

PARASHAH: Vayeshev (He continued living)
ADDRESS: B'resheet (Genesis) 37:1-40:23
READING DATE: Shabbat
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(Note: all quotations are taken from the Complete Jewish Bible, translation by David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., unless otherwise noted)

Let's begin with the opening blessing for the Torah:

***“Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-‘Olam,
asher bachar banu m’kol ha-amim,
v’natan lanu eht Torah-to.
Baruch atah YHVH, noteyn ha-Torah.
Ameyn.”***

(Blessed are you, O' LORD, our God, King of the Universe,
you have selected us from among all the peoples,
and have given us your Torah.
Blessed are you, LORD, giver of the Torah.
Ameyn.)

Welcome to **Parashat Vayeshev**. By now it should be rather obvious to those of you who have been following this series, that the Torah is a living, “breathing” piece of literature spanning the lives and deaths of men, families, tribes, and even whole nations. If you have just joined in, I want to bring to your attention that the Torah is a supernatural, carefully planned-out document, designed to instruct and prepare its readers in every facet of their being. As we can observe by reading it ourselves, some of the many ways it chooses to present itself is by means of narrative, poetic, historic, prophetic, and legal structures to name a few. I encourage and challenge you to read God's Torah for yourself.

This week, we quickly switch our focus from that of our latest familiar character, Ya'akov, to the life and times of one of his youngest and most famous sons, Yosef (Joseph). I hope that by this point you have begun to appreciate the fast-paced, highly adventurous story line that our Heavenly Abba has provided for us in the book of B'resheet (Genesis). He could have just as easily skipped many of the exciting details that surround these “heroes of faith” and simply administered to us the “meat” of what is pertinent to us; the parts that help to conform us into the image of his righteousness. Not that any part of HaShem's Torah should be thought of as trivial, for every part of it has been designed to help us to accomplish this task. Yet, I sincerely feel that when he had Moshe “write” the Torah, he made provision for the specific human emotions created within us that desire to “participate” in some way with the intrigue, suspense, excitement, love, and betrayal that we read about in the Torah. After all, we are no strangers to most of these elements, as many of them mark our everyday lives here on earth. In other words, I really believe that he wants us to intimately identify with the lives

of the people we read about; he wants us to look at their lives and be able to see within them, our own lives.

Parashat Vayeshev is no exception to the above said statements. This part of the Torah is far from slow moving! It, like so many other chapters of the Bible, has its moments when the narrative slows down just enough so that we don't miss the highlighted details, but it is never stagnant! One "adventure" gives way into another, and so the plan of HaShem moves on unhindered. The Torah demonstrates for us that there was never an instance in the history of man, that the plans of HaShem have been thwarted, for even a single moment—not by man, not by demon, not by devil—not by any other created thing! HaShem has not abandoned his interest, nor has he ever lost control of the activities and goings on of this creation of his. Everything is predetermined to fulfill its created function, to the Glory and Praise of our Almighty God.

It is with this introduction that I want to quickly move through the details of the story of Yosef, stopping only long enough to glean what I feel the Torah is primarily trying to get us to learn. For, as we shall quickly find out, this particular man's life bears a rather striking resemblance to another, more significant son of Ya'akov, in that Yosef's is a "type" and "shadow" of the man known as Yeshua.

"Introducing Yosef (Joseph)..."

Yosef was a young man of good character. I believe that he was a quiet, simple young man, with the kind of qualities that every parent wants their child to possess: honesty, integrity, loyalty, kind to those around him, gentle, and just the right amount of naivete and curiosity that allowed him to be teachable. Our story line gives us the details surrounding his early adventures with his other eleven, mostly older brothers, and how his position with them quickly degenerated to a state of jealousy and resentment on their part.

We know from our Sunday-school lessons that Yosef was the recipient of a colorful, long-sleeved coat, presented to him by his aging father Ya'akov. What we might not have known is that this type of garment most likely signified his father's choice of tribal leader, once he himself passed away.¹ Surely this went against the cultural norm of his day. For usually the eldest son was guaranteed this coveted position among his family. But in his old age, Ya'akov favored his son Yosef. Moreover, I believe Ya'akov was able to see the anointing that rested on his son, as well as the potential for becoming a great leader some day. This might explain why in chapter 37, when we read about Yosef's God-given dreams of prominence among his other family members, rather than scold him severely for his boy-hood "fantasies," his father decidedly "keeps the matters in his mind"

¹ Compare to the passage in 2 Samuel 13:18, *"And she had a garment of divers colours upon her: for with such robes were the king's daughters that were virgins apparelled. Then his servant brought her out, and bolted the door after her."*

(verse 11). Also, Ya'akov sent his son Yosef to bring back a report of his brothers' activities in verse 14. This demonstrated that the father trusted his son and sensed in him, the above-mentioned potential.

