

Vayeshev

And He Settled

Walking the Bumpy Road

Torah: Genesis 37:1-40:23

Haftarah: Amos 2:6-3:8

Brit Chadashah: Matthew 1:1-6;16-25

Reading: Art pp. 31,33 and Psalm 112. Jewish hero: Zadok. Torah Carrier: Margaret

Our Torah portion this morning deals with three traumatic events in the life of the House of Jacob. It begins with Joseph's jealous brothers binding him and selling into slavery – a dubious action which actually saved his life and provided Israel with a safe haven as the tribes grew into a mighty nation. During this time, we have the sad story of Judah's false dealing with his virtuous daughter-in-law, Tamar. And while this is happening, we are given a summary of Joseph's initial trials as he is again betrayed and wrongly imprisoned in Egypt and then forgotten by the people he helped. Even while this is going on, the blessing of G-d haunts his footsteps and everything he undertakes prospers in spite of his troubles.

The first verse I want to deal with is 37:20: **Come now let us kill him and throw him into one of the cisterns; we shall say that a wild beast devoured him and we shall see what shall become of his dreams.**

There will always be opposition to the promises of G-d and though people can move against His Word, none of the plots formed against His Word and His promises shall succeed. He will even use our setbacks and problems to foster the fulfillment of His Word and as long as we remain faithful to His Word, even if we are mistreated and even die in His service, both His Word and His promises shall prevail.

The second verse I want to deal with is 37:27: **Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and let us not put our hands upon him, for he is our brother, our flesh.**

Sometimes we will be intensely angry with each other and just as full of rage and jealousy as Joseph's brothers were, but we should never allow it to intensify into a hatred where we do each other actual harm. Judah unwittingly performed an act of saving mercy because a part of him could not bring him to actually harm his little brother. May we also allow our better selves to deliver us from our lower selves and not cause each other actual harm and damage. Even when we intensely annoy each other, we remain family and should always wish each other good and never evil.

The third verse I want to deal with is 38:26: **Judah recognized them and said: she is less guilty than me, for I did not give her to my son Schela. And he did not know her again.**

Judah may have been a real putz at times and he made some bad decisions, but he always owned up to his sins and repented. By the custom of the day, he should have allowed his youngest son to perform the levirate obligation he had to his deceased brother and provide him with an heir, after which he would not continue to sleep with the widow.

In a real sense, he would be conceiving the heir to older brother's rights and privileges and Tamar set things in motion so that her father in law performed the right his youngest son should

have performed. The verse records, that according to custom, Judah never slept with her again and the twins she bore became the heirs to his oldest son.

The last verse I want to deal with from the Torah portion is 40:23: **The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.**

Walking with the L-rd can be a bumpy road when those we do good to abandon us, betray us and do us all kinds of harm because it is not them who should have our best interests at heart. If we continue to trust in the L-rd, He will never forget us – He will never leave us nor forsake us and He will always be our Good Shepherd whose goodness and mercy will always follow us all the days of our lives. This is worth so much more than any fickle human favour which may wander through our lives. How good are you at trusting in the L-rd?

The Haftarah portion (**Amos 2:6-3:8**) reflects some of the trials of Joseph who was sold into slavery and boldly declares that despite whatever circumstances we find ourselves in, it is the L-rd who is in final control. And we need to serve the L-rd and declare His Word, even if what we say is not well received. We serve the L-rd according to His Word and even when people are not faithful to us, our mandate remains to continue to be faithful to the L-rd, both when things are working out for us and when things are not working out for us. Walking the bumpy road with the L-rd is better than not walking with the L-rd, except when things are going our way.

The New Testament portion (**Matt. 1:1-6; 16-25**) gives the genealogy of Joseph and mentions the four Gentile woman who are ancestors of our Messiah and records the angelic visitation which instructs Joseph to marry Mary, even though the child she is carrying is not his. Luke's genealogy is Mary's. While Joseph descends from Solomon's line, Mary descends from Nathan's line and Joseph heeds the words of the angel and realizes that Marie' first child is to be the Messiah all Israel has been waiting for. His arrival was according to both the power and the timing of G-d. We need to let our lives revolve around both of these even if it means that the road we walk is bumpy. When we do, G-d will bless us and lift us out of our difficulties because His blessing always follows those who walk with Him whatever betides.

