

VaYislach And he (Jacob) Sent
Torah: Genesis 32:3(4)-36:43
Haftarah: Obadiah 1:1-21
Brit Chadashah: Hebrews 11:11-20

This week's Torah Portion deals with some of the adventures Jacob has, now that he has returned to Canaan. He has to make peace with his twin, Esau and set up his household in the Promised Land. He wrestles with YHVH (likely through an angel). He and Esau are reconciled and they have both become very rich. Then Jacob settles on land which he has bought from the leader of Shechem. His daughter Dina is taken by a young man, Shechem, who has the same name as his town.

He wants to marry her and says he will pay whatever bride price Jacob asks for. Levi and Simeon convince the men of Shechem to get circumcised and they murder them all on the third day when they would have been in great pain. Jacob moves to Bethel and Rachel dies giving birth to his twelfth son. Esau and Jacob bury Isaac when he is 180 years old. The twins are 120 years old. This occurred when Joseph had been in slavery for three years and it is nine years before Jacob leaves for Egypt.

If the two brothers formed a single camp, their great wealth meant that they had to separate because the country cannot support both of them together. Esau settles on mount Seir and his genealogy is given to four or five generations.

Jacob does not know if his twin still wants to kill him, so he sends him a message and asks to meet up. He divides his camp up and spends the night alone, before he meets with Esau. He wrestles with an angel of YHVH and receives a name change. He is now to be known as Israel because he has wrestled with YHVH and won. Because he doubted YHVH's ability to help him with his brother, he is struck on the hip bone and limped for the rest of his life.

Jacob is troubled when Esau shows up with 400 men. He sends a series of appeasement gifts and when the twins meet up, they cry and kiss each other. Jacob sends Esau on ahead and promises to come to him later. What follows is a sad story which occurred either before the brothers set up camp together or after they had parted ways. Jacob buys a small portion of land and settles close to the town of Shechem. The prince of Shechem violates the laws of hospitality and sleeps with Dinah, taking her into his harem.

I find the treachery of the two brothers, Simeon and Levi, quite disturbing and the act of genocide is not sanctioned by YHVH. Circumcision is a covenant sign and should never be used as a weapon. We are not told how much of the Hebrew faith these Canaanites adopted, but they became part of the covenant and should not have been murdered. Simeon and Levi kill all the men of Shechem and plunder the town, even taking the women and children as part of their spoils.

Jacob did not sanction their actions and said that they were causing him trouble because the remaining inhabitants, who were related to Shechem, might seek vengeance and wipe out the camp. The inhabitants become afraid of them and they are left alone. When it says that Rebekah's nurse, Deborah dies, it may mean that Rebekah has joined Jacob's camp.

The death of Rachel is mentioned, but not the death of Rebekah. Rachel dies giving birth to Benjamin and when she is no longer there to protect her nurse, Reuben rapes Bilha. It is likely a sign that he considers Rachel's and Bilha's sons very low on the totem and wants to establish his dominance as the oldest son and heir. Jacob is getting on in years and does nothing about this insult, which is almost a kind of rebellion against Jacob's authority.

Jacob goes to Isaac, who is living near Hebron and when he dies, both of his sons bury him. Both of the brothers have become very rich and we are not told whether they divided up Isaac's wealth and whether each of them took a segment of the people who made up Isaac's camp. Jacob got the covenant blessing of Abraham, but the riches of Isaac were considerable enough to give both sons a large inheritance.

What follows is a brief outline of the descendants of Esau, so that now there are at least four thriving people groups who are descendants of Abraham: Ishmaelites, Jacob's children, Esau's children and the two nations which came from Lot, Moab and the Ammonites. There is no hostility between any of them.

In the ancient Middle East of the time, people groups were being conquered and the survivors were often assimilated by the victors. Canaan was full of splintered people groups where the defeated ones lived in the hills, while the victors dwelt in the more fertile lands of the plains and the valleys.

