

Tomorrow evening is Erev Chanukah and each night we will add one more candle to the Chanukiah, until Sunday, December 5<sup>th</sup> when we light the 8<sup>th</sup> candle. After service, each family will be receiving a Chanukah kit and each child will receive a Chanukah treat bag – again, after service. The kits contain instructions about lighting the candles, the rules of the dreidel game and my annual explanation of Chanukah.

Once we have lit all the Chanukah candles in our big menorah, we have been asked by Jasper Place to leave it out over the holidays as part of their Christmas decorations. Next week, there will be no Shabbat school, and our children will be singing Chanukah songs for us during our praise and worship time. There will be colouring pages for our children during the Torah Meditation, and my annual Chanukah message. It is always hard to determine how long things will be, so with the lighting of the Chanukiah today, we have shortened the preaching part of the service. The lighting of the Chanukah menorah will take the place of my message. Lets move on and go through the Torah portion.

Today's portion has always troubled me because of the depth of the hatred that Joseph's brothers felt towards him. He was a dreamer of prophetic dreams and both saw that one day, he would govern his brothers and that Messiah would receive the heavenly homage which He so truly deserves.

The portion is roughly divided into three sections: (1) the sale of the dreamer into slavery. (2) the incident with Judah and Tamar. And (3) the first part of Joseph's time in Egypt. As I was preparing this, I got a little sidetracked and from the Scriptures, I calculated the ages of five of the major players in this section. Let me share this with you and be sure to check and see if the ages are correct.

Abraham was 85 when Ishmael was born and he was 97 when he and all the males in his camp (including the 13 year old Ishmael) were circumcised. Abraham was 100 years old and his wife was 90, when Isaac is born. Ishmael was 15 at the time.

Abraham was 137 when Sarah died and lived 38 more years and had at least five more sons with Keturah, his second wife (Hagar did not have the status of a full wife). Isaac was 40 when he married Rebekah and Abraham was 140. Abraham lived another 35 years. Abraham died when the twins were 15 and when Isaac was 75 and Ishmael was 90. Ishmael died when Isaac was 122 years old and when the twins were 62.

Ismael died at the age of 137, when Isaac was 122 years old and the twins were 62. Isaac died at the age of 180, 17 years before Jacob went to Egypt. Joseph was already 10 years in Egypt when his grandfather died. Joseph became ruler of Egypt when he was 37 years old. Jacob was 100 years old when Joseph was born, but we are not told how many years Jacob spent in Egypt before his death. After his extended family arrived in Egypt, Joseph lived another 73 years, and died at the age of 110 years.

These were actual events that happened in ordinary time and space, and none of the details or the characters were mythical or legendary. Life expectancy dropped in four stages: after the flood, after the dispersion at Babel, after the age of the Patriarchs.

It continued to shorten until people could expect a 70 year life span. There have always been people who have lived long lives but the great ages people lived to before the flood is not something we can hope to achieve, even in our modern world.

It is only in our lifetime that life expectancy is beginning to lengthen again and three things have contributed to this rise. When people from formerly closed gene intermarry, their life span lengthens. The rise of modern medicines has meant that fewer people succumb to diseases that once ravaged our planet. Also, better nutrition and improved hygiene has also meant that we live better, longer lives

We are not told how old Jacob was when most of his sons were born, nor how old he was when he died. The Bible is full of limited genealogies and we have to accept the fact, that it is not always possible to assign exact dates to the events which occurred.

At the beginning of the section we are introduced to Joseph, who was his dad's favourite and he exercises a prophetic ministry which was not well received by his brothers. He is told that one day the second youngest would dominate over all his elder brothers.

Because of his dreams, when he is sent to see how his brothers were doing, they seize him and plan to kill him – and they say, let us then see what will come of his dreams. Instead of killing Joseph, at Ruben's suggestion, they just throw him into a pit. They sit down to eat their midday meal, and Ruben is not with them at this point. At Judah's suggestion he is sold to some Ishmaelites (also called Midianites). He is then sold as a slave in Egypt.

