

Vayishlach **And He Sent** **We Are Not Home Yet**

Torah: Genesis 32:3(4)

Haftarah: Obadiah 1:1-21

Brit Chadashah: Hebrews 11:11-20

Reading : Mike p. 27 and Psalm 140. Jewish Hero: Josiah. Torah Carrier: Betty

In this Torah portion we see Jacob twice receiving his new name: Israel, once before his encounter with Esau and again after the kidnapping of Dinah. In the past it was the beauty of the wives of Abraham and Isaac which caught the attention of the pagans, in this portion it is Jacob's daughter who is taken and she is compromised. His sons exact a terrible vengeance on the inhabitants of Shechem and the camp cleanses itself of all its idols.

Even though Jacob has tangible proof of the great blessings of G-d which he has experienced, he is afraid that his brother Esau will attack him and he will lose everything and everybody he has brought back with him from Charan. He sends a rich appeasement offering to Esau, divides his camp and sends it to safety across the ford of the Jabbok river. He spends the night alone, wrestling with the angel of G-d.

He receives a confirmation of G-d's blessing and receives his new name "Israel" for the first time. In Hebrew, the word Jabbok means to empty out and it is during the night that Jacob finally surrenders his fears to G-d. He is still not sure what kind of reception he will receive from his brother, but he is more at peace because he knows he is where he should be, doing what he should be doing. He comes to understand that merely receiving the covenant blessing is no guarantee that he will not have to face many struggles, but he has to embrace both of these as gifts from G-d.

I find it hard to embrace the difficulties I have encountered in my life as gifts from G-d and in a way I am still wrestling with G-d over some of them. May the L-rd grant us all the wisdom of Jabbok, as we learn to surrender our selves and our lives to G-d, along with all the hopes and fears that we have to wade through on our way home to His house in glory.

Jacob and Esau are reconciled and Israel faces the first of two attempts to get the people to assimilate and not remain a separate, unique people. The first comes when Esau invites Jacob to join their camps together. From the text it is evident that Esau had the bigger camp and he is offering his little brother the safety and security that joining forces with him would bring. Jacob resists the offer, but agrees to meet with his brother at his camp on Mount Seir to the south of the Promised Land.

Jacob then moves deeper into Canaan and comes to the city of Shechem, which lies between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. While he is there, his daughter is abducted and the second attempt is made to have the camp assimilate and not remain a distinct group. Simeon and Levi head up a ruse to get all the men of the city to go through circumcision possibly as a sign the inhabitants of Shechem were joining Israel and not the other way around.

While the men were in pain on the third day, they are all killed and the city is plundered and Jacob moves on to Bethel, where he receives the second confirmation of his new name. He has everyone in the camp surrender their pagan idols and he buries them at the place where the inhabitants of Sichem were slaughtered.

His eldest son treats one of his concubines, Bilha, as a prostitute, but no vengeance is taken on him for committing an act worse than what was done by the prince of Shechem. Jacob may have been distracted by the birth of his youngest son and by the death of his favorite wife. The final count of the tribes is given and a time lapse occurs so we can have the final chapter of the story of Jacob and Esau.

They gather together to bury their father, who died at the age of 180. It was three years after Joseph was sold into slavery and nine years before Israel left for Egypt. The portion ends with the recital of all the significant descendants of Esau from an historical perspective, after it has been decided that their two camps were too big to remain in the same region and Esau moves out of Canaan and back towards the mountains of Seir.

The descendants of Esau are mentioned in their generations to show that since he was also a descendant of Abraham and Isaac, he would also become a great nation. There is no hostility between the two groups for many generations and after the Jews were taken captive to Babylon, the Edomites moved into southern Judah. History records that during the time of the Maccabees, the Edomites (idumeans) were forcibly converted to Judaism, so eventually the children of Esau were eventually joined up with the Children of Jacob.

In our portion today, we see Jacob moving around a lot in the land which his descendants would one day inherit, but even then, believers understand that until the kingdom comes, we are not home yet, not even in the Holy Land.

It was always intended to be our place of sojourn, from which our light was to shine as a beacon to the nations, in order to bring them to the light. We are still on a generational journey to the kingdom and no matter how good or how bad our lives are, we can take comfort in the fact that we are not home yet until all His promises are fulfilled.

