

<b>Vayechi</b>	<b>And He Lived</b>	<b>A Ripe Old Age</b>	<b>Chazak, chazak, v'nitchazek</b>
<b>Torah:</b>	Genesis 47:28-50:26		
<b>Haftarah:</b>	I Kings 2:1-12		
<b>Brit Chadashah:</b>	I Peter 1:1-9		

This is the last portion in the Book of Genesis and there is a shift from G-d working through a single Patriarch, to dealing with the growing nation of Israel. This portion deals both with the final days of Jacob and with the final days of Joseph.

Jacob came to Egypt when he was 130 and when Joseph was 32. Jacob spent the last 17 years of his life watching his grandchildren and his great grandchildren grow up. He died at the age of 147, when Joseph was 49. Joseph lived another 61 years and died at the age of 110. He spent a total of 93 years living in Egypt and only saw the Holy Land once more, when he led a huge entourage to bury his father.

This portion has several unique stories, beginning with Jacob asking Joseph to swear a formal oath by grabbing his privates. Thankfully, this kind of oath swearing is no longer practised, but Jacob wanted to be absolutely sure that he would be buried with his father and his grandfather in the Holy Land.

He formally adopts Ephraim and Manasseh as full sons and they are sometimes referred to as the tribe of Joseph when in fact they are given full tribal status by their grandfather. He gives the blessing of the first born to the younger son and says that any subsequent children born to Joseph had to join either Ephraim or Manasseh. In his final blessings over the sons, they are blessed as Joseph, but once they are adopted by their grandfather, they are given separate blessings.

Jacob also gives Joseph a portion of the treasure he took by force from the Amorites, probably while he was keeping Laban's sheep. He never thought he would ever see his favourite son again and so gives him a double blessing in a private ceremony, which was not opposed by any of his brothers.

Just before his death, he gives each son a blessing, though the first three sons received more of a generational rebuke than any favour he placed on them. Two sons receive a special blessing and try as he might, Jacob ends up giving Judah a messianic blessing which effectively eclipses his blessing over Joseph.

He makes Judah the leader of his brothers and foretells the arrival of the Messiah who will descend from Judah. Judah will be granted a mighty kingship which will last until the Messiah shows up. He realizes that it was Judah who convinced him to come to Egypt and he now places him in a permanent leadership position above the other brothers.

The last king of Judah was deposed while Messiah was sheltering in Egypt and Messiah had to come in that generation. He came once to die, resurrect and ascend, He will come a second time to set up His everlasting kingdom over all the generations and nations of mankind. G-d's timing is always impeccable because He has established an agenda which will always be fulfilled in His time and in His way.

Jacob pauses after he has blessed Dan and makes almost a cry of desperation. He realizes that the only blessing he can impart must come from YHVH and even if his life was anything but easy, the rescuing of YHVH never let him down. In our darkening world, where so much is lining up against our biblical spirituality, we need to place our trust in the faithfulness of G-d. Things are quickly lining up for His return, but we need to be content to walk patiently with Him and not get panicked by global warming, future pandemics and all the global problems which are screaming for our attention.

Of all his children, Jacob reserves his strongest blessing for Judah and Joseph. Joseph does not get a messianic blessing, but he is called the shepherd and rock of Israel and is given a very unique seven fold blessing. He is blessed by the G-d of his father and by the work of the Almighty. He is to receive blessings from on high and blessings from the waters below. He is also to be blessed by the breasts and the maternal womb.

Joseph is even to be blessed more than all the blessings of his ancestors. And even the blessings of the ancient hills is to fall upon the head of Joseph, who is even called the prince of his brothers. It really was an amazing set of circumstances that brought Joseph to his current position of power and yet he was more than qualified to do an amazing job. He was well received by both his people and by the Egyptians, especially since he rescued both peoples from the destruction which the famine could have brought.

