

Vayechi **And He Lived** **The Last Patriarch**

Torah: Genesis 47:28-50:26

Haftarah: I Kings 2:1-12

Brit Chadashah: I Peter 1:1-9

Reading: Jo p. 159 & Ps. 41. **Jewish Hero:** Shem. **Carrier:** Alan Chazak, Chazak, V'nitcahzek

Jacob lived for 17 years in Egypt and just before he dies, he makes a formal request of Joseph. He has his son put his hand under his thigh (grab his privates) and makes him swear that after his death, he will be buried in the sepulcher with his fathers, Abraham and Isaac. Isaac died when Jacob and Esau were 120 years old. Isaac died 10 years before Jacob went to Egypt, so he was still alive when Joseph was sold into captivity.

Jacob feels no connection to the land of Egypt and wants to maintain his connection to the Promised Land. Later we learn that Joseph spent 93 years in Egypt and he said to his brethren, just before he died that when G-d visited them and brought them out of Egypt, they were to bring his bones with them and, by association, he was also to be buried in the sepulcher beside his father. We are not told where any of the other sons of Jacob were buried. They would not have received the special treatment both Jacob and Joseph received.

Some theologians consider Joseph the fourth patriarch, but this is not accurate. After the death of Jacob the blessing of Abraham passed on to the twelve tribes of Israel and it was no longer the possession of any single individual. While the three patriarchs were covenant bearers of the promise, Joseph was not. He did save his brethren and allowed the tribes to grow into a great nation in the relative safety of Egypt. The spiritual leadership of the people passed to Levi and the sons of Aaron and the eventual kingship passed to the sons of Judah.

Jacob adopts Manasseh and Ephraim as full sons, but any subsequent children Joseph had were to become part of either the tribe of Manasseh or Ephraim (48:6). Near the end of his life, Jacob blesses his two newly adopted sons and places the second born above the first born, over the objections of Joseph. He also gives Joseph a portion of inheritance greater than which Jacob was to give to his other sons, thus treating his favorite, Joseph, as if he were the eldest son. It was a portion of the treasure he took by force the Amorites with his sword and his bow (48:22). He was both a warrior and a shepherd.

In the next chapter he prophesies over his sons, but does not do so separately for his two newly adopted sons – they are blessed separately when they are adopted. Later when the kingdom splits, the northern kingdom is sometimes referred to as Joseph.

He pronounces a disciplinary prophecy over his first three sons. Reuben receives no blessing because he soiled his father's couch by sleeping with Rachel's maid. Simeon and Levi are told they are to be scattered among the tribes because of the violence they showed by killing the men of Shechem (who by their circumcision, should have been considered part of Israel).

Judah receive the most amazing prophetic, kingly blessing. He is told that from him shall come the royal dynasty which shall rule until Messiah comes to rule over all the nations of mankind. Herod's son, Archelaus, was the last ruler of Judah when Messiah did come.

The blessings are given in the sons' birth order, but none of the seven which follow are anything as spectacular as the ones given to Judah and to Joseph. Right between the blessing of Dan and Gad there appears a phrase where the dying Jacob expresses his confidence in the rescuing or salvation of YHVH (49:18).

When it comes to Joseph, he is called the shepherd and the rock of Israel, as well as the prince over his brothers. Jacob references his other sons' attempts to hurt Joseph and calls down a seven-fold blessing on his favorite son. It is not clear whether these blessings were passed on to Ephraim and Manasseh, since Jacob has already given them a private blessing session as part of the adoption process. Joseph's blessing is mightier than Judah's for the moment, but Judah's generational blessing and status far exceeds that which was given to Jacob's favorite son. Messiah shall be the one to bless all the nations and generations.

Jacob repeats his desire to be buried with his ancestors in Canaan and the passage says he was received by (or gathered unto) his (deceased) people. He is embalmed as a mummy by the Egyptians and the process takes 40 days. This was followed by a further 70 day mourning period and Joseph receives permission from Pharaoh to go and bury his father in Canaan - even though he was given a royal Egyptian funeral.