In the Haftarah portion we are given a series of curses upon Edom for rejoicing in one of the 29 times Jerusalem was raided, burned and sacked. We should never rejoice over the misfortune of anyone, even if they richly deserve their fate because one day, the Jewish people will return to the King and lead the final outreach before the kingdom comes.

The New Testament portion describes the patriarchs and their wives as sojourners who embraced the promises when they saw them from a great distance, knowing full well that they would not see them be fulfilled in their life time. They believed in them just as surely as if they had them in hand and it is because of this tangible faith, that G-d was not ashamed to be called their G-d.

When we walk with G-d in faith and obedience, making any necessary adjustments to the spiritual course we are following, He will also not be ashamed to be called our G-d. Should He be ashamed to called your G-d? Our G-d? When we walk knowing that we are not home yet, just as much certainty as if we were already home, then G-d is not ashamed to be called our G-d. Shavua tov and may we never give G-d any cause to be ashamed to be called our G-d.

Sermon: The Sky is Falling: Jerusalem No Longer Trodden Underfoot of the Gentiles.

Passage: ***“They shall fall by the edge of the sword and they shall be taken captive among all the nations and Jerusalem shall be trodden under foot of the nations until the times of the nations are fulfilled.”*** (Luke 21:24)

We are coming near to the end of my series about the seven biblical signs of the return of the L-rd and of the end of the world and I would like to remind you of one of the central themes of this inescapable eventuality- it will not happen until all seven signs are occurring at once. Until this occurs we should not let anybody deceive us into thinking that it could happen at any second, because we cannot live our lives on red alert. I do not want any of us to succumb to kingdom fatigue, where we have been waiting so long for the return to occur at any second, that we effectively give up hope and start wandering away from our kingdom consciousness.

I have frequently said that I believe more in the coming of the kingdom than I do in the daily rising and the setting of the sun. The coming of the Kingdom is our blessed hope and will be the culmination of all the promises which G-d has given to His people, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. We need to live as if the kingdom were already here because that is where our true citizenship lies and it is the central and single objective of our hearts and lives.

When we study about the return, we are given many pieces of puzzle of history so that we can learn to recognize the signs when they happen. Our study should also show us that this glorious event will not occur according to anyone's agenda, but only according to G-d's. I believe that we are on the verge of seeing all things being fulfilled, but being on the verge still means that there are things which need to happen which have not yet occurred.

This brings us to our study about Jerusalem no longer being trodden under foot of the Gentiles, once the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. Now when our Messiah spoke these words, the place of Judaism in the world was very different to what it is today. After the return from exile and some very bumpy ups and downs, first century Judaism was the biggest and fastest growing religion in the ancient world.

Jewish scribes and preachers pointed out the folly and the bankruptcy of the classical pagan religions of Rome and Greece and of all the other polytheistic religions which were trying to fill the gap that was left as the Romans were abandoning their faith in greater and greater numbers. The Many of the great temples were beginning to stand empty and their owners had to resort to some sophisticated trickery to get people to attend. In one temple, two metal statues would move together and embrace when the command was given, but my favorite deception was far grander than that. You see when the priests began to resort to trickery to retain their followers, they were admitting to themselves that what they believed was a sham and had no real substance to it.

In one temple, a chariot would suddenly appear from the ceiling and fly across the temple and disappear at the other end of the ceiling. It was all down by the exotic use of pulleys and static electricity and while it impressed the people for a while, it was not enough to convince them for long. Tricks and gimmicks can only work for so long, if there is no substance behind them.

Judaism was spreading across the ancient world, with synagogues from Britain to China and they were moving south into the many parts of Africa. Three times a year, Jerusalem would go from a small city of about 165,000 inhabitants to a mighty metropolis of well over a million people. People would run inns for festival use and great stores of food were kept in reserve to

fill the hordes of people who would come to Jerusalem from the four corners of the ancient world. Outside of the Holy Land, converts would often make up three quarters of the congregation of many synagogues.

The temple was one of the biggest buildings in world of the first century and Judaism was making inroads into all levels of Roman society, all the way up to the household of the Caesars. Moses was being preached in nearly every city and it looked like nothing could stand in the way of Judaism becoming the main religion of the Ancient World.