In the blessing, there is reference to Joseph's victory over those who sought him harm and it is an amazing story of a man rising from rags to riches. He was the right man who came at the right time and did the right job. We may all suffer persecutions and set backs, even as antisemitism is again on the rise globally, but when we walk in faith and obedience, we will be just as resilient as Joseph. We should never be afraid of what can happen to us because we can always count on the blessing of the YHVH.

Just before he dies, Jacob repeats his burial instructions to his gathered sons and when he has said all that needed to be said, he tucked his feet into his bed and died. When he left the Holy Land, his prospects were not very good, but the blessing of YHVH is better than any advantage this life could offer.

It takes forty days for him to be embalmed – to be turned into a mummy and he is mourned for another seventy days, which is the usual mourning period for royalty. Joseph asks permission from Pharaoh to go and bury his father and he is accompanied by all the servants of Pharaoh, as well as by his brothers. The children and the flocks remain behind, but Joseph is given a royal escort which is armed and because of this, Joseph is not molested and he is acting like a full prince of Egypt.

On the way, the mourning continues and one place where the entourage halts is called Abel-Mizraim, or the place where the Egyptians mourned. Jacob is buried with full royal honours and he is the last of the patriarchs and the one whose children built the nation in the relative safety of Egypt.

Upon their return to Egypt, his brothers fabricate a supposed message from Jacob to tell Joseph to forgive what his brothers did, who call themselves servants of their father's G-d. Joseph reassures them. He lives for another 61 years after he buries his father. Just before he dies, he tells his brothers that when G-d leads them out of Egypt he wants to be buried with the Patriarchs. The rest of the Torah deals with the entire nation of Israel

**Sermon: First Winter Series: How is Your Spiritual Wardrobe Doing? Eph. 4:17-32**

**Passage: Behold what I say and declare to you in the Messiah: you should no longer walk like pagans who walk according to the vanity of their thoughts. Their understanding is darkened and they are strangers to the life of G-d, because of the ignorance which is in them and because of the hardening of their heart. Having lost all feeling, they are given over to sexual debauchery to commit every kind of impurity linked to greed. But you, this is not how you have learned in the Messiah, if at least you have heard and if, conforming to the truth which is in Yeshua, in Him you have been instructed to put off, in relation to your past life, the old man who is corrupted by deceitful lusts and then to be renewed in the spirit of your understanding and to put on the new man who is created in righteousness and holiness which the truth produces.**

**This is why, renounce lying and let each of you speak the truth to his neighbour; for we are members of each other. And if you get angry, do not sin and do not let the sun set on your wrath and do not give the devil any access. Let the one who stole, steal no more but work with his hands to make good things which can be given to those in need. Let no evil word come out of your mouth, but, if there is a place, some good word which serves for edification and communicates grace to the one who hears it. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit by whom you have been sealed for the day of redemption.**

**Let all bitterness, all animosity, all wrangling and slander and every kind of wickedness disappear from the midst of you. Be good to each other, compassionate, forgiving each other as G-d has forgiven you in the Messiah.**

Paul begins this passage by giving a very graphic and bleak description of pagans, from whose number many of his people came. He is not saying that all non believers are totally evil or completely given over to wickedness. He is describing the severe darkness into which many fall before they come to faith and are delivered from the darkness which was devouring them. Given over to themselves they wallow in the vanity of their thoughts as if there was no higher standard or level of accountability beyond what they think and do.

They do not want to know a life lived in the light and in G-d's presence and are wilfully ignorant and refuse to leave their own darkness and come to the light so they could really see what a sad condition they are in. It is not that they have not heard about G-d and His Word, but they are choosing not to listen and not to consider any possibility that gets in the way of their totally carnal, sensual lifestyle. They do not want any limits placed on their behaviour except those which they set and which permit them to have a free rein to commit sensuality and sexual crimes. They want to indulge all and any sexual impulses and there is nothing which they would not try.

Their sensuality is also linked to greed because they need lots of money in order to support such a vile lifestyle. They have lost all natural feelings and are just burning with lust all the time. The only satisfaction they are able to have is linked to gross sexuality and other forms of debauchery.

