

Vayechi	And Jacob Lived	The Birth of a Nation
Torah:	Genesis 47:28-50:26	
Haftarah:	I Kings 2:1-12	
Brit Chadashah:	I Peter 1:1-9	

This week's Portion brings our study of the Book of Genesis to a close. It deals with Jacob's final days and with his prophetic blessings over his sons. It ends with Jacob's death and burial and a brief discussion of the life of Joseph. From the point on, the Torah deals with the life of the nation and not with any single individual.

When Jacob is 147 years old, he knows his life is just about over. He calls for Joseph and makes him swear that Jacob's body will be buried in the burial cave in Canaan. In order to swear this solemn oath, Joseph had to grab his father's privates, which is what putting your hand under someone's thighs means. There was nothing sexual or perverted about this ritual.

After the oath swearing, Jacob officially adopts Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Jacob is sick, but he gathers his strength for the formal adoption ceremony. He adopts the two brothers who were born to Joseph in Egypt, but says that any subsequent children will have to be called by the names of one of the brothers.

The sons are presented to Jacob and he purposely places Ephraim as the heir and not Manasseh who is the oldest. He himself was the heir, even if he was not the oldest twin. It is a formal ceremony which follows a prescribed pattern and the other brothers accept the adoption. It may be out of shame for the way they treated Joseph and also out of relief that they were neither enslaved nor executed.

There is an indication that all the brothers would receive an equal share of Jacob's wealth, once he died. Over and above any inheritance, Jacob gives Joseph the treasure he has won from the Amorites using his bow and his sword. No details of these fights are recorded in the Scriptures, but they must have occurred while Jacob was guarding Laban's sheep. We are told that sometimes the thieves got away with some livestock and Jacob had to reimburse Laban out of his own pocket.

Most of the next chapter deals with the prophetic blessings which Jacob bestows on his sons. The first three are not blessings, but are rebukes for these sons' bad behaviour. Reuben soiled his father's bed when he slept with Rachel's nurse. Simeon and Levi committed murder when they murdered the men of Hamor while they were recovering from being circumcised. For this unwarranted act of violence, they will be scattered among the people of Israel and do not receive any kind of blessing.

There are two brothers which receive amazing blessings, far above anything the other brothers received. The blessings are listed according to their birth order, so we will deal with Judah first. For saving Joseph and offering to remain a slave in place of Benjamin, he is placed in a position of leadership over the rest of his brothers. As well as receiving homage from his brothers, he will also place his hand on the neck of his enemies. This is an act of dominance over a defeated foe whom you have not killed. Touching the neck meant that the enemy had no more resistance left and fully surrenders.

This is followed by a series of symbolic prophecies that give more detail about his future exalted status. Judah is both called a young lion who devours his prey and as a lioness who cannot be driven away from her kill.

What follows is one of major messianic prophecies in the Torah. Jacob says that the ruling sceptre will not depart from him, nor the sovereign baton until Shiloh comes and the people obey him. This is reference to the future Messiah who will not just rule over Israel, but over all nations. The last king of Judah, Archelaus, was deposed while Yeshua was dwelling in Herod's territory. When this happened, one of the rabbis said that sceptre has departed from Judah and we are not saved. The future universal kingship of our Messiah was described in the Bible with references like this.

49:11,12 is a poetic description of his amazing prosperity. Vines are mentioned along with eyes red with wine and white teeth whitened by milk. These last few verses could be applied to Messiah because there will be no limits to his resources.

Jacob says that Zabulon will dwell on Israel's coasts and that Issacar will be strong enough to survive paying a large tribute to his enemies. Dan is going to judge his people and is also called an ankle biting serpent. 49:18 is Jacob taking a breather to remind himself of the deliverance which comes from YHVH.

Gad will be victorious over his enemies, while Asher becomes a good cook and Naphtali will produce some amazing poetry. Jacob tries to give Joseph the biggest blessing. He gives an eloquent seven fold blessing which describes Joseph as the victorious rock and shepherd of Israel. He will be blessed from on high and from the waters below the heavens. The maternal breasts are also blessed and he will receive a greater blessing than Jacob's ancestors received. These will come onto the head of Joseph who is described as a prince of his people. Deliverance will come from Joseph, but salvation will come from Judah.