Yosef and Yeshua

Yosef is a picture of the Messiah Yeshua. Yosef was the favored son of the father, amidst all the other sons. Spiritually speaking, our Heavenly Father has many sons, yet he has only one "beloved" Son. It is in this beloved Son that he sees the potential to become the preeminent one among his other brethren, the chosen leader. And so, it is in this Son that he bestowed the "long-sleeved, colored garment" of tribal leadership.

Yosef runs into trouble when he encounters the brunt of his brothers' jealousy and resentment. They spot him as he approaches to check up on them, and they quickly plot to do him harm. They mocked him all the more and decided that enough was enough—It was time, they thought, to rid themselves of this "dreamer"! Initially intending to kill him, they stripped him of his garments and instead, tossed him into an empty well, until it was decided what to do with him. Strangely, the Torah is silent as to any type of retaliation or struggle on the part of Yosef. Why didn't he put up a fight? Was he a helpless weakling? In an act of nobility, Re'uven intercedes on Yosef's behalf, and they decide not to kill him, but rather to render him "powerless," so as to be unable to return with a report to his father. Actually, the Torah states that they really wanted to kill him then and there, yet Re'uven's sensibility enabled them to see the folly in that plan, and instead offered them a solution that might simply teach the boy a lesson, while sparing the shedding of blood also.

In the life of Yeshua, his brothers (the Judeans) also discerned that a supernatural favor rested on him from his (self-proclaimed) Father. They quickly became jealous and began to resent him as well. They began to tire of hearing about his "dreams" of preeminence and servitude, and they decidedly plotted to kill him, thereby silencing his ability to bring any type or report about them to this Father of his. But Yeshua, being humble and obedient to the Father's command, just like Yosef, became "naïve" and allowed them to strip him of his garments and hand him over to strangers. He experienced the same sibling mockery that Yosef did—indeed much worse—yet he, like Yosef, did not retaliate.

So, this time at Y'udah's suggestion, Yosef's brothers sell him to a bunch of desert merchants, who are on their way to Egypt. In this way, they indeed do spare his life. However, when Yeshua's brothers handed him over to the strangers, his life was not spared, but instead, he was sentenced to die. Yosef's life was spared, but his brothers still wanted their father to believe that he did indeed die. So they dipped his coat in blood and concocted a lie about a wild animal devouring him, with only his coat surviving the demise. Because this report of theirs was the only one that Ya'akov had, the Torah teaches that Yosef

“figuratively” died. To be sure, to Ya’akov, his son was indeed dead. Only Yosef’s garment testified on his behalf, the suffering and shame that he experienced at the hands of his tormentors. One day, Yeshua’s bloody garment, which was stripped from him as well, will also testify of the shame and suffering that he experienced at the hands of his tormentors. Let’s read Revelation 19:13:

“And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called the Word of God.”

A Father’s Grief

When the report got back to Yosef’s father that his son had “suffered harm,” Ya’akov rent his garments, that is, he ripped his clothing in two, and he went into intense mourning for his favored son. Likewise, in the New Covenant we read of a rather odd occurrence surrounding the death of Yeshua. Matthew records for us that the Temple curtain, separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, was ripped in two, from the top to the bottom (27:50). You’ve heard it taught that this symbolized the access that we as believers in Yeshua now have to the “Throne of God,” which the Mercy Seat, kept in the Most Holy Place, represented. This is true spiritually, but I want to make a “drash” (homily) and a “remez” (hint) from this occurrence as well.

In the days of the TaNaKH, whenever a father lost a beloved son, he would rip his garment to signify his intense loss. His rending of his garment visually testified of the agony and “ripping” of his soul, as he would never experience earthly fellowship with this beloved son again (see 2 Samuel 13:30, 31 for King David’s reaction at the news of the death of his son Absalom). Today, in modern Judaism, at the loss of a beloved family member, the immediate family (father) is known to cut a small portion of their lapel, symbolic of ripping the entire garment. I believe that the Temple curtain represented the “garment” of HaShem. When his beloved Son “died,” he wanted to send a clear and unmistakable signal to all that witnessed that this was indeed his beloved Son! So, like Ya’akov of our current parashah, he “ripped” his garment to show his intense suffering at the loss of this Son of his. I imagine when Ya’akov’s brothers witnessed the display of sorrow in their father, they must have felt some guilt and shame in their (hidden) dishonesty and lack of family justice. Moreover, when Yeshua’s tormentors witnessed the Temple curtain rent into two pieces, they must’ve also felt shame and remorse because of their recent dishonest activities. Someone of that first century community must’ve seen the correlation between these two familiar acts of mourning; I trust that today, you now see it as well.

