

Vayigash	And He Came Near	The Cat is Out of the Bag
Torah:	Genesis 44:18-47:17	
Haftarah:	Ezekiel 37:15-28	
Brit Chadashah;	Luke 6:12-16	

When Joseph's goblet is found in Benjamin's sack, Joseph is prepared to take him into captivity. He wanted his brothers to plead for Benjamin even though they did not hear him when he pleaded. After Judah's very eloquent plea for mercy, Joseph reveals himself to his brothers and tells them to go home and bring their father into the safety of Egypt because there are still five years of famine left. Pharaoh agrees and the brothers are equipped with everything they need to go and bring their families into Egypt.

Jacob is slowly convinced and just before he leaves the Holy Land, he has a vision from YHVH who approves the move. Then the names of Jacob's children who go with him into Egypt are given. There are seventy of them. Their wives and daughters are not included in the listing because seventy is a way of saying both that Israel will become a great nation and that this nation will be a blessing to all mankind.

Joseph has a very touching reunion with his father whom he has not seen for some 20 years. His family settles in Goshen which is on the Nile delta and is the most fertile part of Egypt. It was marshy and there must have been lots of bugs, but the people do not complain.

When the people run out of resources to buy grain, they sell themselves and their lands to Pharaoh in the name of Joseph. The passage ends with a time lapse which says that the people were fruitful and their number was greatly multiplied.

Judah shows his leadership in the wording of his plea. He is not only pleading for Benjamin, but also for his brothers and his father. He would rather face a lifetime of slavery than see the sadness of his father at the loss of yet another favourite son. He did not want to be guilty forever if he lost Benjamin. By this point, none of the brothers are in their youth and they have all established families. Judah does not know that Joseph is about to plead for all of them.

They could not believe it when Joseph reveals himself. As it happened, they must have also thought back to his dreams. In a very real way, if Joseph had not endured being kidnapped and sold into slavery, his dreams could not have come true. Sometimes we have to go through even years of great trials before we receive what we have been promised by YHVH.

Joseph does not show any anger towards the brothers who sold him into slavery. He must have realized that it was YHVH who sent him into Egypt. YHVH can use our mistakes and even our sinful behaviour to accomplish His purposes. Nowhere in the passage does it ever say that YHVH approved of the brother's actions. Two things. YHVH can use horrible things to bring good things into our lives and none of the trials and tribulations we face, will ever be able to stop the eventual blessing of G-d from coming our way.

Joseph had a good life in Egypt as the enduring blessing of YHVH used all of his apparent setbacks to advance His purposes in Joseph's life and in Jacob's life.

I wonder how many times Jacob swatted his sons for both the horrible way they treated Joseph and for the awful lie they told their father. For twenty years, they let their father believe that Joseph was dead. And if Joseph had not toyed with them, they probably would have never told their father the truth.

Judah is now definitely the leader of his brothers and Jacob chose him to go and announce his arrival to Joseph. When Jacob is told by YHVH that His blessing would follow them both into and out of Egypt, this is the last time the Abrahamic blessing applies to just one person, instead of to the whole nation. He is told he is going to die in Egypt because it is a safe place for the nation to grow and Jacob is not going into some kind of exile.

The tribes are listed according to their birth mothers and not according to their ages. Zilpa and Bilha may still have been alive and they join the motley crew of brothers, nephews and nieces who will grow into the nation of Israel. Righteous people and people of faith may frequently suffer difficulties and setbacks, but neither the provision (and protection) nor the purposes of YHVH will ever abandon them (Hebrews 13:5).

Our faith does not excuse us from experiencing great pain and even loss, but as long as we hold on to Him, in the final analysis we are safe and sound. Maybe not in this life, but definitely in the next life. The ovens of Auschwitz became portals through which the people of Israel entered into YHVH's rest until His Kingdom comes and they find life again. The sum total of all the horrors this life may plunge us into is not worthy to be compared to wonder of the glory which YHVH is storing up for us (Romans 8:18).

Whether we are mightily blessed or have to suffer enormous tribulation, as long as we keep our eyes on the Messiah and His coming Kingdom, in the long run, we are in excellent shape spiritually. We don't go looking for trouble, but we should never let this unwelcomed guest dim our vision of our Saviour or of His coming Kingdom.

