



B'NAI CHAYIM

CHILDREN OF LIFE

12 Kislev, 5781 (28/11/20) **First Winter Series: Stick With the Fiery Hammer** J. M. Terrett

Veyetse **And He Went Out** **Jacob Begins Building His House**
Torah: Genesis 28:10-32:2 (3)
Haftarah; Hosea 11:7-4:9 (10)
Brit Chadashah: John 1:10-51

Jacob is being sent away both to be safe from his twin's wrath and also to acquire an Aramaic wife versus a Canaanite spouse. At his first camping site, he has a dream where he sees angels ascending and descending a ladder. It means that G-d is active on earth, even if He is totally separated from the earth upon which we dwell.

G-d speaks to him and Jacob personally receives the blessing of Abraham. Abraham is called his father, even though he is his grandfather. He has not yet left Canaan and the Holy Land is again promised to his descendants. Previously their number was described as being as numerous as the sand on the sea shore, and as numerous as the stars in the sky. In this dream, they will be as numerous as the dust of the earth. This is a pretty awesome blessing for a childless bachelor to receive.

His future descendants will not absorb all the families of the earth, but will be a blessing to all the families of the earth. YHVH says that He will be with Jacob wherever he goes and will bring him back to this place. YHVH will not abandon Jacob until he has executed everything YHVH has said to him.

When Jacob wakes up, he declares that YHVH is certainly in this scary, holy place, which he describes as the doorway to the Heavens. He sets up his stone pillow as a monument and changes the place's name from Luz to Bethel. We are not told whether he had his dream inside the town or just somewhere close by.

In response to this divine visitation, Jacob swears a threefold, conditional oath. If YHVH is with him and keeps him during the journey, and if YHVH gives him bread to eat and clothes to wear, and if Jacob returns in peace to his home, then YHVH will be his G-d. Upon his safe return he also promises to turn the stone monument into a house of worship and to give YHVH a tithe of all which YHVH grants to him. This commitment to tithing should also be true of us today as we bring the tithe of our increase into this house of worship.

When he arrives close to his intended destination, he stops by the town well and meets Rachel who has come to draw water for the family. He identifies himself and is invited to stay in Laban's home, and likely to take over caring for his uncle's sheep. His uncle asks him what kind of salary he wants and Jacob asks for Rachel to become his wife. Laban says that this can happen if he works for seven years with Laban's flocks. If you think about it, it is quite a steep bride price, but Jacob loved Rachel so much that the timer went very swiftly.

When the seven years were up, a wedding feast is held and under cover of darkness Laban sneaks his older daughter, Leah into Jacob's bridal tent and the union is consummated. When Jacob discovers he has been tricked, Laban makes a new deal. It was customary at this time for the bride and groom to sleep together every night for a week in an attempt to begin making babies. So, Laban says if Jacob finishes the week with Leah, he can serve for another seven years for Rachel.

At the end of the week, he goes into Rachel, finishes a new week with her and begins another seven of service as a second bride price. 28:30 says that Jacob loved both sisters, but he loved Rachel more than Leah. What follows I have often called the battle of the sisters as they try and win their husbands favor by seeing who can give him the most sons.

Be careful about attaching prophetic significance to the names which the children were given, when none was intended. Here is a list of their names and their significance:

1. Reuben: behold a man (now my husband will love me).
2. Simeon: to hear/answer (YHVH heard that I was not loved and gave me another son).
3. Levi: to attach/join together (now my husband will become attached to me).
4. Judah: praise (now I will praise YHVH for giving me another son).

It appears that Leah conceived the first four sons in a row and then stopped – and the assumption is that when she stopped producing sons, Jacob stopped visiting her bed. Rachel laments and tells her husband to give her children or she will die. She decides to give her maid Bilhah (bashful in Hebrew) to Jacob as his third wife. Rachel can then claim Bilhah's children as her own, even though she is a full wife and just a concubine. The plan works.

5. Dan: judgment/justice (G-d heard me and gave me justice).
6. Naphtali: to wrestle (I have wrestled with my sister and I have won).

Leah decides that two can play at this game and gives her maid Zilpah (uncertain in Hebrew) to Jacob as his fourth wife. Her plan works too.