Sermon: The Sky is Falling: Then Shall All Israel Be Saved

Passage: “For I would not, brethren, that you be ignorant of this mystery, so that you would not consider yourselves to be wise (smart alecks); a portion of Israel has fallen into hardness (petrification), until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. Then shall all Israel be saved, according as it is written: The liberator shall come to Zion and he shall turn Jacob away from his sins” (Romans 11:25, 26)

As we see the seven signs of the return of the L-rd moving into position, we can begin to rejoice that our Messiah and Saviour will always be faithful to His Word and will always fulfil His promises, both to Israel and to the nations.

Let me remind you that the Bible warns us about being deceived and in our passage Paul wades in and warns us not to become wise guys, who think they have everything figured out when we are only speculating and making wild guesses. We need to see Bible prophecy as the clockwork of G-d and Israel as the time piece of G-d. Look at Israel to find out what time it

is with G-d.

The blessed end of the world and the glorious return of our mighty Saviour cannot happen until G-d has done all that He promised to do with His chosen people. Over the centuries we have seen that Abraham did indeed become a great nation – there has never been a greater one in the whole confusing, convoluted history of this planet. Through the nation of Israel and especially through our beloved Messiah, Abraham has indeed been a generational blessing to all nations. However neither the time of the Gentiles is over, nor have the full number of the Gentiles come into the faith.

You have often heard me refer to the elect of G-d as that light seeking righteous core which continues to exist generationally both in Israel and among the nations and we know that from the time of Adam and Eve, there has also been a generational struggle between the forces of light and power of darkness. We have already seen the power of darkness sweep over our world in the days of Noah and completely fill it up with darkness. It is happening again.

We realize that the righteous cores of the nations are shrinking and that worldwide iniquity and apostasy are gaining momentum as they have never done since the violence which preceded the days of Noah. Our world is poised and capable of being taken over by the final antichrist and his manifestation may not be long in coming. Israel has been reestablished and Jerusalem is no longer trodden underfoot of the Gentiles.

Our seventh sign is actually a double sign because the judicial hardening of Israel in response to their failure to recognize the first coming of the Messiah of promise will come to an end once the full number of the redeemed of the righteous core among the nations have entered the faith and then all Israel shall be saved. There are at least three concepts we have to deal with in our final discussion of the seven signs of the end of the world. The first one we need to deal with is the judicial hardening or petrification of a portion of Israel. The next is when do we know that the totality of the Gentiles have entered the faith and the last one we have to deal with is what does it mean that all Israel shall be saved?

In the case of Pharaoh, the biblical account sometimes says that he hardened his own heart and at other times it says that G-d had hardened Pharaoh's heart. This is an indication of a judicial hardening or petrification (figuratively turned to stone), where G-d responds to Pharaoh's stubbornness by allowing his heart to harden.

In the case of Israel, many of the scribes and Pharisees who were the spiritual leaders of the nation in the first century, were convinced that they had G-d figured out and that He would act according to their understanding and according to their agenda. They did not so much feel that they belonged to G-d as they did that He belonged to them, as a personal possession over which they exercised a considerable control.

Talmudic tradition was already taking root in the psyche of the people and they were more concerned with discussing the supposedly hidden meanings of obscure scriptural passages than they were with taking the Bible at its face value ordinary meaning and putting it into practice. Yeshua described them as straining out a gnat and then swallowing a camel. They were careful to follow the minute details of the Law, but ignored the weightier issues of righteousness, mercy and faithfulness (Matt. 23:23, 24).

Yeshua quoted the prophet Isaiah when He said that the people honoured G-d with their lips, but their heart was far from Him and that they honoured Him in vain, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men (Matt. 15:8,9). Whenever we think we have the Bible figured out, but do not live according to its core teachings we are actually hardening our hearts and becoming incapable of hearing what it really has to say. Whenever our focus becomes the traditions which have sprung up around what the Bible says instead of the core of what the Bible says, we are also hardening our hearts.

It is when this happens that we experience a judicial hardening or petrification of our hearts and move away from what G-d is really saying and what He is really doing. Sadly, our people went from the biggest and fastest growing religion of the ancient world to a small, persecuted minority which was being chased from one country to another, especially once the temple was destroyed and they were dispossessed of the Holy Land.