Paul outlines this sad state of affairs as a warning to us that carnal predators are constantly prowling around the community of believers, looking for weak, undefended places they can crash into and drag us back with them into the living death they are caught in.

Some people get upset when we share our faith, but find nothing distasteful in telling us exactly why we are wrong and are deceived. I only share my faith with those who are willing to listen with respect and meekness and I show them the same level of respect which I expect them to exercise with me. An argument is always wrong, even if you are coming from the right place. Too many believers seem to prefer a good fight to any peaceful dialogue with willing listeners.

There are darkness dwellers who are gunning for us and are aggressively trying to sink our faith so that it no longer challenges their corrupt, lustful lifestyle. And if the truth be told, some of us came from this great darkness and part of it can still seem attractive to us. Paul outlines ten kingdom exclusions in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6:9-11 and says that some of us were also practitioners of these exclusions. We have to be very careful that our old ways do not try and overpower our spirituality and drag us back down into the darkness.

He goes on to discuss two men who could also be characterized as two different sets of clothing. There is first the old man, threaded with corruption and deceitful lusts. Our faith in the Messiah requires a radical, permanent wardrobe change. Too many believers continue to wear the clothes of the old man and how they live their lives is not very different to those who are openly darkness dwellers.

We are told to be clothed with the new man or the renew man, who was created in righteousness and holiness which the truth produces. This means that the power of the Gospel is both able to deliver us from the deepest darkness and to repair any damage we have incurred. There is never any brokenness which is so bad that the Gospel cannot heal.

Now sometimes a person may have to live with brokenness which G-d does not fully take away. Paul's eyes never recovered but he was able to compensate for this thorn in his flesh. Sometimes abuse survivors or those suffering from PTSD or some kinds of mental disability, may not fully be delivered and be able to function totally normally. But what ever G-d does not deliver you from, He gives you grace and multiple ways of escape so that none of the negativeness of your former life has the ability to negatively impact your new or renew life.

Sometimes we may temporarily slip back into our old lives or allow crises to push us back into the darkness of hatred and anger. But when this happens, the Gospel has the ability to repeatedly renew us as many times as we need it and as many times as we ask for G-d's help. So instead of lamenting the damage and the dark depths which you have come from, let Messiah teach you the spiritual strategies which will dig you out and clean you up. You may have to walk with a limp or a disability which does not go away, but every weakness you turn over to the Messiah becomes a strength and a source of blessing, whether it is a stutter like Moses or weak eyes like Paul.

When crippled or wounded people are not healed or delivered from their disability, it is because G-d is going to use it and bless many people through it, because none of us ever has to live as those who are spiritually disabled. The power of the renew man in the Gospel and the Torah will always be infinitely stronger and more amazing than anything the darkness of this world brings our way. Great loss can be turned into great gain when it is turned over to Him and to His Word.

Even the worst of the Holocaust does not have the power to prevent the mighty grace of G-d from working in our lives, even if we never learn to walk without a limp again and struggle with

depression every time memories flood back and we have to take the time to recover. Take the time to recover and do not let anybody rush you or judge you because you are moving at your own pace.

Part of our recovery as we become renewed men, is to learn to abandon the unfruitful works of darkness and as we learn not to fight fire with fire, but with the light. I have been badly hurt by too many people after I came to the Messiah and decided to go into ministry. But it is never right or profitable to repay evil with evil or pain with pain. We need to let G-d and His Word tell us how to respond and not get caught up in any of the works of the flesh.

One of the worst is lying, where we do not speak the truth to our neighbours. Now please understand me that there are times when it is entirely appropriate not to tell someone something they want to know, because it is none of their business. I have said in the past that respect is given, but trust is earned, so we do not feel that we have to tell everyone everything, when we deem it necessary to keep it from them.

During WW2, Corrie Ten Boom was asked to give the name of a collaborator to the resistance, because he was in the process of betraying her and her Jews. She refused, but I do not agree with her decision. Many of those who hid Jews had to keep it a secret and even deny that they were harbouring Jews when the Nazis came knocking. There are many ways of deflecting questions we do not want to answer, without having to directly lie. If cornered, I would never admit to hiding Jews and deny that I was doing it because the Nazis and other racists are evil people whose authority we should never accept.

