

Vayetzei **And He Went Out** **Sustaining G-d's Blessing**

Torah: Genesis 28:10-32:2 (3)

Haftarah: Hosea 11:7-14:9 (10)

Brit Chadashah: John 1:19-51

Reading Marie, p. 177, Psalm 3. Jewish Hero Elizabeth (Yochanan's mother) Carrier: Donna

In this week's Torah portion, we see Jacob married to four women and fathering at least 12 children (11 boys and one girl). He also becomes extremely rich and he also enriches his father-in-law, but sees some tensions develop as his in-laws become jealous of his success. He has followed in the footsteps of his grandfather, Abraham, and of his father, Isaac, since like them, despite the great opposition they encountered, they became wealthy.

It is in Jacob that we see the foundations laid for Israel to become the great nation of promise, as she blesses those who bless her along the way. Jacob's breeding methods are a little confusing but they represent a means of overcoming the trickery of Laban, who has no real intention of letting Jacob and his family leave, because he sees him as a sort of "goose who laid the golden egg".

Jacob makes sure that when the vigorous sheep come in heat, they are sired by vigorous spotted and striped rams and that the less healthy ones are sired by white rams. This does not mean that he was present when all the siring occurred, but that by this technique, he was able to develop a substantial herd of striped and spotted sheep.

When he was ready to leave, he got a revelation from G-d to return home to Canaan and his wives and family agree with this decision. He had put a separation of three days between his flocks and those of Laban and so by the time Laban heard of his flight, Jacob had a six day head start. His camp made it to the mountain of Gilead before Laban and his men catch up with him.

Laban has been warned by G-d not to offer to harm Jacob in any way and the only concern he wants to deal with is the theft of his household gods (teraphim). This is surprising and troubling for me, not just because Laban is obviously a polytheist (idolater), but also because Rachel stole them. While Laban obviously acknowledged and feared (respected) G-d, he was not a true monotheist. It is not good enough to believe that our G-d is the best G-d, we are required to arrive at the understanding that He is the only G-d and that all the rest are fakes or demons.

Rachel's participation in her father's polytheism (idolatry) is not surprising and we can be glad because later on, she and the whole camp abandon idolatry so as not to bring back any spiritual infections from their time in Charan. It is one thing to be blessed of G-d, but it is quite another to sustain the blessing of G-d. The household of Jacob was mightily blessed in Charan, but in order to sustain this blessing, his whole camp had to make a clean break with all and any forms of paganism and idolatry. It was the failure to break all ties with idolatry (and fornication) which would trouble Israel and eventually lead to her captivity.

Laban called upon the G-d of Abraham and Nachor and of their father, Terah to judge between them and Jacob swore by the One whom Isaac feared. While the hand of G-d moved on all of

those mentioned, it was only those who separated themselves from pagan idolatry who sustained the blessing of G-d for themselves and their descendants.

Deliverance brings G-d's blessing into our lives, but it is only repentance and obedience which will sustain it, both for us and for our descendants. We need to make sure that we are not hoarding or holding on to any residual forms of paganism in our lives, because what G-d will allow from young believers or those who are new to the faith, He will not continue to allow in those who should be growing in both their faith and in their obedience.

Do you have any residual “Rachel corners” in your lives? Are there inappropriate, unbiblical leftovers in your heart and life? Have you allowed anything of the world to penetrate into your heart and life and bring back elements of the darkness from which you were delivered? May how we lead our lives as individuals and as a community result in sustaining the blessing of G-d as we do regular triages in our hearts and lives, where we recognize and jettison all and any traces of darkness that may still be lingering where it does not belong.

The Haftarah portion is a summary of some of the causes of the Babylonian captivity and warrants a careful study so that we do not follow suit and slip into the paganism which caused the downfall of Israel. Two verses provide a thematic summary of the content of this portion.

“And you, return to your G-d and retain holiness and righteousness and always hope in your G-d” (Hosea 12:7) and: ***“That which causes your ruin, Israel, is that you have been against Me, against the One who could have rescued you”*** (Hosea 13:9)

We have an obedience mandate which we are required to fulfil which is a non-negotiable prerequisite to sustaining the blessing of G-d. In other words, how we live our lives and how we respond to the happenstances of our lives will determine the direction of our lives, much more than any of the circumstances which come across our paths. There is nothing and no one who is greater than our G-d or that can stand in the way of His ability to bless us and to sustain this blessing. How is your non-negotiable prerequisite doing?

The New Testament portion deals with the testimony of Yochanan concerning the Messiah and records several of the first disciples as they come to realize that Yeshua is the promised Messiah. A lot of people feel that Elijah must come back to herald the return of Messiah. In this passage we are told that John fulfils this mandate and that those who investigate the claims of our Messiah will encounter Him and will learn to walk with Him.

All three portions outline our need to both discover the truth of the blessing which is in our Messiah and to sustain this blessing by embracing it with both faith and obedience. Nothing we encounter in our walk with the Messiah can overcome us as long as we walk with Him. We begin to self destruct whenever we allow lingering darkness or paganism into our hearts and lives. We want to sustain the blessing of G-d by purging our hearts and lives of the only thing which could cause our lives to shipwreck – paganism (idolatry). We can avoid a personal captivity by not allowing darkness to gain a foothold in our lives. What are you doing to sustain His blessing in your life?