7. Gad: good fortune (KJV I see a troop coming)(I am so happy that my plan also worked)
8. Asher: happiness (I am so glad to give my husband two more sons)

During the wheat harvest, young Reuben finds mandrakes and gives them to his mother. They were considered to enhance sexual performance and Rachel asks Leah to give them to her – after all, she is the one Jacob is sleeping with. Rachel agrees to send Jacob to Leah for the price of the plants. Her plan backfires, because Leah conceives two more sons.

9. Issachar: salary (G-d has given me my salary)
10. Zabulon: to dwell (also a gift) (Now my husband will dwell with me)

Her next child is a girl she names Dina (judgment). This either meant that she stopped conceiving or that Jacob stopped visiting her bed. It is finally Rachel's turn and she conceives and gives birth to a son.

11. Joseph: he adds (G-d has given me another son)

Jacob's twelfth son will be born during his return trip to Canaan. The portion switches to talking about the incredible riches Jacob acquires, both in livestock and servants. Later we learn that his acquired considerable treasure fighting with those who probably tried to rustle his livestock. Laban wants Jacob to hang around some more because the blessing of G-d is on everything Jacob touches. Jacob agrees to serve Laban for another six years and accepts as his salary all the striped, spotted and black sheep and goats which are in Laban's flocks.

Jacob used three kinds of branches which could cause sheep to go into heat, when they were near their annual period of fertility. He used these branches when a vigorous black, striped or spotted ewe was going into heat, but not when a sickly ewe was near to going into heat. In this way he got richer and richer and Laban's sons started to get hostile because of their cousin's success. They may have begun planning to kill Jacob and reclaim their father's riches. Laban was also developing hostility towards his tricky son in law.

YHVH tells Jacob it is time to leave and he and his family sneak off while Laban and his sons are shearing their sheep. It takes Laban seven days pursuit to catch up with Jacob. Just before they left, Rachel sneaked into her father's home and stole his household gods (teraphim – little statues). And part of the reason Laban is chasing them is an attempt to regain his idols. If the blessing of YHVH was no longer available in Jacob's absence, he wanted an alternate source of blessing. The two camps are adjacent to each other on Mount Gilead, across the Jordan from Canaan.

YHVH appears to Laban and tells him not to threaten or harm Jacob. When they actually meet, Laban said he would have sent Jacob off joyfully if he had been allowed to embrace his children and grandchildren. He asks Jacob why he stole his idols and is allowed to search through Jacob's camp. Rachel sits on a saddle where the teraphim are hidden and says she cannot rise because she has her monthly period.

Laban finds nothing and Jacob repeats how hard he worked for Laban for some 20 years while YHVH both protected him and blessed him. Before they part ways they set up a stone monument to certify that neither will cross this boundary to cause harm to the other. This is the last time Charan will be used as a source of future brides. The monument is given two names, one in Aramaic and one in Hebrew. Jacob throws them a feast and sends Laban and his camp on their way.

We do not know when the two groups started speaking different languages and it may be when the Hebrew speaking Abraham left Charan, his cousins adopted the language of the people among whom they lived. Jacob would have been able to speak Aramaic, but the language of his camp and his family was an early form of Hebrew.

As Jacob got close to the Jordan he meets some angels who either enter the camp or pass by it. He names the campsite Mahanaim, which means two camps – his and the angelic one. In the next portion we learn about Jacob's preparations to meet his once hostile twin brother. Jacob has become extremely wealthy and has a large family, along with a considerable number of servants and even if the portion does not mention that he paid a tithe of all he had acquired, we can be certain that he did what he swore to do.

Tithing is never presented anywhere in the Bible as an optional requirement. It is something all believers should do automatically, as soon as they begin to earn their own money. You tithe ten percent of your increase which means your net income. You do not pay all of your bills and tithe ten percent of what you have left over. Abraham tithed ten percent of all the treasure he took from the kings he defeated. Jacob made an oath to G-d to tithe ten percent of all and any increase he was going to acquire in Charan. Tithing is also taught in the New Testament as financial support you extend to your local community which has taught you the Word. It was never abolished and does not just belong to the Old Testament. We need to learn to keep on tithing and only stop when the Messianic Kingdom is set up.

