

The Patriarch Jacob/Israel is remembered by future generations for his faith to bless his sons and grandsons after him. May we all finish this life and have a testimony of such faith, being known as those who to our dying day were witnessed as worshipping the Holy One. Then *and perhaps only then*, we will surely be able to pass on a testimony of significant spiritual transformation to our progeny!

V'yeishev וַיֵּשֶׁב He continued living “Conflict and Faith”

Genesis 37:1-40:23

Amos 2:6-3:8

In much of the Holy Scriptures, we witness how God often uses conflict to accomplish His will. Just witness how there is a contrast between elements such as light and darkness, good and evil, the Heavens and the Earth, and the flesh versus the Spirit—with them frequently being at odds.⁷³ As the Creator of time, space, and matter—God’s purposes for Planet Earth are subject to the immutable laws of the natural and spiritual realms and dimensions He fashioned. Every created thing has a purpose and a reason for existence, regardless of our mortal ability or inability to fully comprehend the minute or grandiose details of His grand design. This reality came into focus when I meditated upon the sibling rivalry among the sons of Jacob/Israel, which is detailed for us in this week’s Torah portion.

Conflict between people is one of the primary results of human beings inheriting a fallen sin nature in Adam (cf. Romans 5:12ff), and every Bible reader should be innately aware of the first fratricide in how Cain murdered his brother Abel (Genesis 4:1-15). For some reason, I could not help but reflect upon a passage from the Book of Ecclesiastes, which seemed to permeate my thoughts, as I contemplated the various conflicts and acts of oppression described in *V'yeishev*:

“Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression which were being done under the sun. And behold *I saw* the tears of the oppressed and *that* they had no one to comfort *them*; and on the side of their oppressors was power, but they had no one to comfort *them*. **So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living. But better off than both of them is the one who has never existed, who has never seen the evil activity that is done under the sun.** I have seen that every labor and every skill which is done is *the result of* rivalry between a man and his neighbor. This too is vanity and striving after wind” (Ecclesiastes 4:1-4).

consonants, *mem* (מ), *tet* (ט), and *heh* (ה), as *mittah* (מִטָּה) or “bed.” The LXX follows the point of view that Jacob was leaning on his staff as he blessed his sons.

In the scope of meaning, this is a rather small point, but some in the Messianic community have used it to discount the reliability of Hebrews. For further discussion, consult the entry for the Epistle to the Hebrews in *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic*, and the commentary *Hebrews for the Practical Messianic*, by J.K. McKee.

⁷³ For a useful handle on this, and a discussion of why physical matter is ultimately *not* inherently evil, consult the FAQ, “Dualism.”

I had a difficult time considering the perspective of Qohelet, who concludes that it is actually better for a person to have never existed, than for those who have seen all of the evil activity and oppression that is performed under the sun. *Is life really this futile?* The challenge, for those of us seeking to know God, is recognizing how the ills of this world are largely things that fallen people have brought on themselves—and **that we all require Him for salvation and guidance.** The words of Ecclesiastes are often presented from the perspective of what a life without God would be: not something that we would probably want to have.⁷⁴

The main focus of *V'yeishev* this week is the early life experiences of Joseph. Within our *parashah*, we clearly see how the Eternal God allows the natural inclinations of humankind to accomplish His purposes for His chosen ones. Joseph had a unique problem, as he was the favored son of his father Jacob, and this obviously fomented great jealousy and hatred in the hearts of his brothers:

“Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a varicolored tunic. His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers; **and so they hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms**” (Genesis 37:3-4).

This human emotion, which is common to all people, eventually resulted in Joseph being sold to the Ishmaelite traders from Midian, who in turn took Joseph to Egypt and sold him to Potiphar, captain of the Pharaoh's bodyguard (Genesis 37:18-36). It is very true that after being given a revelation by the Holy One, that Joseph's lack of maturity in zealously expressing his dreams to his brothers, could very well have precipitated and enhanced their rage to dispose of him (Genesis 37:5-11)—a lesson to all in that we must be *very careful* and tactful when we think the Lord has communicated something special to us, and we think we can then go out and share it. But in spite of this, Joseph did nothing so abominable so as to merit his other brothers' hatred, and with it a dastardly plot to murder him. If anything, I would suggest that Jacob's preference toward Joseph, as being the firstborn child of his beloved Rachel, caused more of the problems than anything else. For Joseph's brothers, their thoughts must have been that if he were removed from the scene, they would be able to garner more of their father's love and attention.

We know from previous readings over the past few weeks how Jacob, or Israel, was himself a somewhat “conflicted” individual. Although Jacob knew he had inherited the blessings of his grandfather Abraham and father Isaac—and even had some rather unique first hand encounters with the Lord—he still retained various human frailties. The emotions of love and adoration, exemplified in fondness, were difficult for him to hide. By displaying preferential treatment toward Joseph, we can only conclude that the hand of God was able to let the cruel actions of the brothers and various others to accomplish His will. These dealings ultimately positioned Joseph into a place to save the entire family of Jacob/Israel in the future years:

“As for you, you meant evil against me, **but God meant it for good** in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive” (Genesis 50:20).