Once the people are settled, Joseph presents five of his brothers to Pharaoh and I think that both Judah and Reuben were included in the number. As shepherds, they remain an abomination to the Egyptians, but not only does one of their number govern Egypt, but they are all given land in the best part of the country. People have often seen G-d's people as an abomination, but it is only YHVH's opinion which matters.

Joseph's great wisdom did not spare him from being kidnapped or imprisoned, but it eventually enabled him to assume the number two position in Egypt. The other courtiers may have been jealous, but there is no indication that Joseph oppressed those under his control. There is also no mention of him taking vengeance against Potiphar's wife for her false accusation. There is a Chinese proverb which says that if you seek vengeance, you better dig two graves.

There will always be two versions of our lives. There is first the one which the world and those around us see and then there is the one which YHVH sees. Joseph's brothers may have beaten him when they were throwing him into the empty cistern, but though Joseph scared them and forced them to come clean, they were not beaten as part of their punishment. Again Jacob may have smacked them, but we should always see the provision of G-d and His greater picture as the reality we both live for and live in. The grindstone of G-d may grind very slowly, but it grinds very fine and very thoroughly.

Sermon: Time Keeps Moving On. Do You? May you have a Happy New Year's.

A friend of mine did a time perception study and helped me understand why time seems to be passing more quickly every year. For a three year old, each year is a third of their life. For a soon to be seventy old man, each year is a mere 1/70 of my life. The last year that did not seem to be speeding up for me, was 1969. How should we live and practice our faith in a world which is always speeding up? As we bid 2022 farewell, I want to share with you three ways that believers can maximize their time as they travel through our darkening world.

First, in the present portion of our lives, we need to live with all our strength (Eccl. 9:10). We have to always be looking for G-d's way of escape when we are stumbling through a dark valley (I Cor. 10:13). When we are going through good times, we need to rejoice in YHVH (Phil. 4:4). We have to keep our own nose clean (I Tim. 5:22) and not follow the crowd. We need to live our lives by conviction (Rom. 14:23) and never by group consensus.

We also have to understand that YHVH has good things planned for our lives (Jer. 29:11). We need to see each new day as an opportunity to do the good works which YHVH has prepared for us to practice (Eph. 2:10). And even when we know that we are right and the other person is being ridiculous, we must never quarrel, because it is a colossal, cosmic waste of time (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

When we are suffering, we need to pray. When we are joyful, we need to sing songs. When we are sick, we need to ask for prayer (and take our meds) and for the elders to anoint us with oil. We need to know that we will recover and that our sins are forgiven (James 5:13-15).

We need to accept the stage of life we have arrived at and determine to do everything to the best of our ability, even if that ability is no longer what it used to be. At every stage of our lives, we are called to do our best. We have to love all the people YHVH brings into our lives, no matter how easy or difficult it gets. We have to be good examples to our growing children. We have to be helpful to those older than us and we have to comfort anyone who is going through any difficulty (2 Cor. 1:2-4).

We have to stand up for the poor, the widows and the strangers in our midst. We also have to learn to do what we know we should and not rely on our feelings to guide us. We need to learn to recognize the hand of YHVH in the wonder of His creation and in the provision and protection He brings into our lives. We need to thank our Messiah for giving us the desire and the ability according to His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13).

We need to learn to be restful and peaceful whatever He allows to wander into our lives. We need to be prepared to speak about our faith whenever we are asked for the reasons we believe (I Pe. 3:15). We need to seek His Kingdom in everything that we do (Matt. 6:33). We need to learn to recognize His hand, even we are being slapped down, persecuted and when people are telling malicious lies about us.

We need to love the members of our family and enjoy them at every stage of their lives. We need to learn to organize our days so that we can apply our hearts and souls to wisdom (Ps. 90:12). We need to read and study our Bibles, even if it can only be for a short time. We need to be in prayer and not worry about anything (Phil. 4:6,7). We need to see every day as a gift from G-d, whether things are going our way or whether we are up the creek without a paddle.