The Sky is Falling, the Sky is Falling: The Advent of the Worldwide Antichrist

“Beloved do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from G-d, for many false prophets have come into the world. By this you shall know which is the Spirit

of G-d: every spirit who declares publicly that Yeshua HaMashiach has come in the flesh is of G-d. And every spirit which does not declare publicly for Yeshua is not of G-d. And this is the spirit of antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming and now it is already in the world.” (1 John 4:1-3)

If you want to get someone's attention, start a conversation about the identity of the antichrist and suddenly everyone is listening. In this series, I want to accomplish at least two things. First, I want to help you discover how to manoeuvre through all the material which claims to show you what the Bible really says about the events surrounding the return of our beloved Messiah. Our passage speaks of many false prophets who have come into the world with the sole purpose of undermining what the Bible actually teaches, especially in the area of the end of the world. After I have shown you how to avoid some of the pitfalls and rabbit trails that many well meaning people have come up with, my second objective is to help you come up with a biblical understanding of the events which must occur as this glorious event prepares to bring our world to its end.

When someone says that the Bible says something, go and look at the passages which they are referring to and see if they say what they are claimed to be saying (Acts 17:11). If what they are saying does not line up what the Bible says, we need to learn not to go beyond what is written (1 Cor. 4:6) and stay well within its teachings. This is not as easy as it sounds, but if we get into the habit of rightly dividing the Word of Truth (2 Timothy 2:15), we will not be drawn away by people's attempts to overthrow our only guide to faith and living (2 Corin. 2:17).

Our passage today mentions that the spirit of antichrist is both coming and is already active in the world today. Let me first affirm that I believe more strongly in the return of our L-rd and the end of the world, than I do in the rising and setting of sun. I do not want to teach against a firm belief in the return of the L-rd and of the end of the world, I just want to be sure that the basis for all we affirm is derived from the Bible.

The spirit of antichrist has been active in the world at least since the prophet Daniel identified this source of deception and this spirit has at least three goals. First it wants to overthrow what the Bible teaches and open the door for falsehoods. Second it wants to bring back the great darkness which once covered the world in the days of Noah. Lastly it wants to set up a final false messiah and cause the peoples of the earth to worship him and abandon their faith in the one true G-d and in His Messiah.

There have been many antichrists in our world and here is a working definition of the spirit of antichrist. The L-rd divided mankind in nations and cultures and families and the only one who has the right to dominate over the nations is the Prince of Peace who will reunite the lost children of Adam and Eve into the one new man. Any leader or any people who believe that they have the right to conquer and dominate over any other people or nation, that is the spirit of antichrist.

Historians talk about people movements, where established nations are overrun and replaced by various invaders and this movement of peoples to dominate, conquer or exterminate is the spirit of antichrist. This has happened over and over again at the cost of untold millions of lives until we have arrived at our modern situation where every square inch of our planet is occupied by stable people groups. This does not mean that genocide is a thing of the past, it just means that it cannot occur without the whole world being aware of it.

I could take time to mention some of the major antichrists in human history, but the latest series of antichrists built the colonial empires which shattered and replaced the indigenous peoples of North and South America (and Australia and New Zealand). As part of these attempts at world domination, two personalities stand out: Napoleon and Hitler top the list. Both nearly succeeded in overcoming all the other nations of the world and setting up a single government, but the time was not yet ripe for this tragic event to occur.

In a way, these were just practice runs at world domination and now that our world is so interconnected that world domination is possible, we are seeing the stage being set for the arrival of the final antichrist, but he will not just be a political leader.

Some people feel that believers will somehow be removed from danger as the final chapter of the return occurs, but this is not the consistent testimony of the Scriptures. I would rather not be around to see this demonic personality overcome and dominate the nations and the religions of the world, but I understand that no one and nothing can ever overthrow G-d's kingdom or the truth of His Word.

When the nations of the world gather together against Jerusalem and our Messiah's kingdom, I will lift up my eyes, not in fear, but in hope, because the coming of Messiah's Kingdom is more inevitable than death and taxes. There will be no uncertainty as to the identity of the final antichrist or of the final false prophet who will proclaim him with deceptive miracles and lying signs and wonders.

Instead of looking around and trying to pin this dubious honour upon world leaders who do not really fit the bill, we need to be certain of three things. First he will be a world leader who will overcome all other leaders, even more than the Romans, the Mongols and the Nazis, until there is no effective opposition to his rule.

Second of all, he will require worship and will delegitimize all and any religious believe that challenges his claim to be worshipped as G-d. So he will not only crush and conquer the world's political systems, he will do the same to all the religions of the world. Any opposition to him will be driven underground and every religious organization will also either be officially dismantled or effectively crushed.