While this may seem a harsh treatment, it did place him safely out of his brothers' reach. Ruben reveals his intention to have restored Joseph to Jacob and maybe return to his father's favour. When this is no longer possible, He joins with his brothers as they soak Joseph's coat in animal blood and tell their father that he has been devoured by a wild animal. Jacob is inconsolable.

Now we deal with another disturbing event which likely occurs while Joseph is in Egypt. Judah separates himself from his brothers and marries a Canaanite woman who bears him three sons. G-d brings about the death of the first born because he was evil and Judah wants son number two to perform a Levirate marriage, where he would have relations with his brother's widow, until she brought forth a son to replace her dead husband. After this, she would raise her son under the protection of his father, but would not become part of his family. Her son would be considered the first born, even though the second born was his father.

The second born refused to comply and was also killed. Their mother dies and, rather than risk his only remaining son, Judah tells the widow, Tamar, to return and live in her father's home until the youngest son was old enough to marry. Later, she learns that the youngest son has married and it looked like no one in the family would be willing to perform their levirate obligation.

To remedy the situation, Tamar dresses up like a prostitute and sits by a road she knew that Judah would use. At that time, prostitutes covered their faces with a veil so that no one would know their true identity. As Judah passes, he stops and asks her her price. They agree on a goat. He leaves his signet ring, his cord and his walking stick as a guarantee that he would send the agreed upon price.

When he tries to send the goat, she has disappeared and the people are quite shocked when he asked if there was a prostitute in their community. He feels that the three items he left are

gone and he forgets about the incident. Tamar becomes pregnant by her father in law and when he is about to have her burnt for what was adultery, she takes out the three items and Judah says that she is less guilty than him. Judah has performed the Levirate obligation and takes her into his home, though he never touches her again. She gives him twin boys to replace the two sons he lost. They are considered to two eldest sons in place of the two who died.

The portion switches back to Joseph, who is sold to Potiphar, who is captain of Pharaoh's guards. Despite all his troubles, the blessing of the L-rd is on everything which Joseph does and his master is blessed both in his house and in his fields. More trouble comes when his wife tries to commit adultery with Joseph, who was both very handsome and well built. He refuses her advances and when she clutches his outer garments, he leaves them and flees the scene.

When Potiphar comes home, she uses Joseph's coat as proof of an attempted rape and Joseph is put in the royal prison. She might have wanted to accuse Joseph first, before he could accuse her and her lie works. It is interesting that Joseph is put into the Royal prison and not the one for ordinary criminals. Potiphar may not have believed his wife and may have also been a little afraid of Joseph, who was obviously favoured by the gods.

The same level of blessing follows Joseph in the prison and he is put in charge of all the other prisoners. We do not have to be in a good place for the blessing of G-d to follow us. There is a time lapse of unspecified length and two palace officials are put into the Royal prison under the supervision of Joseph – Pharaoh's baker and his taster.

Pharaoh had someone who always tasted his wine and his food, to make sure it was not poisoned. Each of them had a strange dream about what was going to happen to them in three days and Joseph was able to tell them what the dreams meant. He said that in three days the taster would be restored to his favoured position and that the baker would be hung. When it happened the way Joseph explained, the taster did not speak to Pharaoh on behalf of Joseph, so he remained in prison for another two years.

Strange as it may seem, the Royal prison was the safest place for Joseph to be. He was out of his sibling's reach and of Potiphar's evil wife. G-d's protection and provision will always follow believers, even when we are in a tough place. Joseph had done nothing to incur his brothers' jealousy and he was innocent of the charges Potiphar's wife brought against him.

He was in a safe place and at an appropriate time, G-d would release him from prison and he would see his dreams come true. Not all dreams are from G-d, but the ones He gives us will be fulfilled in His time, not ours. As messianic believers we should be patient as we wait for his kingdom to come. In our Messiah, we are all in a safe place and as we respond to the situations of our life with faith and obedience, G-d's purposes can be fulfilled through us.

The only safe haven this life has to offer is to take shelter under the wings of the Almighty. From this safe place, none of the storms of life can do us any real harm and His blessing will fill our lives as we learn to walk with the Messiah. I really enjoy the next portion. Shabbat shalom, Shavua Tov and Chag Chanukah.