

Miketz At The End Of Hook Line and Sinker**Torah:** Gen. 41:1-44:17**Haftarah:** Zech. 2:14-4:7 (Shabbat Chanukah)**Brit Chadashah:** Matt. 27:15-46Reading: Sherri B. p. 145 and Ps. 40. Jewish hero: Abraham; Torah carrier: Aaron
L-rd's Table

This Torah portion deals with two main themes: the elevation of Joseph as prime minister of Egypt and Joseph angling with his brothers in order to bring his family to Egypt and save them from the famine.

History is full of descriptions of famines which have struck at various times and today's portion deals with one which struck after a period of great abundance and it was to last uncommonly long. Egypt usually depended on the annual rising of the waters of the Nile to irrigate her crops, but for a seven year period the country was unable to harvest crops and the country was saved from the danger of starvation by the preparations Joseph made during the seven good years.

His ability to interpret Pharaoh's dreams was coupled with an excellent leadership ability and he becomes a blessing to the nations when he prevented great loss of life during the seven bad years. Despite being betrayed by his brothers and wrongly accused and incarcerated, the blessing which followed him brings him to the place where he is able to save his family and bring them into the womb of Egypt so they could become a great nation.

Pharaoh's court was a stormy place and his promotion may have prevented Pharaoh from taking out his displeasure on the senior members of his court who were unable to give him an explanation of his double dream. It is a strange dream and not one which his counsellors could explain satisfactorily. His new position depended on both Pharaoh's continued favour and on the success of his plans to save the country from ruin.

The Egyptians did not have a means to count to infinity and they gathered so much grain that they ran out of numbers and during the years of plenty the people would not have objected to giving a fifth of their harvest and no one saw the need to prepare for an end to the good times. Even if Joseph had warned the people that bad times were coming, the annual flooding of the waters of the Nile usually exempt Egypt from the famines which struck countries which relied upon rain for their sowing and harvesting.

Once the bad years come, and Joseph recognizes his brothers, he has to figure out a way to get his family into Egypt, without them just running away or scattering, which may have happened if he had revealed himself too soon. He is not playing with them to make them pay for what they had done, as much as he was setting things in motion so that his family would be safe as they saw his dreams come to be realized.

His use of deception makes them realize that what they had done to their brother was wrong and they see their troubles as a direct consequence of this criminal behaviour. He takes his second oldest brother hostage in the place of Reuben perhaps because his loss was not something Jacob would greatly mourn. He is gradually losing the leadership role to Judah and when Judah is entrusted with the safety of Benjamin, he is doing for his youngest brother what

he should have done for Joseph.

I find the reference to a divining cup problematic except that it is his personal cup and they appear to have not just cheated him, but also stolen from him – which is exactly what they have done and in their conversations; they are admitting and accepting their guilt as they are being shown up as the liars and thieves they were towards their brother.

They are so convinced of their innocence that they say whoever is guilty of the theft of the cup, should be put to death and the rest of them should become slaves. He is making them relive what he went through, because they wanted to kill him and sold him into slavery so that his blood would not be on their hands.

They are confused and astounded, because even though they acted in good faith, they are found guilty of theft by the one whom they stole and they progressively come to admit their guilt in such a way that they will have to come clean with their father because they cannot hid their sin any longer. Judah becomes the spokesman for the group and says that G-d has uncovered their iniquity and he tries to make sure that his little brother is exempt from the death penalty which they had already invoked upon him.

He is prepared to share his brother's fate and to submit to the slavery which they had condemned Joseph to. He has got them hook line and sinker and they never suspect that Joseph is using deception against them in much the same way they used it against him and they end up seeing that their troubles have come upon them because of what the subjected Joseph to.

Joseph shows them mercy which they did not show him and is prepared to let them go home and remove Benjamin from their dubious care. G-d's blessing allowed Joseph to rise above the treachery his was subjected to, both from his brother's and from Potiphar's wife and while he could have taken real vengeance on his brothers, he just wants them to admit their guilt and ask him for forgiveness, even though, at the time, they are not aware that that is what they are doing.

We need to see that the blessing of G-d will follow us through any number of trials which we may be subjected to and that instead of harbouring resentment and seeking for retribution, we need to be set free so that G-d can take care of the perpetrators while we shine and are salty, which is our calling.

Joseph got his brothers hook line and sinker so that they would admit their guilt and no longer use deception to hide it.

While we may never be in a position to angle those who have hurt us and betrayed us into admitting their guilt, we need to pray that the L-rd would bring them to their senses, just as He did with us when we came to faith in Him. Vengeance belongs to the L-rd and we need to pray that the guilty ones would not cling to their sin, but seek for repentance and forgiveness, both on an individual basis and on a global basis.