They do not have the right to know the truth because they would use for destructive purposes. This can become a moral slippery slope which might allow lying to become a lifetime habit, but using deception to protect those who might otherwise be killed is not something I would do freely or joyfully. Evil people do not have the right to use us to betray innocent people who are hiding to save their lives. If you have any questions about this, talk to me, because it is not something which I take lightly.

It may surprise you that our passage does not say that getting angry is a sin. It is something we have to deal with quickly so that we do not act in anger. When Paul was slapped, he snapped at the man who told someone to slap him, but he did not justify either the slap or his response to it. Anger can be a powerful emotion, but I have never met anyone with a bad temper, just people with bad temper control.

Shepherds say that if you get mad at a sheep and yell at it or hit it, it will never follow you again or trust you again. Expressing dissatisfaction without temper is acceptable and sometimes even temper can be acceptable as long as what we do does not violate the Word of our King. I get angry when I think about the Holocaust and all the perpetrators who are still getting away with what they did. I am also angry that Native people had their land stolen from them and were slaughtered in their thousands for the crime of not being white.

Racism of any kind angers me, but I never want to take the law into my own hands. If I saw someone being beaten, I would intervene and in the past, I have intervened. But I have left punishment in the hands of the law and the courts.

I would fight to defend my family and all of you are members of my extended family. Perhaps I should say I would fight them off and stop them from causing harm because two wrongs do not make a right.

Getting angry and acting in anger give the devil access to our hearts and lives. We may come under his influence and power, but we cannot be possessed by him. He can break the windows of our soul and yell into the house, but he cannot take up residence there unless the person has totally and completely renounced the Messiah. Fixing the windows and learning biblical strategies for handling our anger are the way we should go.

Speaking evil of each other is another way to give the accuser of our souls the ability to pollute our lives and weaken us spiritually. Our speech should be uplifting and we should never allow ourselves to put people down. Even when we have to discuss people's misdeeds and even their carnal temper tantrums, we can do it in a way as to offer help and support. In the process, we may have to confront someone and even exclude them from our fellowship, but none of this should ever be done maliciously.

The passage goes on to describe one of the two negative experiences with the Holy Spirit which we should avoid. In our passage we are warned not to grieve the Spirit. This happens when we do that which the Spirit doesn't want us to do. The other is to quench the Spirit by not doing what He is asking us to do. The Spirit wants to be our coach and our guide and He wants to always lead us deeper into the truths of G-d's Word. He wants us to listen and apply the appropriate strategy for whatever situation we find ourselves in.

Holiness is the goal for the Holy Spirit and it can be practised in every situation of our lives. The Holy Spirit gives you are for our own good and spiritual benefit and while allowances can be made for mistakes and error, He wants to guide us back onto the straight and narrow, so that none of power of the enemy or the flesh can re-infect our lives and cause us not to do what we should do and also for us to do what we should not do.

The passage ends with an exhortation to remove all the remains of all kinds of evil and evil speech. When Paul says this it is because it is possible for unwise and carnal believers to let their lives fill with the unfruitful works of the flesh and leave no room for the very beneficial fruit of the Spirit. We have great potential for great good and also great potential for great evil.

Bitterness and slander can be major problems in spiritual communities because we have not taken the time to think things through and not overstep and also not to let our disappointment turn to bitterness when we do not get our own way. It is never right to become sinful and carnal in how we deal with problems and we want to end quarrels and not stir them up or allow them to continue in our midst.

Instead of being part of the problem and letting our flesh pull us into the weeds, we need to become part of the solution and let the Spirit guide us into paths which will bring healing and love and joy. All along the way, we have to make allowance for people to fail and we have to extend our forgiveness repeatedly and graciously. This needs to be done in a way that helps people recover and not feel worse when they know they have made a mistake. Correcting people without condemnation and judgment is a hard, good lesson to learn and until we learn it, we are not much good for the kingdom.