A huge funeral caravan departs for Canaan for the exceptional burial and somehow crosses over the Jordan, before they reach the burial site, probably to remain in Egyptian held territory until they were close to where the burial was to occur. Before crossing back into Canaan, they hold another seven day mourning period and the place they held it was subsequently carried Abel-Mitsraim (the place where the Egyptians mourned). Jacob is buried as a Patriarch of Israel and not like a member of the Egyptian royalty, so it is unlikely that his burial cave contained any treasures which could have been subsequently plundered.

The other sons tell another lie to Joseph, claiming that, just before he died, their father told them to tell him to forgive them the sins they committed against him. Joseph assures them that they have nothing to worry about – he will take care of them. He lives for 81 more years and dies at the age of 110. He is embalmed in the manner of the Egyptians and is put in an Egyptian tomb. The embalming would have also taken 40 days and the mourning period would also have been 70 days long.

He prophesies that G-d would one day bring the tribes of Israel up out of Egypt and take them back into the Promised Land and when this happens, they are to take his bones with them. It would actually be his mummy. Joseph lived a total of 93 years in Egypt and only revisited Canaan briefly for his father's burial. We are not told whether his sons were given a special status, like him, since it is unlikely that the position of prime minister was hereditary.

The Children of Israel did have a special hereditary status as the guardians of Pharaoh's flocks and they were exempt from the requirement to pay 20% of their crops to Pharaoh. Their principle occupation remained as shepherds but it is also likely they also grew enough grain and fruit for their own needs and remained distinct from their Egyptian neighbours.

This special status remained as long as the then current regime ruled Egypt, but as we shall see later, it did not survive when another regime came to power and slaughtered all the surviving members of the previous dynasty. Over 30 dynasties ruled ancient Egypt before it became a Roman province, with the death of Cleopatra, who was the last Pharaoh.

Sermon: Biblical Truth and Spiritual Reality: Our Triple Calling

Passage: *“ Abraham shall certainly become a great and powerful nation and in him all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. For I have chosen him so that he would ordain to his sons and to his house after him to keep the way of YHVH by doing that which is right and just, so that YHVH would accomplish on behalf of Abraham, all the promises which were made to him.”* (Genesis 18:18, 19)

In my second winter series, I want to deal with two pillars upon which the spiritual life of both our community and our individual members, depends. We are to hold fast both to biblical truth and to have a firm hold on spiritual reality. You see, it is one thing to know the truth and it is quite another to live the truth. Both have to be active in our lives.

I would never consider knowing the truth to be something unimportant, but far too many believers know the truth, but do not live it, both in our day and throughout the checkered history of Israel. It was also a problem in the early church and although the Gentile church has too frequently wandered away from biblical truth, even when they returned more closely to the truth of the Bible, they have always had problems putting it into practice.

If they had put it into practice, there would have been no persecution of the Jews and certainly no inquisition and none of the bloody crusades would have happened. We are studying the book of James in our Yeshiva Bible Study and James has some pretty firm and direct things to say about those who know the truth and who do not live it. In fact he goes as far as to say the devil knows the truth and trembles – so just knowing the truth is not enough it has to be thoroughly integrated into every area of our hearts and lives.

Said another way, if you were put on trial for being a believer, would your life contain enough evidence to convict you? You see, far too often religious people have the sad reputation of being cruel and judgmental, as they pass judgment on everybody and fill their lives with harsh, rigid rules of conduct which are truly not sanctioned by the Bible. They seem overly proud of what they do not do and are not conscious enough of their need to live a life full of love and joy and peace. They are blinded to their true mission.

This can also be true of some segments of rabbinic Judaism where a spiritual arrogance creates a separation between the supposedly holy ones and their inferior Gentile neighbours. We need to avoid falling into this same trap. I am glad to believe and to live as a Messianic Jew, but I do not want to look down upon those Gentiles who need to take a closer look at their Bibles, when it comes to understanding how they should be living.

Spiritual reality is more the measure of who is an authentic believer than merely a collection of truths we adhere to. Together, biblical truth and spiritual reality will make us shine brightly and be very salty as we reach out to the darkening, dying world we are merely passing through. Together, biblical truth and spiritual reality give us the whole spiritual armour of G-d and leave no holes through which the enemy, the world or the flesh can penetrate and drag us back under the defiling influence of the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and pride of life.