Several of the sons and grandsons of Esau are mentioned because they became leaders of the newly forming people groups and together they form the nation of Edom. In order to identify the leaders who are being described, several ladies are mentioned. This was not normally the case. The story of the rise of Edom as a nation is traced because Esau was also a son of Isaac. They appeared to have a good relationship with the children of Israel, but we learn later on that the two groups sometimes fought.

We are told about the various tribes or subgroups that make up Edom. The passage gives their names, their territories and their tribes (36:40). While Israel was developing into a nation, so was Edom. Israel's growth as a nation really occurred in the safety of the first part of their sojourn in Egypt, but from this account, we can assume that the two groups remained on good terms until Edom refused returning Israel passage through their land.

There are several time gasps in our passage, but no hostility between the descendants of Israel and those of Edom is mentioned. The names of the women taken from Shechem are not given and any children they had, would become part of the tribe they became attached to.

Even though Jacob and his children were richly blessed, they had quite a rocky ride when they first set themselves up in Canaan. The children of Israel do not always behave very nicely, but this does not stop YHVH from both blessing them and sometimes disciplining them. While Jacob was looking after his father-in-law's sheep, he became quite a skilled warrior, but after they settled, he began to slow down.

He had already made his camp give up all their pagan idols (35:2-4), but they had a long way to go before they quit acting like pagans and served YHVH according to His Word and to the traditions and teachings they had received from both Abraham and Isaac. How good have you been at removing all and any paganism which wants to take over your life?

Sermon: First Winter Series: Romans 1:16 For I am Not Ashamed of the Gospel

Passage: “*For I am not ashamed of the Gospel. It is the power of G-d for the salvation of whoever believes, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile (Greek).*” (Romans 1:16)

While he was in captivity, Paul writes a letter (epistle) to the believers in Rome, both to explain the Gospel and to help them keep the faith, even when trials came crashing into their lives. He is waiting to be sent to Rome, because, as a Roman citizen, he had the right to have his case heard by the emperor.

Rome was the capital of a vast empire and people from all parts of the world lived in the city. Rome was known as a place where wealthy and powerful people did as they pleased and got up to all kinds of debauchery. Many new gods were worshipped along side the traditional ones and there was quite a bit of competition for converts.

One of the first issues that Paul is going to address is the criminal idolatry which led many people into all kinds of sexual perversion. But he firmly states that the power of G-d is greater than the folly of mankind. He is anxious to face the challenges which come when we share the Gospel and he establishes an extensive defence and explanation of various features of the Gospel which believers could refer to before his visit.

There was quite a bit of hostility to the Gospel and at various times people faced being jailed or even executed if they made a public stand for their faith. There were secret believers who kept their faith to themselves and even in our world today, I have met Jewish believers in Yeshua who keep their faith in Yeshua a secret, so that they are not kicked out of their synagogue.

There are still places today when our faith puts us at risk and many believers in China and in the Muslim world keep their faith a secret for fear of reprisal. When I was teaching in public schools, faith in the G-d of the Bible was mocked and believers still face the potential of being ostracized if they identify as believers.

There are many moral stances which our biblical faith requires us to uphold, even if our society is at odds with what the Bible teaches. While I am prepared to engage in lively discussions and I am not afraid to proclaim my faith, slipping into arguments is always counterproductive. Paul never wasted his time and energy with people who liked to pick a fight and making a firm, public stand for our faith does not mean looking for people to argue with. Now, I will admit that there are many believers that I am ashamed of, either because of the lavish lifestyle they lead or because of the strange doctrinal stances they have adopted.

I will not try and defend someone I should be ashamed of, but I will always defend my faith and I am never ashamed of being a believer. The message of the Gospel is both true and powerful and cannot be overthrown by those who oppose it, or try to pervert it.

There are three flash points which could cause lots of friction if we do not approach them with wisdom. I suppose I should also include any form of antisemitism or antizionism, but we should not just defend our Jewish people's right to return home to live in the Holy Land. We should also defend their right to live anywhere in the world without facing prejudice or the risk of violence. We also need to defend a biblical world view that is definitely Jewish as well.

