inevitable blessings of G-d. Much has been speculated about the full meaning of this encounter, both by Jewish and Gentile commentators, but let me simplify our understanding of the vision he had. The blessings of G-d will always trump our troubles and no matter what it is we are wrestling with, the blessing of G-d will carry the day, either in this life or in the one to come. We need to wrestle with our fears until His promises become more real to us than our troubles, because He shall always overcome through us so that His Word is fulfilled, even if we have to limp a little because of our lack of vision.

Jacob and Esau have a joyful reunion and both of them have had their socks blessed off and the troubles which divided them when they were younger are forgotten as irrelevant, given the hand of G-d in both of their lives. Esau makes an attempt to merge their camps and their destinies, but Jacob bows out and establishes himself close to where he set up a monument before he left Canaan. His daughter encounters a potentially disastrous situation and two of Jacob's sons deceitfully use circumcision as a weapon against their enemies. For all intents and purposes, the people who circumcised themselves had entered the community of Israel, so their slaughter was as if Jews had killed each other.

The first three sons of Jacob will later pay for their crimes and not receive any blessing from their dying father, but their descendants remain an integral part of Israel throughout their generations. Esau and Jacob bury their father (he is 180, they are 120) and the portion ends with a descriptive genealogy of the founding of the nation of Esau, also known as Edom.

There is always enough blessing to go around, but the covenant and the blessings of Abraham will always remain the sole prerogative of the descendants of Jacob.

The prophetic portion deals with the retribution of G-d upon Edom who rejoiced in the day of Israel's troubles, because people will always reap what they sow and the New Testament portion again recites the faith and courage of Abraham, Sarah and Isaac and then stipulates that the transmission of this covenant blessing went to Jacob and not to Esau. Again, even though the purposes of G-d are often beyond our limited ability to fully fathom, we can surmise that the basic reason why Jacob received the blessing over his brother was twofold. First, Jacob bought it and Esau despised it – which was a choice he made and which also should caution us when it comes to choices which we make. Secondly, Jacob obeyed and trusted in G-d and did a backwards Abraham. He left the Promised Land to acquire a wife who would not endanger the covenant blessing through spiritual and cultural assimilation and he returned with a community which was substantial enough for people to assimilate into, but which was too substantial for assimilation to ever be enough of a threat to endanger either the future generations of the community or the transmission of the covenant blessing until it was fulfilled in the life and ministry of the Messiah of Promise.

G-d's blessings will always both be personal and generational and as long as we follow in the faithful steps of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, His blessings will always trump our troubles, whether our kids turn out right or whether His relentless pursuit of them condemns them to be a work in progress, until they get their lives together – or their children's children do! Never let your troubles overpower your grasp of His promises, because He is always able to deliver us and bless us and heal us and touch us through all the whatever's of our lives.

Sermon: His Grace Is Always Sufficient For Us. 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

***In order that I should not be puffed up with pride because of the excellence of these revelations, I have been given a thorn in the flesh, an angel of Satan to buffet me and to prevent me from becoming proud. Three times, I besought the L-rd to remove it from me and He said to me: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is accomplished through weakness." I will therefore most willingly boast of my afflictions in order that the power of the Messiah should rest upon me. That is why I will take pleasure in my weaknesses and in insults, hardships, persecutions and distresses for the Messiah; for when I am weak, then I am strong.***

I would like to give you a meditation today which helped me to come to grips with both my ongoing health concerns and the latest crisis where I taught the hospital the true meaning of caring for patients. I am so grateful for all the prayers which were offered up on my behalf and I truly believe that it is because of them that everything which could have gone wrong, didn't go wrong and I look forward to being around for quite some time, both to keep people on their toes and also to continue to bask in the gracious provision and protection of our wonderful Messiah and L-rd.

First of all, let me dispel some of the myths which surround the apostle's "thorn in the flesh". A careful reading of the Pauline portions of the New Testament reveals that Paul never fully recovered his vision after his temporary blindness and this weighed heavily upon him. He dictated the epistles he wrote and often affixed his signature to them at the end. He thanked the Galatians for their concern for his poor vision, saying they would have offered him their own eyes if they could have.

The word for thorn in Greek is used in reference to a physical ailment, so it was not his wife,

nor was it some kind of spiritual or mental oppression. He taught extensively how to wage successful spiritual warfare against both the enemy and the forces of the enemy, but he could not miss the opportunity of calling his disability a messenger of the enemy to keep him from getting puffed up in pride. He never missed an opportunity to slam the enemy!

While there is no record that Paul ever engaged with our L-rd prior to His death and resurrection, Paul had several mighty visions over several years, where the deep truths of the Gospel and the Torah were taught to him by revelation as well as by study.

None of the other apostles had such a comprehensive grasp of the Gospel and his explanations testify to the amount of deep revelation which he received as an apostle who had such a dubious beginning to his walk with the resurrected Messiah. Paul believed in divine healing and he both experienced it and operated in the gift of healing, but he could not make his thorn in the flesh disappear, no matter how much faith he had or how many times he wept and wailed and assailed the gates of Heaven.

In order for him to understand that he would not be released from his thorn, he was given a personal message that still speaks to us today when we encounter physical, emotional or spiritual disabilities which will not go away, no matter how much we want them to – and no matter how hard and loud and often we pray for them to get lost and leave us alone: His grace is always sufficient for us in every situation we may encounter

This does not mean that we passively accept sickness or disabilities, but it does mean that our understanding of divine healing must always contain an element of grace which we can always count on, whether or not healing or release is part of the picture. You see there are both positive and negative features of G-d's provision and we need to learn to welcome them equally. Troubles and joys are two sides of the same coin which G-d often brings our way.