We need to see that evil doers and deceivers are victims of the darkness which they have succumbed to hook, line and sinker and pray for them to escape themselves out of the snare of the enemy. This is so that they could fall hook line and sinker into the hands of G-d and

escape the judgment they so richly deserve, but which He is prepared to release them from if they repent and seek for forgiveness.

The Haftarah portion refers to the ministry of the Messiah who will remove the iniquity of the country in a single day, who will be given to the people if they walk in the ways of the L-rd. Just as Judah the Maccabee overcame the great mountain which stood in his way by the Spirit of the L-rd of Hosts, so the Messiah will deal with the international, generational sin and guilt as the chief cornerstone who will bring about G-d's reign on earth. He will set up the heavenly temple on earth, because His purposes can never be thwarted, no matter how much resistance the enemy, the world and flesh put up.

The New Testament portion reflects the Haftarah portion in Zechariah and deals with the crucifixion of the L-rd, who as the Chief cornerstone, did indeed remove the iniquity of the people and of all peoples in a single day and by a single act. And it is my prayer that just as Joseph's brothers fell hook, line and sinker into admitting their guilt and need for forgiveness, so our Jewish people would come to acknowledge what David's Greater Son accomplished, even when He was despised and forsaken.

Sermon: **Its the End of the year Again**

On Friday December 23rd 2016, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 2334 declaring all Jewish settlements in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem illegal and calling upon Israel to relinquish all land it has taken control of since 1967. Included in this is a call to return the Golan Heights to Syria. France will also be hosting a conference in Paris on January 15, 2017, where 70 nations are invited to discuss peace in the Middle East with the understanding that it would promote a two state solution.

There is a lot of anxiety in Israel that this may be a last ditch attempt by outgoing President Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry to force a two state solution on Israel before President elect Donald Trump is inaugurated on January 20th and changes American policy towards Israel.

I believe that we should still pray for the peace of Jerusalem and not join the crowds of those who would join with Chicken Little and proclaim that the sky is falling as the enemies of Israel once again line up for her destruction.

Now I am aware that with all the nuclear weapons this world still possesses, that daily we live on the edge of destruction as we see global spiritual darkness spreading out across our globe as relentlessly as it did in the days of Noah. I recently watched a documentary on the life and legacy of Fidel Castro and it was reported that he wanted to station Russian missiles in his country so that a pre-emptive nuclear strike could be launched against the US from his shores. It did not happen and the world moved away from the immanent threat of nuclear war, but this threat is still there as long as the missiles exist.

Nonetheless, we need to be careful not to fall into the trap of declaring every major world event as a sign of the end of the world and as a fulfilment of various biblical prophecies which we take out of their original context and reapply them to various modern events.

I am glad that we are about to enter 2017 and that we are one year closer to the coming kingdom,

but since evangelicals have been crying wolf about the end of the world since the mid 1800's, our belief in the end of the age is no longer taken very seriously because events did not turn out the way they were supposedly predicted. Instead of learning from this mistake, every time there is a major world crisis, there are those who race back to the drawing board and say that this time they have got it right.

At the end of another year where the faithfulness of G-d continues to show mercy and patience with the carnal, criminal folly of sinners across the globe, I would like to use my teaching on prophecy to make at least three statements this morning as we prepare to observe the L-rd's table on this the first Sabbath of the Hebrew month of Tevet.

First of all, let me say that I believe more firmly in the coming Kingdom than I do in the rising and setting of the sun each day. We are truly getting closer to the end of the world and I can hardly wait to cast off this earthly tabernacle of flesh and be clothed with life everlasting. But instead of getting a kink in my neck staring at the sky and looking for signs of His return, I want to be studying His Word so that my lamp is full of oil when He comes knocking.

In the 1800's a system of Bible interpretation called dispensationalism was formulated which said that because 2 Peter 3:8 said that a day with the L-rd is like a thousand years, and since there are seven days in the creation story in Genesis, that there are seven thousand years from the creation of the world until the New Heavens and the New Earth.

This system teaches that at the end of six thousand years, a literal thousand year reign will be established on the earth, preceded by a seven year tribulation period, from which believers will be excluded, either before, during or at the end of this time of great trials.

They take the passage in I Thess. where it says that the living will be raptured from their bodies after the dead have resurrected, so that we might meet the L-rd in the skies and be forever with Him. Various attempts have been made to identify the Beast who was to be wounded and healed and who stands in opposition to the Lamb who died and was resurrected.