The blessing section ends with a description of Benjamin as a victorious, mighty wolf.

Jacob then gives his funeral instructions and then gathers his feet up on his bed and dies. This may mean that after he gave his blessings and the funeral instructions, he never got up out of his bed again.

When he dies, he is embalmed over a 40 day period, followed by a 60 day mourning period. It is not said if the whole of Egypt mourned Jacob, or just the members of his family. Joseph asks for permission to bury his father with all of his brothers, but promises to come back once the burial is completed. Many high officials from Pharaoh's household go with them and this would have included a contingent of soldiers.

They apparently rested for an additional mourning period and where this occurred was called Abel-Mitzraim (the place where the Egyptians mourned). Once back in Egypt, Joseph's brothers pronounce another lie and say that Jacob told them to tell Joseph not to kill them. He comforts them and lives to be 110 years old, which means he spent 93 years in Egypt. He made the Children of Israel swear to take his body with them and bury it in Canaan. Joseph had to be buried in an Egyptian manner and his body could not be disturbed until Israel was preparing to leave Egypt. Things may come and things may go, the only important thing in our lives is to be living under the provision and protection of YHVH.

Second Winter Series: Spiritual Flexibility (2 Corin. 6:1-10)

I do not know what you expected when you came to faith, but I was prepared for an incredible adventure in a life full of happy endings. Before coming to faith, my life was full of disappointments and unhappy endings.

True spirituality means having the flexibility to be grateful when things do not turn out the way we expected. I am a firm believer in the provision and the protection of YHVH and he brings so much peace and love and joy into my life that I will not get discouraged when it is time for a long walk through the valley off the Shadow of Death.

You see, walking the bumpy straight and narrow means that there will be good times where everything just falls into place. But it also means that there will be trying times that break your heart and which may even knock you flat for a while. You will be wounded as well as healed and your life will be as full of tears as it is of laughter.

The apostle Paul was big on believers living abundant lives full of peace and joy. But he also wanted us to be prepared for spiritual warfare with a triple enemy which never fights fair. The flesh wants you to stumble, the world wants you give in to the works of the flesh and the enemy of your souls wants you totally destroyed and broken into painful tiny little pieces.

The thoughts YHVH thinks for us are full of love and plans to give us a future full of good things (Jer. 31:3 and 29:11). He will withhold no good thing from those who walk with integrity (Ps. 84:11). He will lead us beside quiet waters as he restores our battered souls. Our souls are both at rest in the Messiah and are in the middle of a fight to the death in a hostile, darkening world. It is not so much a question of which kind of life you lead, it is a question of realizing that there will be good times and bad times and moments of great joy and moments of great sadness. The apostle Paul liked expressing the truths about our Messiah in ways which would make us think. Lets look at our passage.

“Since we work for G-d, we exhort you not to receive the grace of G-d in vain. For He said: At a favourable time, I will answer you and in the day of salvation, I rescued you. But now is the favourable time and now is the day of salvation. We do not want to scandalize anyone about anything so that the ministry would no become an object of blame.

We want to make ourselves capable of being recommended in every way as the servants of YHVH: by a lot of patience in tribulations, in calamities and distress, being beaten in prison, in dealing with seditions, labours, in keeping watch late into the night, in fasting,

by purity and knowledge, by long suffering, by goodness, by the Holy Spirit, by a sincere love, by the Word of truth, by the power of G-d, by the defensive and offensive weapons of righteousness, in the midst of glory and of shame, in the midst of a good and a bad reputation, being considered as imposters even though we are the true, as unknown, even though we are well known, as dying, but yet we live. As chastised and yet not put to death, as saddened and yet we are always joyful, as poor and yet we enrich many people, as having nothing and yet we possess all things (2 Corinthians 6:1-10).