The Torah relates that despite the potential negative impact of sibling betrayal and being sold into slavery, Joseph's masters visibly recognized the blessing of his God upon

⁷⁴ Consult the author's thoughts on Ecclesiastes in the chapter “Sukkot Reflections on Ecclesiastes,” appearing in the *Messianic Fall Holiday Helper* by Messianic Apologetics. Also consider the entry for the Book of Ecclesiastes in *A Survey of the Tanach for the Practical Messianic* by J.K. McKee.

their servant and prisoner. Joseph was blessed as a slave who served in Potiphar's stead, and even after being falsely accused of trying to rape Potiphar's wife and being imprisoned,⁷⁵ Joseph found favor in the Egyptian prison:

“The LORD was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian. Now his master saw that the LORD was with him and *how* the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hand. **So Joseph found favor in his sight and became his personal servant;** and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he owned he put in his charge” (Genesis 39:2-4).

“But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. The chief jailer committed to Joseph's charge all the prisoners who were in the jail; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible *for it*. The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge because the LORD was with him; **and whatever he did, the LORD made to prosper**” (Genesis 39:21-23).

In spite of his various trials, Joseph maintained a relatively positive attitude about the life circumstances he encountered. Was it faith and confidence expressed in his childhood dreams, or was it his faith in the God of his fathers, that sustained him during these tumultuous times? Perhaps it was a combination of these things, but nevertheless, Joseph knew that he had a special relationship with the Almighty, as he certainly recognized the blessings of favor among his superiors. When Joseph had the opportunity to interpret some dreams while in prison,⁷⁶ he appropriately gave the glory to his God—as the only One who can give a mortal being the true comprehension and interpretation of dreams:

“Then they said to him, ‘We have had a dream and there is no one to interpret it.’ **Then Joseph said to them, ‘Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell it to me, please’**” (Genesis 40:8).

From this statement you might conclude that Joseph had a personal relationship with the Holy One that allowed him to speak so directly and confidently: “Are not solutions from God?” (Alter). The intimacy that Joseph undeniably had to have, with the Heavenly Father, is surely something that each of us needs to heed! We are not going to be sold into slavery, and are probably not going to be falsely accused and thrown into prison. But we all need *and require* incredible patience, faith, and maturity in our lives—and **these things can only come by us being sensitive to the will of God.**

If there is one thing that we should all learn to appreciate about the various episodes related to us in this Torah portion, it is the fact that God uses our common fallen nature *to achieve His goals for His Creation*. We might not always understand the complex relationship of how our free will choices and His sovereignty work together. At times in our lives, we may think that we have complete control over our destiny, but later in retrospect recognize that events transpired by *the Father's doing* after all. As limited beings, we have to each recognize how God is providentially in control of the ultimate outcome. While human conflict is one of the ways that His purposes are realized—and none of us inherently like conflict—events that do not seem to go our way are to drive us to Him, so that He might mold and fashion our faith and character.

God knows the beginning from the end, and as the Creator of time, He is not limited by anything to fulfill His purposes. It is for this main reason why I

⁷⁵ Genesis 39:11-18.

⁷⁶ Cf. Genesis 40:1-23.

encourage Messiah followers to study the Torah. Within Moses' Teaching, we can review the foundational stories and accounts of what God's plan for His Creation truly is. We witness how bad circumstances later turn out to be good, and how evil intentions can ultimately be shifted around into a key stage toward a nation's very survival.

What main lesson can you learn from reviewing *V'yeshiv*? Do you identify more with Joseph, Jacob/Israel, or Joseph's envious brothers? How much faith do you have in the Holy One that terrible events or various tragedies are necessary in order for you to truly seek Him and rely upon Him? How might our Torah portion for this week allow you to more fully understand the Apostle Paul's words in Romans 8:28?

“[W]e know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

Regardless of what happens in your life, allow events and circumstances to draw you ever closer to Him!

Mikkeitz מִקֵּיץ

At the end “Remembering God's Favor”

Genesis 41:1-44:17

1 Kings 3:15-4:1

This week our Torah portion concentrates on the continuing trials and tribulations of Joseph, the dreaming son of Jacob, who was positioned by the Holy One to be the means of deliverance for his family. Throughout *Mikkeitz*, we are informed of how God may use dreams and visions to communicate various things regarding future events to His people. The passage also illuminates the interactions between Joseph and his siblings, with different episodes that reveal how the Lord will use these vivid circumstances to mold the successive generations into a nation of priests for His own possession (cf. Exodus 19:6).

As you consider the various interactions recorded in this *parashah*, it is apparent that the Almighty is intimately involved in the minutest details of the different exchanges. You realize that Joseph, the principal actor in this familial drama, received God's favor and peace as a direct result of his pleasing ways. Torah students can once again be reminded that, like Joseph—if we walk in obedience to God and are sensitive to His direction—we can also receive His blessings.

Impetuous Dreamer

With the continuing narrative of Genesis largely focusing on Joseph in *Mikkeitz*, his godly character is further revealed. We should remember that as a young man Joseph had some rather impressive dreams that, when shared with his brothers, did not exactly win him some admirers (Genesis 37:1-11). In fact, as we should all remember from last week's Torah portion, *V'yeshiv* (Genesis 37:1-40:23), when he told his brothers about his revelation—their jealousy and wrath toward him was exacerbated:

“Then Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, **they hated him even more**” (Genesis 37:5).