It is important to have a well balanced biblical view of the world and be weaned away from both the traditions of men and the lies and myths of the world.

Evolution is one of the worst myths that mankind has ever come up with and I am a convinced

biblical creationist. The breakdown of our society's sexual morality has made sexually transmitted diseases one of the greatest health risks among young people and the older ones who say they are sexually active. What they are is sexually immoral, committing things which the Bible calls abominations and don't get me started about the worldwide murder of babies in their mother's wombs. The number of murdered babies long ago passed the sum total of all the people who have died in wars since WWI – and we are talking about hundreds of millions of innocents being slaughtered.

But the issues we struggle with and the effort we make to remain true to what the Bible teaches is only half the battle. We have to love sinners, even when we hate sin. The joy of the Lord needs to be our strength and we need to live at peace with everyone as much as it depends on us. I am not so much worried about Muslim immigrants taking over Europe and North America, as I am worried for the babies who are being slaughtered to make room for this replacement population.

I am friendly with Muslim people and let them know what I believe as a Messianic Jewish rabbi and I see it as a major spiritual duty for all of us to be helpful and friendly. I will discuss my faith with anyone and everyone, but how I live, should be the opening through which our Message of the Torah and love of the Messiah travels. How we live should win us a hearing for what we are called to share. People will often see how we live, before they will examine what we believe. Is the way you live an opening for what you believe?

Fractious, grumpy believers who are full of bitterness and anger (and malicious gossip) are an even greater barrier to the spread of the Gospel than the influx of Muslims and Hindus into this great country of ours. Spiritual reality should be where the rubber meets the road, as we travel through this life to our Father's Home in glory.

When I share my faith, I do not so much look for openings to share my faith, as I find natural openings when people respect the way I live and appreciate the love and joy and peace that our lives should be full of. So for the next several weeks, until it is time for Purim (and the end of our long, cold Canadian winter), we are going to be examining a series of Bible passages which speak of the two sides of the what should be the same coin: Biblical Truth and Spiritual Reality.

If ever a gap develops between these two essentials, then our effectiveness for the Messiah is compromised and we stumble into carnality with no essential impact for the progress of the kingdom. How healthy is your grasp of essential Bible truths? How dynamic is your expression of the spiritual reality we are called to live? A life can be filled with Bible truth and yet be an untended garden which is being choked by the works of the flesh. As well, spiritual reality is not just being nice and friendly to everybody, as if we were all heaven bound pilgrims together. It should be an expression of our hearts and lives that make people curious enough to give our faith a hearing. Does how you live give your faith an effective hearing?

Join with me in this series as we explore how to be spiritually healthy, well balanced believers who not only have a strong grasp of the Bible, but who put it into practice in every area of our lives. Biblical truth and spiritual reality should never be played against each other and should always work in tandem and in harmony, because, truly, you cannot walk with G-d if you have just one and not the other. We need both Biblical truth and spiritual reality in our lives.

This morning I want to speak to you from a conversation G-d was having in front of Abraham,

both so that he could understand his mandate and his calling and so that Abraham would understand why Sodom and Gomorrah needed to be destroyed. The righteous core of truth and light seekers had died out among the general population of the twin cities and only survived among Lot and his family. When the righteous core of truth and light seekers dies out in our world, then an infinitely greater fire will consume the entire cosmos.

It is this righteous core which is preventing the enemy from again taking total control over the world, even as our enemy is turning the world, more and more against us- and a renewal of the days of persecution and tribulation may not be far away. Staying firm and sweet is the only remedy for us to adopt in our information overloaded, cyber driven world.

Abraham had a triple mandate, which we also share with him, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. First he was to teach the way of the L-RD (derech Adonai). This was to be based on a belief in the one true Creator G-d of the Bible. Abraham probably had a copy of all the contents of what became the first 11 chapters of Genesis, along with other documents which have not survived. He believed that when G-d spoke, He should be listened to and that much of what He said should be committed to writing and passed along to the next generation.