When the Lord said that no stone of the temple would stand where it now stood it was almost an entirely unbelievable scenario to imagine. It is true that Jerusalem has fallen some 29 times in its long history, but ever since it became a Jewish city, no one could imagine it being trodden underfoot of the nations until their time was fulfilled. The nations were being converted in their thousands and Jerusalem had its largest population to date and was as prosperous as it had ever been.

There were always rumblings of wars and calamities, but no one considered the possibility that Jerusalem as a Jewish city would be overthrown and become Gentile for an extended period of time. When the Sanhedrin petitioned Rome to depose the evil Archelaus, who was as evil as his father, Herod, the Jewish nation made a pact with the Roman administration.

If they would be made into a Roman province, they would declare the emperor to be their sovereign overlord, promising never to rebel and they also agreed to pray for the emperor once a day and twice on the Sabbath. This was not always a very popular decision among the people and uprisings were not an uncommon thing, but none of them seriously upset the status quo, let alone lead to the overthrow of a Jewish Jerusalem. The series of events which led up to this tragedy were set in place shortly after death, resurrection and ascension of our beloved Messiah.

The Romans appointed a governor over Judea who hated the Jews and his constant goading led to the massive rebellion which lasted from 67-70 of the common era. Josephus goes into great graphic detail about the horrors our people experienced during the fighting and once the walls were finally breached, the temple was doomed. As it burned, the gold from the upper decorations melted and settled among the stones of what was once such a magnificent building.

In order to get at this gold, the Romans were obliged to remove every single stone which once formed part of the temple until they were all removed. After the great rebellion which occurred from 132-136 of the common era, the city's name was changed to Aelia Capitolina and Jews were forbidden to enter. After this conflict, so many Jews were sold into slavery that the price of a Jewish slave dropped to the same amount of money needed to purchase a horse's daily ration of oats.

Judaism was persecuted and they went from a significant, growing minority to a tiny minority, scattered among the nations of the ancient world. This state of affairs did not change for many centuries and even though Jewish people were always drawn to their holy city, it was never again under their control until after the Six Day War. Over the years, Jews were allowed to visit and even allowed to live there, but it never again became a Jewish city until modern times.

Towards the end of the Middle Ages, the final horror occurred and a pagan mosque was erected on the site where the Holy Temple once stood. In 1948, when Israel became a state again for

the first time since the early Roman era, Jerusalem remained under Arab control and it took two more wars to dislodge them, and in 1967, Jerusalem was once again a Jewish city. The term trodden underfoot meant that Jerusalem would become a Gentile city and that nothing would remain of its once glorious temple.

Now that it is Jewish again, there are some who feel that the temple will be rebuilt and I have a couple of things to say about this before we discuss the prophetic significance of Modern Israel and bring our service to a close.

One of the names of the modern state of Israel is: “the Third Temple” and the government has set up a temple menorah in front of the Knesset. The government has no intention of rebuilding the temple and the temple mount remains a Muslim holy site. None the less, every year, orthodox Jews collect golden temple shekels and they are being stored in the main Ashkenazi synagogue in Jerusalem. They even have a brinks truck, operated by kohanim (priestly descendants of Aaron) which gathers the donations, both from the orthodox in Israel and that which is sent to Israel by orthodox communities from around the world.

Nowhere in His prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem does our L-rd mention the rebuilding of the temple and while I would be glad to see this happen, it is not one of the seven signs which have to be fulfilled before our Messiah returns. Paul clarifies this by saying that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit and the only temple we are encouraged to wait for, is the Heavenly one which will descend when our Messiah returns.

Jerusalem has had a very violent history, both before and after it became the capital of Israel, but it became Jewish once again during the Six Day War. It is no longer being trodden underfoot by the nations and this means that the second part of the prophecy has also been fulfilled. The time of the Nations is over and it is time for Israel to turn back to her Messiah and fully embrace the only Saviour she will ever know.

This does not mean that we should stop reaching out to the nations and it does not mean that Gospel no longer belongs to the nations – it just means that the long, sad exile of the Jewish people from the Holy Land is drawing to an end. We are closer to the return than at any other time in our long history, but we have to see the influx of Jewish people back into the Gospel before this glorious event occurs.