First of all, we need to learn to trust in the timing of G-d, when things are going our way and when everything seems to be going wrong. True spiritual flexibility means never giving up on walking with YHVH, no matter what comes our way. He will always be with us every day until His kingdom breaks forth or until we take our turn sleeping in the dust. It is time to trust and obey YHVH today and every day. We are ambassadors of the King and sometimes we have to be skilled warriors, battling the real forces of evil and darkness.

We do not want to scandalize anyone by engaging in spiritual misbehaviour. The works of the flesh are actually various kinds of spiritual misbehaviour. Among them, the big three are gossip, lying and cheating. I have frequently been on the receiving end of most of the works of the flesh, but I continue to prevent them from taking root in my heart and my life.

I know believers and even clergymen who practice sexual immorality, drunkenness and even engage in robbing the sheep instead of tending the flock (I knew he was a shepherd when I saw him fleecing the flock). The challenge for us is to never let the misbehaviour of others motivate us to follow suit. The first time I caught a fellow believer in a lie, I was both heartbroken and enraged. The first time I was lied about and defamed by other believers, my disappointment was boundless. It is still going on as we speak.

I know many believers feel that when you walk with the King, you will have endless peace and great prosperity. They become disillusioned and bitter when things do not work out for them. There was once a mother of a diabetic child who was told that if she wanted to see him healed, she should take him off his medications. When he got sick and died, she was told that he would rise from the dead in three days. She was taken to court and was found to be guilty of first degree murder. She faced no jail time out of compassion for her great loss and showed great courage in not abandoning the faith. She even wrote a book with a very sad title "We let our baby die".

The evangelist who gave her such rotten advice, should face jail time, but in most cases they say that the miracles did not happen because those asking for them did not have enough faith. This kind of: "name it and claim it" nonsense brings shame to the ministry. Believers can be anywhere on the political spectrum, but those on the left should not attack those on the right and those on the right should not accuse those on the left of abandoning their faith.

You will never hear anyone who shares from this pulpit call for violence against the gay community or against those who perform and support abortion. I want to be clear in why I could never endorse things which the Bible forbids, but those who are caught in any kind of brokenness will only receive love and compassion from this source.

A large part of negotiating our faith is learning how to remain calm, even as the roller coaster ride of our faith takes us to some dangerous and unwanted places. We will have much tribulation which will call for much patience, so we do not quit or run away when things start to heat up. We will encounter calamities like the war in the Ukraine which may rip our lives apart. We should never let anyone or anything rip apart our spirituality.

We may even be beaten and thrown in jail for our faith and hanging on to both our faith and our trust in YHVH may not be an easy thing to do. The 23rd Psalm is a mighty poem about great peace and tranquility in the midst of great turmoil and distress. YHVH will never abandon you and in every trial we should always be looking for His way of escape.

People will tell seditious lies about us and falsely accuse us of many kinds of heinous crimes, just to try and sink our faith and get us to shut up about the Messiah. I have been targeted in this way, but shutting up about the Messiah, has never been an option. I am not afraid of any level of scrutiny, as long as it is not just opening the door to character assassination. The only thing worse than being the object of seditious lies, would be to follow suit. It is not so important what people say about you, it is about walking in the light of the Word and only listening to those who are also walking in the light.

Sometimes we will have to live on red alert when great danger is imminent and sometimes things may come our way which can only be dealt with by prayer and fasting. Listening to bad things which some people are prone to speak about is a bad spiritual habit. We are called both to never speak bad things about people and to strive for reconciliation and peace.

There are still some believers who would cross the street if they saw me and take great pleasure in telling anyone who will listen the many things that are supposedly wrong with me. Fighting fire with fire sometimes means you burn your own house down. Our response should always be governed by the priorities of G-d's Word and not by the flesh, the world and the enemy.

When we encounter dirt and defilement, we need to respond with purity and with a firm grip on the truths of G-d's Word. Some problems and some problem people may cause us long term grief, but not giving up easily on people will draw us closer to them and closer to the Messiah. He has never given up on me or on anybody who wants to walk with Him. While I was a part-time volunteer Chaplain at the old Montreal Maximum prison, I was really impressed when some believing inmates actually lead a prison guard to the Messiah.