I know that sometimes I run the risk sounding like a broken record because I keep on bringing up the same issues, but we cannot walk with the Messiah if we let the priorities and beliefs of popular culture determine how we live and what we believe. Most of our modern world has succumbed to the folly of various kinds of evolution and people will look at you really funny when they find out that you are a biblical creationist. Life did not start accidentally and the universe did not come into being because of some supposed big bang explosion.

I like to dialogue with evolutionists and let them know that I am not just a believer because I do not know any better and have not considered other options and opposing viewpoints. We need to be able to express our faith so it is understandable to our world and we need to make sure that we are not ashamed of any aspect of this mighty message, especially when it comes to what we believe about how the universe came into existence and how old our amazing planet really is.

In our weekly Yeshiva Bible Studies I will do one entire session discussing why evolution is both impossible and extremely improbable. I will talk openly about the worldwide flood in the days of Noah and the impact the dispersion at Babel has had on human history. I have sometimes been told that it does not really matter what you believe, as long as you do not condemn the beliefs of others, because everybody has the right to believe whatever they want.

Belief is a personal thing, but we should not think that it is acceptable to believe whatever you want. Paul was going to come head to head with many opposing views of the world and competing religions which taught strange things and did not accept the truth of the Gospel. We face the same kind of challenges in our modern world and the biggest opponent to the Gospel is evolutionism.

There is no room for any of this kind of foolishness among believers and if you are struggling not to accept the foolish teachings of probably the greatest lie the enemy has come up with, lets talk. I am not ashamed to be a convinced biblical creationist, because it is part of the firm foundation the Gospel stands on. What people believe and what people disbelieve does not affect either what is real and what is true.

I am grateful that Roe Versus Wade has been overturned by our neighbours to the south, but there is no room for believers to agree with the slaughter of babies in their mother's womb. Once a baby has been conceived, it is a full person with the same rights as those the mother may claim. We should not deal with an unwanted pregnancy by ending the baby's life while it is developing in the womb. Abortion is never a form of birth control and even in the case of violence and rape, the perpetrators should be punished, without ending the life of the baby that has been conceived. Human life begins at conception and a baby should be as safe in a mother's womb as it will be later on when a mother takes her child into her arms.

I am not trying to deny any woman the right to decide what she does with her body, but it is too late for her to decide, once a baby has been conceived in her womb. I am not against many forms of contraception which will prevent conception from happening, but once conception has occurred, we are dealing with two lives with equal rights. I would never promote violence against abortion clinics or the staff that work there and I do not feel that every woman who has been convinced to have an abortion is a murderer. But calling abortion anything else than murder is just twisting words and concealing the truth.

More babies have been killed by abortion, worldwide, than the total number of people who have perished in warfare over the ages. There is also no such thing as an aging society, it is simply a society which sanctions the murder of its most vulnerable citizens. There are many things which people have the right to decide for themselves, but deciding to end the life of an infant in the womb is not one of them. At my age, I sometimes feel that I am turning into a dinosaur, but these creatures perished in the flood and did not wander the earth for millions of years before mankind showed up.

I am glad progress is being made to combat racism and prejudice and I will always condemn any form of gender violence. These are as much criminal acts as murder and theft, no matter who sanctions them. White supremacy is a violation of what the Scriptures teach about race and the eradication of hunger and disease, worldwide, is part of our mandate as we proclaim the Gospel to our dying, darkening world.

The third concern is one which has successfully hijacked the human rights agenda and now sexual orientation is seen as something which should be just as protected as freedom of speech and freedom of religion. The global gay agenda is becoming more powerful and at least in the States, charities risk losing their government funding and charity status if they take a stand against homosexual behaviour. Gays are even being positively portrayed in mainstream advertising and it is even considered a criminal offence to speak out against it.

Now I have always been careful about the way I speak about this form of perverted sexuality because it is never portrayed as normal or acceptable in the Bible. In the Torah, it was a crime that was punishable by death and just because it has become an acceptable expression of sexuality, does not make it right or normal. Homosexuals of both genders are sexually broken and those who go through a sex change operation are just maiming their bodies, because gender exists at the cellular level. It is not possible for believers to show any kind of support for the gay agenda, but this should not translate into violence against these sad people.