The way of the L-RD is first a confession of faith and then a mandate to be a blessing, both as a great nation and as a blessing to all nations. Ephesians chapter two says that Jewish and Gentile believers are fellow citizens in the Israel of G-d, built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. The Jewish people still remain the special people of G-d, but believers in the Jewish Messiah, need to bless the nations among whom they dwell – which is something Israel has never ceased to do.

The way of the L-rd also speaks to kingdom of G-d, both in this life and in the life to come and there was a very special reason Abraham was told to go to the Promised Land. Our citizenship is not of this world and we are all called through the Promised Land, to return to the Garden of G-d's coming Kingdom.

If you take all the continents and piece them back together, you would get one great continent which geographers believe once existed and which they call Pangaea. At the very centre of this ancient super continent, was what is now the Holy Land, because the Holy Land was where the Garden of Eden stood. And it is the symbolic garden through which we need to pass, as we return to paradise and leave the filth and the horror of this world behind.

Abraham became a citizen of the world to come and this is part of what it means to embrace the way of the L-rd. No more idolatry, because the gods of the pagans are at best myths they have made up and at worst are demons, which bring death and destruction to those who worship them. No more fornication. It was a sad truth that Canaan was home to some of the most disgusting sexual practices ever practiced in the history of this lost and dying world. The enemy made sure that the ancient site of the Garden of Eden became the centre of the worst sexual immorality this world has ever known.

Abraham understood there was only one G-d and that we need to listen to His voice, both when He speaks directly and also when He speaks to us through His Word. How is your walk in the way of the L-rd doing? Have you left all the junk of this world behind and are you living as a citizen of the world to come?

The second part of our threefold mandate is to do that which is right, or in other words, listen to

voice of our conscience in how we conduct our affairs. Others may steal, others may rape and still others may commit murder, as they seek to get all they can, can all they get and sit on the lid. In all that we do, every day, we need to ask ourselves what is the right thing to do and what is the right thing to say. This is what righteousness means.

It is not so much what you do not do, as it is about what you do and the choices which you make. Said another way, if you do not, or say that you cannot, listen to the voice of your conscience, then you are incapable of listening to the voice of G-d, either through His Spirit or through His Word. Violating your conscience is equivalent to violating the Word of G-d.

Now I am not talking about the little voice that condemns you and tells you how bad you are – that is the voice of your flesh and not the voice of your conscience. Your conscience has a copy of the Torah written on your heart/soul/spirit and wants to seek for the light and the truth until it encounters the written Word and banishes all the works of the flesh from your heart and your life. This is the inner voice that we all need to learn to listen to.

Next, comes doing that which is just and this is a twofold mandate. First it seeks for justice when people have been wronged and also wants to bring perpetrators of injustice to face penalties for the evil they have committed. It wants to make good judgments when a question of morality is being considered. Sometimes we will not be able to decide which option is the right option and being just examines the options to determine which one is right (righteous). In a sense we become lawyers and law enforcement personal in our own lives and in the life of our community. We want to make sure that nothing evil or ugly takes root in our lives.

We will uphold those laws of our society which do not violate the laws of the Bible, but we will also go beyond that and seek to create an environment where the Law of G-d is upheld in every decision we make and in every option we take. This is not a complicated process, but it is a high calling that we must fulfill throughout our earthly pilgrimage, in every decision we make and in the reality we live, in our day to day lives.

Abraham was called to both walk in the way of the L-RD and teach his household after him to follow the same path. Foreign ideas and foreign immorality is to avoided at all costs and also be completely purged from our lives. We must never accept any idea or any teaching which contradicts our belief in the one Creator G-d of the Bible or our adherence to His Word as our only guide for faith and practice in this life. We need to live the straight and narrow.

Part of this is seeking to do that which we know is right, as we follow the voice of our conscience, upon which is written a copy of the Torah and which also contains the image of G-d in our inner most beings. This is not some come of impossible legalistic task. It is what James calls the perfect law of liberty which will keep us in the light and will protect us from the encroaching darkness. The light is the only place we want to dwell in this life.

Finally we must embrace that which is just, righting wrongs and clarifying which options are right and which are wrong. We have to embrace the truth and integrate it into every area of our lives, for this is the whole duty of man and woman. Are you doing your duty?

Shabbat Shalom and Shavua Tov.