Next when it comes to the past we have lived through, we need to let go of the things which caused us pain and let the Messiah begin to heal any wounds that haven't healed yet. We need to also let the past recede and not intrude, either into our present or into our future. I was bullied a lot in school. Gratefully, the names and the faces of the perpetrators are fading.

In my past, I did things which I shouldn't have done and I didn't do things which I should have done (James 4:17). I know that I have hurt many people and that many people have hurt me. I need to learn to forgive myself and to forgive them (Matt. 6:14, 14). Instead of thinking how bad some things were that intruded into my life, I need to realize that it could have been worse. I also need to be grateful when they are gone.

When I think if only I had said this or done this, or if only this had happened to me, I need to remember a French proverb: "with all the if's we could put Paris in a bottle". When I got sick in Quebec, I was not told that I could have taken a year off to recover. But if I had taken the year off, my son would not have met his wife and I would have missed out on knowing so many amazing people. We should let all the horrible things which have happened to us and all the horrible people who tormented us, make us appreciate the good things in our lives and those marvellous people who enrich our lives so much.

You may not be aware of this, but in 1959, my parents flipped coin between Canada and New Zealand. I have come to really appreciate this frozen wasteland and have no regrets about not growing up in New Zealand.

Over the years I have had some really good times and some amazing belly laughs. But it is not wise to pine about the good old days (Eccl. 7:10). Dwelling on the past is a trap more people fall into as they age. Some tend to view the past through rose coloured glasses and it diminishes their ability to live in the present and to plan for the future.

My mother-in-law turned 92 this summer and she once told us that she wants to live long enough to see who the great grandchildren marry. When we started the shul, there were not enough funds to cover a reasonable salary, so for two years I worked a series of temporary and part-time jobs. I rarely had a day off, but quitting was not an option and I got to meet some interesting people and did some strange and wonderful things.

I know my full strength will never come back fully and that Patti and I are going to need more and more help as we go about the business of living. The only thing I want to do when I think of the things an energetic and slightly crazy young man did, is to get a t-shirt made with the following caption: 'The older I get, the better I was'.

A part of me will likely always miss Africa and when I get too nostalgic, I listen to Miriam Makeba and watch videos about that amazing continent. My mom has been gone for 23 years and I will always miss her. When she died, I wrote her a letter and set it on fire so that it would get to her faster. I said in the letter that there would always be a part of my heart where she is still alive and where we can continue to argue about things we did not see eye to eye on when she was alive.

As I grew up, my father was unbearably abusive and manipulative off the scale, but when he died, I sat Kaddish for him and remembered some amazing stories about a man who was also a courageous adventurer. They both called me: "Mickey Mikes" and it still makes me smile.

As I was doing my best to come to terms with all the negative things that still wanted to cause me pain in my life, I read a book that said whenever a negative message rears its ugly head, I needed to come up with a positive one that cancelled the impact of the negative one. I call it my Litany of Healing and it continues to do a good job.

The late Queen Mom said that duty was the rent you pay for living. She also said that regrets are like a cancer that will eat away at your heart. Some kinds of pain are permanent, but we do not need to let them take over our lives. The Holocaust will always bring sorry and anger into my heart, but I worked through it so that it does not poison my life. One day, I may make it to Auschwitz to honour the memory of the millions who were murdered. One day, I also hope to visit Israel and spend some time praying in Yad Vashem and read the names of both the victims and those courageous heroes who saved them.

How you are dealing with your past will have a big impact on both your present and your future. When I learned that the government of Canada allowed a few hundred Nazis to hide in our country in return for some of the strategic information they shared, I was incensed. When I was in Montreal, I found out that six of them were still alive and I wanted them to finally face justice for the crimes which they committed. A little old Jewish lady who was a survivor said something which shamed me a little and caused me to respect her greatly. She said: "Let those old men die in peace, give me the children."

I am not out to get justice like some kind of vendetta which keeps me awake at night. If they are brought to justice, it would make me happy. If they have to wait for Judgment Day to answer for their crimes, I am content to wait. In Israel, both Jews and Arabs lost homes and property which they will never get back. Instead of filling their lives with anger and regret, they should be grateful that they escaped with their lives and rebuild. Being chained to the past is one of the worst tragedies which can befall anyone in this life.