First of all, He is always able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we can think and ask. He is our healer, our deliverer and our provider. However, we will also encounter intense persecution and tribulation which He not only blesses, but which He uses as a means of empowering us with His grace, because sometimes His strength is made perfect in our weaknesses, even though these weaknesses can be painful, confusing and excruciatingly annoying. We do not choose what comes our way; we only choose how to respond to it.

When I began to get sick in the late 70's, I prayed and prayed and asked to be delivered and I could tell you some amazing stories of "just in the nick of time". I have often been "beaten down" but never downtrodden or demolished.

My first and last line of defence in every situation which I encounter as I stumble and grumble through the valleys and heave myself up and over the mountains will always be prayer, accompanied by faithful obedience, whether I get my own way or not. I will never let an obstacle eventually block my trust or my joy and too often in the depths of pain and tears, His grace reaches out and pulls my feet out of the miry clay and reminds me who is L-rd and where it is that His straight and narrow and very bumpy path is leading this fractious pilgrim.

Paul saw visions of glory above all the other apostles and his outreach to both Jews and Gentiles was so much more effective than any other apostle. He also lists 28 categories of tsouris (troubles) which he endured and which should have been enough for several lifetimes.

I rejoice in both the negative and the positive features of my King's faithful provision and impenetrable protection – as well as is His unfailing guidance in a world which is going mad and growing dark almost beyond measure. He will leave us nor forsake us!

I will never give the adversary greater credit than I give to my Messiah. Anything which he is allowed to do to me remains as much under the direct control of the L-rd as those mighty blessings which are so gratefully received. I passionately hate my multiple chemical sensitivity and all the complications which it clogs up my life with. I also hate all the trials which this chubby little British Jewish boy has encountered ever since he made his spectacular entrance into this veil of tears, nearly 63 years ago and it ain't nearly over yet!

I have several months of painful therapy ahead of me and until further notice, I am no longer allowed to cycle, workout or take a sauna and none of this is because I lack faith or because of any secret sin in my life – you can't get up to much when you are stuck at home and even have to cut back time on the computer – and I know all my Facebook friends will dearly miss my sharp wit! My life is complicated, but will always be imbued with His overpowering grace.

I am not letting the devil get a foothold into my life and I still desire to be healed, but if it is not to be yet, I am not going to sit on the floor, throw a kicking fit or hold my breath until G-d gives in to my tantrums. I am going to do everything which I can and trust Him to bless me in my thorns, even though at times I feel like a porcupine and get so fed up with my isolation that I sometimes struggle with despair and anger and have even been known to get grumpy!

I told the crew in emergency that I learned long ago that the world does not revolve around me. By faith I acknowledge that it revolves around the gracious provision and inescapable, ultimate control of G-d. As much as I can, I want my life to revolve around this provision and around this control and when my grip seems to be slipping, I will kvetch (complain) and pray and study until my commitment to His purposes is renewed, even if it means sticking myself with blood thinners for the next three to six months and figuring out how to further limit my exposures to the chemical off gassing from the electronic devices which are often my only tangible contact with the outside world.

His grace will always be more than sufficient for me and for us, whatever that looks like. Please keep praying for me that my grasp of this foundational spiritual truth will never slip, even if my blood clot should do so!

I want to see our community continue to grow and prosper and I want to see all of our needs provided for as we reach out to our fractious Jewish community and our misbehaving, often really callous, Christian community, firmly grasping on to the Scriptures which neither group seems to take very seriously.

Our duty in this life is to make sure that our understandings and our reactions are biblical, whether we encounter the positive features of His amazing grace or whether we cling to the wreckage of our boat as we are dodging the stones and whips and slanders which seem determined to drag us away from the light and enslave us into the dark side.

Chanukah is in a few weeks, followed by Purim, Passover and the next round of High Holy Days and Sukkoth. As long as we embrace His grace and find that His strength is perfected both through our weaknesses and through His mighty victories on our behalf, then we will not

lose our way and stumble into all the negative works of the flesh which are crouching at our door and doing their best to take up position on the couch of our hearts.

My chemical sensitivity is a thorn which is thankfully diminishing and one of the dangerous side effects of perfuming is the constriction of my veins which could still trigger subsequent blot clots if I am not more careful - and perhaps even if I am more careful.

I am so glad to have been walking with the Messiah since I was 19, some 44 years ago. He has given me more healing and more joy and victory than all the troubles that have come with it. And with Paul, I am learning to say that the light weight of my afflictions is not worthy to be compared to the immeasurable weight of glory which is waiting for me and for us, once our pilgrimage is completed. And His tenacious grace also sustains me in every trial all the time.

I will never stop praying for people to be healed and delivered, because I have seen indescribably wonderful things happen in the lives of countless people. I have also wept with people who have wandered through valleys deeper than the Grand Canyon and who have spent more time running and hiding than David ever did. I never want to be so narrow and judgmental that unless people are immediately and permanently released from their thorns, that I feel they are somehow in sin and responsible for the trials which seem to be pouring over them. I never want to be one of Job's cruel, fickle friends.

I am so grateful to still be alive and still have the potential for recovering my health and causing trouble for many more years to come. Again, a lot of the reason I am still here is directly linked to the faithful prayers of the saints who have stood with me, with varying degrees of good and bad advice. Thank you for your support and be assured that His grace will always be sufficient for this little old Jewish man, whatever that grace looks like.

I am not down and out and I am not grumbling and wondering why G-d has forsaken me. I am grudgingly grateful for all that He continues to do and want to do all to also embrace His grace which will always be more than sufficient for each of us and all of us, both in the positive and negative happenstances which we are called to negotiate through on our way home to our father's Home in Glory! Shabbat Shalom!