It is true that wherever they roamed, they blessed the nations among whom they dwelt, but these occasional periods of peace and stability were always followed with great trials and tribulations as they wandered through what has been called a great valley of tears. It is also amazing that while many converted out of Judaism, both from personal conviction and to escape the incessant persecution, many of the people among they dwelt also converted into Judaism until Jews from around the world eventually looked identical to the peoples among they dwelt, adopting many of their customs and languages in the process.

Today we are seeing a growing interest in Yeshua among our Jewish people and with the reestablishment of the Jewish state of Israel the wandering years of the House of Jacob is coming to an end. The first Jewish disciples of our Messiah were given the mandate to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth and to make disciples among all the nations of the earth and to teach them to observe all the things which our Saviour commanded. This has been being carried out with varying degrees of success and with some major set backs, like the rise of Islam in the former heartland of our faith and the rise of the various factions that the Christian faith has been split into. And this also includes the various cults and heretical groups that have also risen up over the centuries

Right up until the last century of the old millennium, there were still major unreached people groups and significant regions of the world where the Gospel had not penetrated. It was said of the 1900's that wherever you travelled in the world, you would find two things, a coke machine and a missionary. It could not be said that the time of the Gentiles was completed until there was no people group in our planet which remained untouched and which had not heard the Gospel. So the second part of our discussion states that the full number of the Gentiles will come into the Gospel at the same time as the judicial hardening of the House of Jacob begins to thaw.

This positive reality which we are seeing as a growing worldwide phenomenon is being sadly balanced with the rise of religious liberalism which is gutting many of the major traditional denominations and moving them away from any semblance of biblical faith. So the Gospel is both gaining ground on one front and losing ground on another front. So as long as there is a significant light seeking righteous core among the nations which is responding to the Gospel, the most we can say is that the time of the Gentiles is drawing to a close as the fullness of the Gentiles is also being reached on a worldwide scale.

So as the judicial hardening of the House of Jacob continues to melt and an interest in the person and the teachings of Yeshua rises among our people and as the fullness of the Gentiles is nearing its completion, our last consideration needs to be discussed. What does it mean that all Israel shall be saved?

We realize that there have been two major scatterings of our people among the nations and in each case our people dwindled from a mighty nation to a smaller remnant which eventually wandered back into the land. The first scattering (diaspora) lasted some seventy years and by the time of our Messiah's appearing, a few centuries later, the people had fully recovered and even exceeded the numbers they had reached before the captivity. Historians estimate that before the destruction of the second temple, Jewish people accounted for around 10% of the Roman world, as well as having other significant populations scatter all across the ancient world. This great number included both those born Jewish and the converts who joined our people from the nations among whom they dwelt.

The scattered remnants of the second diaspora did not really begin to recover their numbers until the early part of the 1800's when there was a sudden population explosion among the Eastern European or Ashkenazi Jewish communities which are estimated to have nearly tripled in size. This phenomenon was accompanied by a series of massive pogroms and by the beginning of the 1900's every major Jewish community in the world had a majority of expatriate eastern European Ashkenazim.

Much of this formerly fertile homeland of Yiddish speaking Jews in Eastern Europe, was destroyed by the Nazis during World War Two and with the recent exodus of millions of Jews from the former Soviet Union there are now two major Jewish population centres, in our world today. I am referring to the Jewish communities of greater New York and to the state of Israel, whose Jewish population recently became the largest in the world for the first time since the destruction of the second temple. For the first time in nearly two thousand years the Jewish population of the world is about the same as it was in the first century.

As we rejoice in this modern miracle, there are two opposite forces working on our people and one of them is broken down into various competing warring factions. For the first time in Jewish history, secular, non practising Jews outnumber those who regularly attend synagogue. They still proudly self identify as Jews and are interested in all things Jewish, from the revitalized modern Hebrew language to all aspects of Jewish culture including dance and music. There is still a token observance of major Jewish festivals, but this is more from cultural pride than from religious conviction.

Right alongside this modern rise of secular Judaism, there are various radical groups of orthodox Jews, competing with each other to win back converts from this non observant secular majority. One of the fastest growing groups which is reaching out to modern secular Jews is Messianic Judaism, which is even seeing converts from the various groups of the orthodox join its rank.