I want to live joyfully in the present and be prepared to face the future which I cannot avoid. There will certainly be new challenges and old enemies who will be making return performances. I want to use what I have learned and what I have on hand to walk confidently into the future, especially since we all know that one day His Eternal Kingdom will break forth over all the nations and generations of mankind.

Patti and I have prepared more than one hundred couples for marriage and one of the biggest principles we try and teach them is that marriage is a constant state of renegotiation. I have quit wanting to grow old with my amazing wife because we are already old and we intend to enjoy to the fullest all the time we have left. We have kept 56 troubled young people in our home and while that part of our lives is over, I still want to have a positive impact on the young people who come into our lives and show them that there is still fire in these old bones.

A young lady asked an 85 year old man when life stopped being fun. He thought about for a couple of seconds and said that all he knew for sure is that it was sometime after 85. We are both starting to rattle and shake and sometimes things take longer than they used to, but we want to enjoy our lives and our ministries as long as we draw breath. It does not scare me that I am getting closer and closer to graduating from this old life, but all believers should determine to live their lives to the fullest until it is their turn to rest in the dust with our ancestors. My hearing has diminished and my sight is not so good, but my humour is still amazing and when I meet new people, I am grateful to G-d for giving me new people to torment and love.

I have lived through some of the most amazing technological advances in human history, but there is still nothing new under the sun and my curiosity has not abated and never will. I am not planning to go to the moon, when that becomes more of a reasonable economic possibility and my allergies keep me from enjoying those massive cruise ships that are three or four times bigger than the Titanic. I would still like to sail across the Pacific in a tanker and set foot on Pitcairn Island, which is the most isolated place on earth.

I am still fascinated with all of our young folk who are growing up in our midst and after I am gone, if any of you ever stop attending shul, I will ask YHVH for permission to come back and haunt you! We are getting close to a cure for most forms of cancer and HIV and AIDS may soon be brought under control. One day, abortion will just be a sad memory and the gay agenda will never succeed in making that or any other forms of sexual immorality acceptable behaviour.

I want to see hunger become a thing of the past and I want to be around as thousands and thousands of people are becoming believers around the world. I want to see pollution come under control and while I firmly believe that climate change is part of a millennial weather pattern, I want to see human ingenuity deal with the impact the changing climate is having on our world.

The threat of nuclear war is still real and some day I would like to think of it as a sad chapter of our history and I would like to live to see all nuclear weapons dismantled. I was thrilled when the USSR dissolved and I want to live to see China set free of the grip of communism. It is my hope that abortion becomes a thing of the past and even though I know we will not have enduring peace until Messiah's Kingdom comes, I want to continue to participate in the healing of our world and not contribute to its destruction.

I want to enjoy the reign of King Charles III and still be around to see William V crowned. I want to show my wife around Europe and even walk up the path at Masada, before I am too old. When I was in High School they said that all of our fossil fuel will be depleted by the year 2000, but we were told not to worry because we would all perish in a massive nuclear war before that happened.

I know that spiritual resistance and even religious persecution is on the rise globally, but I intend to go down fighting because no politically correct agenda will ever shut me down. I can remember when racism was a greater problem in the US than it is today and when our indigenous folk all lived in poverty, both on their reserves and in our cities.

I want to look forward to a bright future in the Messiah, because in Him we will always be more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37). Our life expectancy is still rising and we are learning to take better care of ourselves. When I was younger, middle age was said to begin at 40 and old age at 60. Now middle age begins at 65 and old age well into your 80's.

While I sometimes get tired of living, it is usually when I get overtired or have too much on my plate. The Messiah places a high value on our spiritual happiness and I want to see more of this in 2023. I want our shul to grow until the sanctuary is filled and I want our finances to stabilize so that we can afford an assistant and maybe even someone who can lead music. I want us to have an exciting Shabbat School and an amazing youth group. There are so many new Hebrew songs and chants I want us to learn as we remain a dynamic Messianic Community of Jews and Gentiles. Shabbat Shalom and Happy New year's campers.