Sermon: Stick With the Fiery Hammer

Passage: “Let the prophet who has had a dream, speak about his dream and let the one who has heard my Word, faithfully speak about My Word. Why would you mix straw with grain, says YHVH. Is my Word not like a fire says YHVH and like a hammer which breaks rocks? Behold I am angry at the prophets who take their own words and give them instead of my Word. Behold I am angry says YHVH with those who prophesy false dreams and who speak about them, causing my people to go astray by their lies and their wicked boldness. I did not send them and I gave them no orders. They are of no use to this people, says YHVH”.(Jeremiah 23:28-32)

Jeremiah was an Aaronite priest who prophesied during the reign of at least three kings. YHVH also told him that he would have an incredibly difficult time both with the people and with the religious authorities who resisted revival wanted to maintain the wicked idolatrous status quo. He had a following of people who listened to him, but after the death of Josiah, the last righteous king of Judah, the nation slipped heavily into a spiritual darkness, from which it never recovered.

In his lifetime, he lived to see the land emptied of all its Jews, even though G-d promised those who remained after most of the people went into captivity. Jeremiah's big double battle was to convince the people to abandon their idolatry and to return to the Word of G-d, both written and spoken. The book of Jeremiah is really a series of prophesies recorded and organized by his secretary, Baruch the son of Neriah (Jer. 36:4).

When the authorities did not like what the L-RD said through Jeremiah, they accused him of lying and burned what had been written down. He was called a prophet to the nations, but he did not do any outreach to the nations in his lifetime. His enduring spiritual legacy, both for Jews and Gentiles is his refusal to be shutdown under pressure and his stubborn insistence that walking with G-d according to His Word is the only kind of spirituality which is acceptable to G-d.

In this, he did not differentiate between what G-d said through the prophets and the truths which are enshrined in the written Word. Believers who do not listen to the voice of G-d's Spirit, will violate anything which G-d says to them either personally or through the written Word.

Our passage today deals mainly with the spoken prophetic Word which Jeremiah considers on par with everything which the written Word proclaims. He opens with the exhortation that people who receive prophetic dreams are supposed to share them and share them faithfully. Suppressing G-d's Word in any shape and form is one of the gravest sins which spiritual leaders can commit.

Pagan priests and pagan prophets were known to say whatever the highest bidder paid them to say. However, G-d's Word, both spoken and written is priceless and when a prophet of YHVH seeks to profit from the Word he is called to share, he is a false prophet, no matter how big a media presence his or her popularity has. Some preachers say what G-d has not said and do not say what G-d has said. Whatever we say as human beings and all that which comes to us from human sources should never be elevated to or falsely claimed to be something which G-d has said.

In the past, I have received spoken prophecies that kindled a flame in my heart and I knew that they were from G-d. I can safely say this for at least three reasons. First of all these inspired utterances lined up with what the written Word teaches. Secondly, they resonated with what G-d was already doing in my life and what He was speaking to my heart about. Lastly, and possibly most importantly, they willingly invited scrutiny and were not afraid to have their words tested and verified.

The human vehicles who were speaking on G-d's behalf welcomed the examination of their utterances and did not get riled or feel threatened because they were upholding G-d and the authority of His Word. They were not trying to establish their own authority.

In our passage, the spoken and the written Word are described using to three symbols. First the Word is compared to grain which has already been separated from the straw. Mixing our words with G-d's Word would be like mixing the straw back into the grain when we already know that the grass withers and flowers fade and fall, but the Word of YHVH endures for all eternity (Is. 40:8). We always need to remember that the written Word should always be our infallible guide to evaluating whatever someone claims to have received from G-d.

The Word is also compared to a fire which burns through all and any garbage which rise up against it. It is like the burning bush, the flaming mountain and the fire which hovered over the ark during the wilderness wandering. People have to be careful how they handle it – strange fire is lethal for those who falsely claim that their fire came from G-d, even when they know they just made it up. We can either shine with the fire of G-d's Word or be burned when our fire does not come from Him.

Finally, the Word is also compared to a rock smashing hammer which can smash everything which tries to get in its way. It does not need a fence around it to protect it, it just needs to be unleashed. This is the level and kind of ministry G-d's Word wants to have, both in our individual lives and in the life of our shul.

When the prophet Samuel received a prophecy, he was warned not to hold anything back,

especially since it concerned the awful punishment which was about to come on Eli and his two wicked sons. Jeremiah is warning the prophets not to edit anything which they had received from G-d. It needs to be the whole truth and nothing but the truth, even when we share that are uncomfortable and which people may not want to hear.

When we claim to have received a Word from G-d, it needs to pass the threefold verification, but it should never be diluted or edited, no matter how much resistance we encounter when we try to share it. Also, when we see something or say something which we feel very strongly about, we should never claim that it comes from G-d based solely on the strength of our feelings on the issue. We should never say something comes from G-d even though we really know that it doesn't.