Historically, when the righteous core of Judaism shrank, it was this remnant which survived and returned from exile to rebuilt on the ruins of that which was destroyed. There are some radical theologians who wrongly suppose that at some time in history before the end of the world, all the Jews who have ever lived will come back to life and accept the Messiah and thus all Israel

will literally be saved.

There are even those among the Orthodox Jewish contingent who believe that because of the great spiritual virtue of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, all Jews, practising or not will be welcomed into the kingdom of David's greater Son. This is not the consistent testimony of the Scriptures and this is not what it means when Paul says that all Israel shall be saved.

In Romans 9, 10 and 11 Paul deals at length with the mystery of the Jewish people's reaction to the Gospel and he wants to avoid several extremes. He first contends that G-d has never rejected His people and will never replace them with a Gentile version of the one new man.

The Scriptures teach that there is only one natural olive tree and that the one new man will be made up of both Jews and Gentiles, who in this life will not cease to be Jews and Gentiles, even though they share a common citizenship with the saints in the Household of G-d, which is built on the foundation of both the prophets and the apostles in the Kingdom of our Messiah.

Those of the House of Jacob are still heirs to the promise and have not been rejected by G-d, but there is a reality which exists in Israel, just as it does among the nations of the earth. There is a righteous core in Israel, which means that not all those who are born of Israel are part of the Israel of G-d.

This righteous core is composed of light seekers who are being increasingly drawn to the light of our Messiah, from among our Jewish people, just as they are also being drawn to the Messiah from among the nations of the earth. Our Messiah is the whole point and focus of the Law which was given to Moses and the prophets and faith in Him and what He accomplished on the cross is the message which the Law was given to prepare us for.

When it says that all Israel shall be saved, it means that all members of the righteous core of the House of Israel will be set free from their generational judicial hardening and their zeal for the Law which does not recognize the true Messiah of promise, will be revitalized and transformed, when they come to faith in what the Scriptures have always taught about the identity and ministry of the Messiah of G-d. Because they have been raised with a knowledge of fact that there is only one true G-d and that He will one day set up His everlasting kingdom over all the nations and generations of mankind, Paul is trying to say that Israel has always had a more significant righteous core of light seekers than is usually found among the Gentile nations of the world.

I have often said that while not all Jews are good, all Jews know that being good is their calling and those who abandon this calling feel guilty for not fulfilling this mandate. Judaism has always stood for *tikkun olam* (the healing of the world) as they wait for the *olam haba* (the world which is to come). There is an enduring G-d consciousness in Judaism which drives Jewish people to strive to make a difference for truth and righteousness wherever they roam and to draw a clear distinction between darkness and light and good and evil. The core societal values of Judaism are derived both from the Scriptures and the traditions of the Talmud and as such, they have no substantial paganism to deal with before they come to faith.

The greater frequency of light seekers in the righteous core of Judaism does not lessen the love of G-d for the lost among the nations, nor the need for both Jews and Gentiles to repent and come to saving faith in the Messiah of promise. However, as in the case of the apostle

Paul, it is not always easy to recognize members of the righteous core because they might be fighting against the light and initially come across as enemies of G-d and His Messiah.

As well, sadly, there have been enemies of G-d among those who call themselves Christians, but who are really false brethren who do not bear the fruit of righteousness, though they claim to call upon the name of the L-rd and to work miracles in the name of the L-rd. But, on the day of judgment, when all mankind shall stand before G-d, He will declare that He never knew them or any others who dwelt in darkness and practised unrighteousness.

Simultaneously, as the fulness of the righteous core among the Gentiles come to saving faith, those who are part of the righteous core of Israel will also come to faith, so that all members of the righteous core of Israel will be saved. It has not happened, but it is happening and we need to be faithfully patient and confident that the hand of G-d will line up all the seven signs of His return in the fullness of His timing. As we wait for this blessed event, we need to shine as beacons to attract the light seekers, both among Israel and among the nations. This means walking in faith and obedience to His Word and not allowing any of the burgeoning paganism take root in our hearts and lives.

We remain torn between our desire to see the Kingdom be established over all the nations and generations of mankind, all the while not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to faith in our blessed Messiah of promise. We live in exciting times as we see the generational drama of the ages swiftly move towards its conclusion, but we still need to exercise both caution and wisdom so that we are not deceived and do not fall into the trap of adding to or taking away from what the Bible says about the return of the L-rd. He will always be faithful to His word, will you follow suit? Shabbat shalom, campers.