There are people in our world who are physically and mentally handicapped. We need to show the sexually handicapped as much mercy as we do for others who suffer from any kind of handicap. Making homosexuality acceptable and normal does not make it acceptable or normal in G-d's eyes. We have to fill our lives with things which G-d finds acceptable and prevent unacceptable things from taking over our lives.

A big part of what it means not to be ashamed of the Gospel is to take a stand on major moral issues, so that we can continue to uphold and promote a biblical lifestyle. The power of the Gospel is not diminished by the increasing number of people who no longer believe in it. The moment you place your faith in the Gospel of our blessed Messiah, you receive salvation and become a citizen of the world to come.

Now, many people can trace the exact moment when they placed their faith in the Messiah. For others, especially those who were raised in believing homes, the Gospel was something they believed in as soon as they were able to understand. It does not really matter where you came from nor how dark your life was when you come to faith. The power of G-d in the Gospel, is greater than anything this sorry old world can throw at us. It may take us time to heal from all our wounds and sometimes, some of wounds will not go away and we have to compensate for them because, it is always better to limp in to heaven than to slide into hell.

It is the power of G-d for salvation, but we do not receive any of the power of G-d and do not become part of the deity, as some weird groups believe. G-d remains G-d, as the plural singularity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and we remain human. He may empower us to perform miracles, such as praying for the sick, but at best, we just become a channel or a conduit for His power. We can never say that we somehow possess this power or gain any control over G-d. We come under His power and give Him control over our lives.

The Gospel is more powerful than any foolishness believed by those darkness dwelling victims who have come under the power of the enemy. There have been any number of attempts to destroy the Gospel by killing those who believe in it. There have been other attempts to dilute or defile the Gospel by adding doctrines and practices which are not clearly taught in the Scriptures. Both the mainline synagogues and many traditional mainline churches, follow traditions and hold to beliefs which are not part of what the Bible teaches.

Attempts have been made to stifle or extinguish the Gospel, but it remains the power of G-d for salvation to anyone who believes in it. It will always be to the Jew first and also to the Gentile, because this is the double promise which YHVH made to Abraham. His descendants were to become a great nation and be a blessing to all nations. In Messiah, we become a blessing to all nations and even if there continues to be great resistance to the Gospel among most Jewish people, they will always remain part of that generational great nation and the Messiah, who is the true King of Israel, will always be a blessing to all nations.

The Gospel came to the Jewish people first, but this does not really give us any superiority over the other nations of the world. We need repentance and need to believe in the Gospel just as much as someone who belongs to another nation. We are called to be a homing beacon to the scattered descendants of Adam and Eve, to show them the way home to YHVH, who is the only true G-d. The Holy Land was given to us because it is where the Garden of Eden used to be and our Father wants all of us, Jew and Gentile, to come home.

You do not have to stop being a Jew when you come to faith and you do not need to become a Jew in order to come to faith. There are truly two spiritual genders that will exist side by side until the Kingdom comes and all temporary distinctions will be done away with. Until that glorious day, we need to make sure that nothing we believe and nothing we do, makes us ashamed of the Gospel. Taking a firm stand on moral issues is not asking for a fight. Not taking a stand on moral issues means we have lost the fight and are being sucked back into the darkness which the power of G-d in the Gospel delivered us from.

Walking with the Messiah will always be a work in process, as we learn to maintain straight paths for our wounded feet and not let any of the darkness of this age take up residence in our hearts and lives. Believing is an active power that can break all the chains of sin and darkness and set us free. This is still possible today, even as our world slides back into the darkness which covered the globe in the days before the Flood.

I am not ashamed of the Gospel or of anything it teaches and taking firm moral stands is the best way to show that I am not ashamed of this unique, powerful message. The world can continue to turn darkness into false light and sour things falsely into sweet things, but the truth of G-d's Word cannot be overturned. The Gospel will continue to be the power of G-d for the salvation of anyone who believes, both when we are floating on a happy cloud and when we are slogging it out in a dark valley, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. Shabbat Shalom.