Two examples come to mind: the Book of Mormon and the Koran. My Savior died on the cross and not in a gunfight while he was trying to break out of jail. The wife of one of Joseph Smith's early supporters, burned the document which Joseph Smith claimed to have received from G-d and challenged him to reproduce it. Instead he said he was telling the same story which she burned, but from a different perspective. He was both a liar and a fake and nothing which he said came from G-d.

Shortly after Mohamed's death, early Muslims gathered upwards of twenty versions of the Koran and burned all of them but one. They claimed that what passes for the Koran is the right copy, but they have no way of proving this, especially since they burned copies which may have said things they didn't like.

When it comes to our Bible, there are somewhere over 10,000 ancient manuscripts or fragments which have come down to us in an amazing number of different languages. These ancient documents show that the message of the Bible has not been changed over the centuries and is not full of supposed contradictions. One Bible scholar said there are upwards of some 400,000 textual variations in these manuscripts, but only 500 of them affect the meaning. There only some forty places where these variations change the meaning, but in each instance, we can cross reference the changes and easily establish to true meaning of the variations in question.

Over and above the Scriptures, there are thousands of documents which falsely claim to have come from G-d, but no amount of human wisdom or human intelligence can ever come remotely close to the mighty Word of our eternal G-d. This also applies to any prophecy we hear or any message in tongues people want us to receive as coming from G-d without verifying the content.

For centuries, people have been setting dates for the end of the world and claiming to have identified the final Antichrist and this serial guessing comes from the diseased imagination of foolish people and not from the actual Word of G-d.

Our passage in Jeremiah ends with an expression of the L-RD's anger with those who falsely claim to be His messengers and who share their false dreams in order to lead His people astray by their lies and their wicked boldness in sharing things which they know do not come from G-d. He says that He did not send them and that He gave them no orders and that they are completely useless to the people of YHVH.

Now I will not begin a rant against online ministries and big name television evangelists who try to tickle our ears and empty our pockets – and who even try and steal our tithe which rightly belongs to our shul. Can any of them share G-d's Word? Only if what they say lines up with the written Word of G-d. Only when it resonates with what G-d is already doing in our hearts and lives. Only if it invites careful scrutiny and is not afraid to have its authority challenged.

Over the years, G-d has used any number of donkeys to speak to any number of Balaams who have not been prepared to listen to G-d and actually speak His Word. In 325 C.E. G-d used a creepy donkey by the name of Constantine. He gathered some 3,000 scholars to the city of Nicaea so that they could wade through tons of documents until the authentic New Testament was recognized. From over 300 Gospels which were examined, only four were recognized as authentic.

The 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament mention some portions of the Word which were lost and did not survive. Both sections of our Bible are described as the Canon and can be used as a means to evaluate all and any truth which claims to come from G-d. Only those whose content line up with the truth of our Bibles come from G-d, the rest is human nonsense which we shouldn't listen to.

How much of the spiritual truth which you have allowed to come into your life, actually measures up to the Canon of the Scriptures? Have you sifted through the straw of this world to get at the grain of G-d's Word? Have you let the fire of G-d's Word burn away all the human straw which is trying to stake a claim in your heart and in your life? Have you let the hammer of His Word smash all the carnal folly which wrongly wants to be the foundation of your life?

I am not afraid of spoken prophecy. In fact, I would welcome it with great enthusiasm as long as it passes through our threefold verification process. In the Scriptures, false prophets were stoned. In our day, many of them prowl their way on the internet, while others have lucrative television ministries. Some even sound so biblical even though they do not teach what the Scriptures teach. Others add to or delete from what the Scriptures teach.

Beware, be from Berea and don't be deceived. Online and television and radio ministries remain a minefield of possibilities. Don't let them blow up your faith and lead you down a false garden path. We need to pay attention when a yellow alert goes off in our hearts and minds and not wait for the red alerts these false prophets are trying to disable. Don't let them lead you into the fox's cave because they have falsely convinced us that the sky is falling and that the end of the world is just around the corner.

When I was at university there were people in our Christian group who would say on Friday that they would see us on Monday, if the L-rd had not yet come back. They are still playing games and setting serial dates, each new one more fantastic than the previous ones.

Stick with the fiery hammer as you separate the straw of this darkening world from the grain of G-d's eternal Word.

Shabbat shalom and shavua tov.