It may take longer than we like for things to start turning around and sometimes we may have to just accept the fact that certain things will never turn around. I heard of an old time preacher who prayed for his unbelieving brother every day of his life. I am told that the brother accepted the Lord at the believing brother's funeral. There are people I have been praying for 52 years and I will continue to do so until they either come to the faith or the Messiah tells me to stop praying for them.

And even in our cruel, cold world, I want to exercise goodness and work for the healing of the world (Tikkun Olam). People should know that I will always be kind and helpful to the best of my abilities and my resources. I want to manifest the Holy Spirit as my secret guardian and sometimes as my secret weapon. I never want to be far from the presence of G-d and as a labourer in His vineyard, I want to be cultivating the fruit of the Spirit.

These days' it is too easy to tell people that you love them, even when you hardly know them and do not really care about them. Pretending friendship is sometimes no more than a good sales technique. I want to exercise sincere love and I want to experience sincere love. And in the midst of the great uncertainty which our current society seems to revel in, I want to be known as one who knows the Bible, and as one who shares the Word and who puts it into practice in every area of my life. I want people to see the power of G-d in me, when I pray for the sick and when I encounter any of the forces of evil who try to sneak across my path. I want the power of G-d to overcome all and any power of the enemy and in this conflict, you will never see me cringing in a corner. I want to always come out swinging and see the enemy's fortresses come tumbling down because nothing can stand before the power of G-d.

Our passage goes on to pair opposites together, so that instead of being surprised when we encounter setbacks, we are prepared to face them down and overcome them. To do this effectively, we must use both the defensive and offensive weapons of righteousness. I will try and answer all reasonable objections to my faith and sometimes people's objections can turn into access points for the truth of G-d to find its way into their lives.

Sometimes we will receive incredible accolades where people express appreciation for our participation in their lives. Sometimes we will also be despised for making the effort to participate in their lives. Sometimes we will have a bad reputation because we do not accept the Gay Agenda and for being pro-life in a pro-choice world. We may be called names and be told that we are following a faith system that is both false and toxic.

It is far too common for adversaries to participate in character assassination when they cannot refute our words. I do not think all gays are necessarily evil people and pro-choice people are not all monsters. I want to focus on ideas and on positions and not try and destroy anyone who dares to disagree with me. I will sometimes have a good reputation mainly because I refuse to quarrel and play dirty.

Sometimes we will be accused of being imposters and even fake Jews who use a Jewish disguise to try and sneak up on unsuspecting Jewish people and recruit them out of their Judaism. I am a practising Jew who lives an observant lifestyle according to what the Bible teaches and not according to the traditions of men. I do not pretend to live one way, when in fact I am actually living another way. I am the real deal, nothing less and nothing more. Some people will see me as being for real, while others will always suspect me of hypocrisy by using my faith as a cover for the sins I am supposedly practising behind people's backs.

Some people have never heard of Messianic Judaism and our efforts to be salt and light do not seem to be making an impact in their lives. Others have become well aware of us and of our ministry and their support is much appreciated.

Some of us will be put to death and suffer martyrdom and some people even see this kind of death as our number one objective. Living for the Messiah is the central objective of our lives and we will continue to live on, even as we see many of our brothers and sisters put to death. Sometimes we will also face great obstacles to our faith and suffer varying degrees of loss, as if someone were punishing us for being believers in the Messiah from Nazareth. Sometimes we will be killed and at other times we will be severely punished for our faith.

While we are going through the storms, we will be saddened and yet, at the same time, as long as keep our eyes on the coming Kingdom, we will always be joyful, even in the midst of our tears and our wounds. We will never really get rich from the Gospel and those who do, are peddlers of G-d's Word and are not really sincere believers. There are some big time ministries which cost a lot to run, but profit should never be our first motive when we work for our King. We will make many people spiritually rich and material wealth should not have even the slightest hold over our hearts and lives.

We may not personally own much as we travel through this world, but it is the Messiah's world, so in a very real way, we possess all things. How well are you relating to both the positive and the negative sides of the Gospel? Shabbat Shalom and Shavua Tov, campers.