He shall have a special hatred for Israel and the Jewish people, but he will not limit his hatred to G-d's people – he will aim his hatred to anyone and everyone among the nations who takes a stand for G-d and our Messiah and who refuses to worship the beast or his idol. I mention the beast, because this is another name for the final antichrist and gives us a key as to his identity. Our Messiah is the Lamb of G-d who died for the sins of the world.

The beast will be a false copy or parody of the Lamb and instead of dying for the sins of the world, he will receive a mortal injury from which he will miraculously recover. Do you remember the promise which the L-rd made to Eve? The snake will bruise the heel of the manchild, but will have his head crushed. This is a prophetic reference to the death and resurrection of the Messiah, but it also gives us a clue as to the deception of the beast. He will suffer a non redemptive, apparently fatal injury from which he will appear to recover as a false sign of the deity he will be wrongly claiming.

Lastly, the antichrist will have a great power of deception, unparalleled in human history and we have seen the stage being set for this overwhelming deception in the rise of evolution and evolutionary morality. Things like the call for inclusion versus exclusion in religion is just the beginning and we can expect a definite, well planned assault on our belief that G-d was manifest in the flesh when our Messiah came into the world.

The final assault will attack the truth of the incarnation, the life, death and resurrection of our Lord and may take special aim at His ascension, calling the whole thing a myth or an allegory which was put together just to tell a good story. This is already happening among liberal Christians and Jews and we can expect newer and more toxic versions of this attack to continue as the way is being prepared for the manifestation of the final antichrist.

Instead of getting caught up in the trap of setting dates and scenarios where prepared believers are somehow removed from the world as the final assault begins, we should focus on walking with the Messiah and making sure that none of the deceptions of this new age conspiracy are allowed to take root in our hearts and minds.

The spirit of empire is the spirit of antichrist and the stage is being set for the advent of the final antichrist who will rise up against all that is called G-d. If we fall into the habit of crying wolf and saying that any particular world leader is the beast, when we are proven wrong, our credibility will be gone and we will not be taken seriously, which may be part of the plan of our adversary.

If he can make believers appear ridiculous fear mongers who regularly falsely predict both the date for the end of the world and the identity of the beast, then we will not be taken seriously when we talk about our faith in the resurrected Messiah and in the advent of His coming kingdom – and especially when we warn the world when the beast finally shows up.

So how do we relate to this escalating conflict? You all know my favorite verse which says that the secret things belong to G-d and not to us. While we should never be slow to declare that we believe in the coming of the final antichrist and in his false prophet, we need to be sure that we do not jump the gun and make false identifications.

I do not know who the antichrist is and I do not know who his false prophet is. I will not spiritualize either of them to say that they are systems or nations or specific groups like evolutionists. I realize that what the Bible says about the final antichrist is true and binding on anything which I am willing to say about him.

I will affirm that the spirit of the antichrist is active in our world today and that there are still many practice antichrists who are vying for world domination. I will affirm that international morality is slipping towards the final darkness and that the days of Noah are upon us more and more with each passing year.

However, as I have shown you in my message, there is still enough uncertainty about the identity of this final adversary for me to say with great certainty that he has not yet been revealed and that this revelation is being held back because the time is not ripe yet.

Part of the resistance to this final foe is found among believers who believe in the Bible and are prepared to live according to its teachings. As more and more believers succumb to those who

would challenge what G-d's Word teaches, the door is being opened wider and wider for the arrival of our final adversary.

Let me give you two examples of this kind of deception as we bring our service to a close. The first is a weird teaching called theistic evolution, which tries to teach that the theory of evolution is compatible with the teachings of the Bible. A version of this lie is called Day-Age creationism which attempts to line up the six days of creation with the various ages which evolutionists have formulated. This is the official position of the Catholic church and I have heard various protagonists within a broad spectrum of faith groups also try and push this invasion of evolutionism upon believers.

The Bible teaches that Creation occurred as a single event, which I can show did not even take six days, but which occurred in a single moment. G-d built time into the fabric of the cosmos and the two creation accounts in Genesis One and Two indicate the truth of this position. The question is not how old the cosmos is, but that every particle in it is of the same age and it did not come into existence gradually over many ages.

The next challenge is the wider acceptance that monogamous homosexual marriage is getting. Any form of homosexuality is forbidden, whether or not it is practised in a long term faithful relationship. Trying to dress up immorality as acceptable moral behaviour is another attack on both our beliefs and on our morality.

This is just the beginning and if the enemy can infiltrate our ranks as he destroys our credibility with the world, then we need to see this as the stage being set for the revelation of the final antichrist. I have no problem with preaching this loud and clear, because this is what the Bible teaches. Engaging in serial speculations is not helpful and is a trap which the enemy is setting for us to confuse us and make the world not take us seriously.

I want to know what the final antichrist will look like and what he will do when he is manifested. Until this occurs, I want to study the Bible and walk with the L-rd so that I am alert, with my lamp filled with oil. As long as we are about the Master's business and are growing in the grace and knowledge of our blessed Messiah, then we will not fall for the final deception and be able to take a firm stand against the final beast, in the final conflict which will precede the arrival of our blessed King and Saviour. Let us not let him catch us sleeping or speculating or fighting and devouring. How ready are you? How ready are we?