My heart sings when I think of Jerusalem as a thriving Jewish city and we need to start looking up because our redemption is drawing near. Something which many thought was impossible has occurred and a restored Jerusalem is a mighty magnet which is drawing Jewish people back to the Promised Land. And the influx has not stopped, as waves of Jews from all over the world are making their way home to the Promised Land.

It may seem like a contradiction, but at the same time as this joyful return is happening, the worldwide hatred of the Jews is also growing in momentum. And while the worldwide sharing of the Gospel is bringing untold millions to faith, worldwide apostasy and worldwide iniquity are also on the rise globally. We have not yet seen the advent of the final antichrist, but conditions are ripening for this horrible event to occur. We have seen Jerusalem again become a Jewish city and we are starting to see more and more Jewish people come to faith in our beloved Messiah.

Over the centuries there have been times when large groups of Jewish people accepted the

Gospel and there have also been times when Christian people have turned to Judaism, but this back and forth cross pollination will have one final push before the end comes.

Many interesting books have been written by very learned and gifted scholars which have suggested many compelling scenarios about the events which need to occur before the return of the L-rd brings about the end of the world. But there is only one book which tells the complete and full story about the end of the world – the Bible. As surely as our Messiah came in the flesh and died on the cross and rose and ascended into Heaven, He will one day return as He promised.

The Bible does not indicate that He will come in a gradual series of events, like a seven year tribulation and a literal one thousand year millennium. The Bible proclaims that He will come, suddenly, as a thief in the night and that at the same time that this occurs, the heavens will melt and explode with great noise and the entire universe will dissolve back into the chaos from which it was formed. After this has occurred, we will all stand before the King of Glory and the contents of our hearts will be fully revealed before we are ushered back into the garden from which our first ancestors were excluded so long ago.

We are not given much extensive detail about the events which will occur in the lead up to our Messiah's return, but we are given three things and I will close with them. First we are promised that He will return and bring our world and the entire cosmos to an end. G-d never does things in half measures and His promises are more sure than anything else in our world and authentic faith in Him requires that we also believe in the coming end of the world. It is both promised and it is inevitable, whether we choose to believe it or not. It is as much an objective reality as the rest of the cosmos, which it will bring to an end.

Secondly we are told what signs to look for before this blessed event finally happens. In my series, I have outlined seven specific signs and these are what we need to look for as we wait for the end to occur. It is an all or nothing occurrence and I cannot specify strongly enough that all seven signs have to be happening together before the return of our Messiah. We need to avoid jumping the gun and not be deceived when people tell us that the end of the world is coming before we see these signs fulfilled.

While we may not always understand the rationale behind everything in G-d's agenda, we have to acknowledge that just as everything is under His ultimate control, so are the events which must be set in motion before the return materializes. Any pictures which we come up with which are not painted with these seven signs will give us a flawed understanding of the hope we have in our Messiah's return.

Finally, we have to live each day for the kingdom which is coming because it is the only final reality in this crazy mixed up world we are travelling through. If we ever stop considering ourselves strangers and pilgrims travelling towards the kingdom which our faith makes us citizens of we have missed the whole point of our faith.

It is true that He came into the world to die on the cross for sins of mankind. It is true He rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven. But it is also true that one day He will return and all our trials and temporary joys will be over and we shall see Him as He is. By His Spirit we can see Him as He is in this life and this contemplation of who He is will transform us into the image of the one new man who lives each day for the coming of the Kingdom.

Today we talked about one of the most compelling signs of His return, the Holy City is Jewish again and events are leading up to the event which will free us from our earthly pilgrimage and grant us entrance into the eternal state. Being Kingdom conscious is our calling. Seeking first His Kingdom and His righteousness daily is our only earthly mandate. Our true citizenship is in the coming kingdom of which we are called to be ambassadors.

How is your kingdom consciousness doing? Are you letting Him turn you into an effective ambassador? The end times began when He ascended in the heavens and will end when He returns. All that matters in the interim period is that we have faith in His return according to His Word and that we walk worthy of our calling as we wait for the new world which is coming.

Jerusalem is no longer trodden under foot by the nations and our Messiah wants to make sure that neither our hearts nor our lives are trodden underfoot by this world. Shabbat shalom and have a good week (Shavua Tov).