Dispensationalism attempts to put human history into neat little packages and has been proclaiming for nearly 200 years that the rapture could happen at any second because all the events of our confusing world are a fulfilment of prophecy and many go as far as to set a date for this event. And when they are proven wrong, they go back to the drawing board and juggle more verses to come up with a new date, which is always just around the corner.

Believers tune in to teachings on prophecy and many are taken in by the juggling of Bible verses, where a little is trimmed here and a little is tucked there to show that this time they have finally got it right.

Let me just say that this system is the weakest link in evangelical theology and there are two broad fallacies which fuel the ongoing folly which turns prophecy into a guessing game and which dangles like a carrot in front of believers who should be filling their lamps with oil and not twisting the Scriptures into a comedy of errors which makes people not take us seriously when we talk about the coming kingdom.

Here they are: distinguishing between the literal and the literary and not applying prophecies out of their original context. I give a longer discussion of this in my brochure on prophecy, but

unless we quit taking something literally which is meant literarily (symbolically), we will keep running around in circles seeing cloak and danger plots in every global crisis instead of focusing on the coming King.

As well prophecies which were given to Israel were always conditional and dealt with various situations Israel was struggling with and many of them were not fulfilled because the conditions were not fulfilled. Many of them have an end of the world element because Israel's final redemption and the final redemption of the nations will only be accomplished in the Kingdom at the end of the world. But we cannot take a prophecy which was given to Israel and apply it to our situation, because that is not the point of prophecy.

Prophecy says that we will both be delivered from current tribulations through which we may all too frequently wander and we will also be finally delivered with all the generations and nations of mankind at the end of the age. Trying to say that prophecy has a double application or a second fulfilment is not something which the Scriptures teach.

As well we are not given all the pieces of a puzzle which we must piece together until we finally get it – all the pieces of the puzzle are fulfilled in our Blessed Messiah, including the secret things which belong to G-d and the mysteries which will not be revealed until this age is over.

Well, where does that leave us and how can we recognize the end of the age so that we can be prepared for it and not taken by surprise. Luther gives us the beginning of an answer when he said that believers should live everyday as if the L-rd were crucified yesterday, risen today and returning tomorrow. Being prepared is not about figuring out a specific date, but living for the Kingdom and its righteousness every day and in every decision we make.

Here is a Jewish proverb, before Take you to my conclusion and speak about the sings of the end of the world according to the Bible. It is not so important that you recognize the Messiah when He comes, it is more important that He recognizes you. All of G-d's purposes have to be fulfilled and the kingdom will not come until then. Is there enough oil in your lamp so He will recognize you and are you listening to His voice in His Word, so that you recognize His voice at His return.

There is lots more which can be said. I do not subscribe to dispensationalism because nowhere does the Bible teach that human history will unfold over a seven thousand year period. One thousand years is a symbol of G-d's merciful love to those who keep His Word an it extends from the time when He blew breath into our first ancestors and will continue until the last babe is conceived and all His purposes are fulfilled.

Rapture is to the living what resurrection is to the dead and it is through much tribulation that we enter the Kingdom. Things are heating up for the end, but I will not fall into the trap of trying to figure out a date because His kingdom when He is good and ready and not before.

Let me finish with the seven signs which I believe the Bible teaches must all be in play before the end comes – everything which happens until they are all fulfilled is nothing more than birth pangs and the groaning of creation because G-d's Kingdom will never jump the gun and neither should we. Here they are:

Before the L-rd returns we will see:

1. Worldwide Hatred of the Jewish people by all nations (Matt. 24:9)
(its coming)
2. Worldwide Iniquity (Matt. 24:12), part of which will be
(its growing)
3. Worldwide Apostasy, as in the Days of Noah (Matt. 24:37 & 2 Th. 2:3)
(its evolving)
4. Worldwide sharing of the Gospel (Matt. 24:14)
(its happening)
5. A worldwide antichrist (2 Thess. 2:5-12, called the Beast in Revelation)
(he has not yet been revealed)
6. Jerusalem must no longer be trodden underfoot of the nations (Luke 21:24)
(this happened in 1967)
7. All Israel must be re-grafted into the holy Olive Tree (Rom. 11:25, 26)
(pray, share, support, because this is also happening)

You will always be wrong if you set dates because the Kingdom is coming according to G-d's agenda and not ours. His kingdom is coming. Treat biblical prophecy with respect and wisdom. Learn to recognize the signs of His coming and whatever happens in Paris on January 15th and whatever resolutions the UN Security Council passes, at the end of 2016 let us put our faith in the King who will bring about His eternal reign and not run around trying to second guess. Let's live by faith and obedience. Nothing more, nothing less. Let's pray.