Y’hudah “Teaser”

At this point, the Torah makes a seemingly odd turn, and relates to the readers some activities surrounding the life of Y’hudah and his offspring in chapter 38, before switching back to the life of Yosef in chapter 39. It might seem odd at

first, until we realize that one of the main features of the story of the life of Yosef centers on divine selection, despite human frailty and position. Yosef was the chosen of the Holy One. The divine anointing rested upon him, in spite of the fact that he was young, seemingly unimportant, and ill-fated more than once in his life. Likewise, the man Y'udah, would someday receive the preeminent blessing in B'resheet 49:8-12, as well as being the forefather of the tribe from which HaShem chose to bring his Son Yeshua into the world (Revelation 5:5). Y'udah made some pretty serious mistakes in chapter 38, in dealing with his family, but this doesn't discount him from becoming the covenant player that HaShem has preordained him to become. To be sure, as we read further into the life of Yosef, we will find Y'udah emerges as a true leader among his brothers.

Yosef Goes to Egypt

Yosef is eventually sold to a prominent officer of the Pharaoh's guards, to a man named Potifar. Potifar also recognizes the anointing that rests with this man Yosef, and decides to place him in charge of his entire household, including all of his treasured possessions. It is here in Potifar's house that Yosef once again suffers at the fate of jealousy and deceit. Potifar's wife, knowing that her husband works away from the house during the day, tries lustfully to get Yosef to sleep with her. But, being the man of integrity that Yosef is, he refuses. She continues this proposition day after day, until she can no longer control her lustful passions. In a fit of misguided emotion and desperation, she lunges out to him and grabs him by his robe, demanding him to sleep with her. This time Yosef wastes no time in trying to convince her with conversation. Instead, he immediately turns and flees from Potifar's house, leaving his robe in the hands of his would-be adulteress. His honesty and moral fortitude lands him in prison, as she lies about the incident to her husband when he returns home.

Here again it seems as if HaShem has either chosen the wrong man for the anointing, or he doesn't seem to be interested in Yosef's everyday affairs. But nothing could be further from the truth! Yosef's activities in chapter 39 conclude with the comforting assurance that ADONAI was with Yosef (vs. 21), and that ADONAI was prospering him, despite the seeming contradictory circumstances (vs. 23). The parashah concludes in chapter 40 with the familiar story of Yosef in prison, interpreting the dreams of both the chief baker and chief cupbearer of the Pharaoh. As it was, they both also had landed in prison, and HaShem was preparing to bring Yosef into the presence of the ruler of Egypt himself. We will later find out that HaShem used this event to prepare the Pharaoh to consider Yosef's anointing also.

Conclusion

The lessons today should be obvious: HaShem masterfully orchestrated every single event of Yosef's life, bringing him into a position where he would be the

key player in the provision and leadership of the young tribe of Isra'el. It was necessary to allow Yosef to experience the pain and suffering at the hands of his brothers, in order that the ultimate plan of HaShem, a plan that promised blessing and inheritance, might come to pass! So it was this way also for our own Savior Yeshua. He had to suffer shame and humiliation at the hands of his own flesh and blood, in order that the Will of the Almighty would be fulfilled. The life of Yeshua was "sacrificed" so that the lives of his brothers might be saved! We shall see also that the life of Yosef was "sacrificed" so that the lives of his brothers might be saved!

"To be sure, in the case of both Yosef and Yeshua, their immediate families weren't the only ones who would benefit from the sacrifice. The entire land of Egypt, and surrounding communities, were about to witness the provision of Almighty God, as he worked through the obedience of Yosef, a humble, anointed son of Isra'el....

"Likewise, the entire world this time has witnessed (and shall witness again soon) the provision of Almighty God, as he worked through the obedience of Yeshua, his humble, anointed, ONLY-BEGOTTEN Son...."

The closing blessing is as follows:

***"Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-'Olam,
asher natan lanu Torah-emet,
v'chay-yeh o'lam nata-b'tochenu.
Baruch atah YHVH, noteyn ha-Torah.
Ameyn."***

(Blessed are you O' LORD, our God, King of the Universe,
you have given us your Torah of truth,
and have planted everlasting life within our midst.
Blessed are you, LORD, giver of the Torah.
Ameyn.)

"Shabbat Shalom!"

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