

14 Tevet, 5776 (26/12/15) **What is The Whole Point of The Matter?** J. M. Terrett

Vayechi And He Lived The Birth of the Great Nation

Torah: Genesis 47:28-50:26

In today's portion, we see the final stages of the transition from Israel being a small collection of the families of the sons of Jacob, to become the mighty nation which was to be a blessing to all nations through our beloved Messiah. Jacob lives out his final years in peace and contentment and does something amazing – he adopts Joseph's two sons as his own. And yet, when he blesses the 12 tribes, they are blessed as one. Joseph may have had other sons and daughters, but they were counted as part of either Manasseh or Ephraim.

We discover that Jacob was also a warrior, in that he took treasure from the Amorites by his sword and his bow, probably in retaliation when they attacked him to try and steal his livestock. He pronounces blessings upon several of his children as his final parental act, which includes comments on the misconduct of four of his children (Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Dan). He tries to give Joseph (Manasseh and Ephraim) the greatest blessing, but Judah receives the promise of the Messiah and of the royalty as the tribe through whom Shiloh (Messiah shall come).

There is even a sort of time line given which may have confused those who heard it - the royal sceptre shall not depart from Judah until Shiloh comes. At this point, Joseph is the regal brother, but Israel was given a vision of the future arrival of the Messiah and all of those who heard his words would have known that the people of Israel were destined to greatness and that during their time in Egypt, they were going to grow into a great nation, capable of taking possession of Canaan.

Jacob is embalmed and a huge, even royal, burial procession lays him to rest beside his fathers (and Leah). The man, who left Canaan with nothing and came back with a large family, was being buried in the land which would one day belong to his descendants forever. Two more items of business precede the last mention of the patriarchs; one settles any possible animosity between Joseph and his brothers and the other is an oath that the children of Israel swore to carry Joseph's bones out of Egypt to be buried beside his father.

There is no room for sibling rivalry or taking vengeance in the economy of G-d and though Joseph would have had every reason to enslave his brothers (except Benjamin) and claim all the blessings of his father for himself and his heirs, he proves faithful to his vision and assures his brothers of his good intentions. They bow before him as he prophesied that they would and he promises to look after them as long as he (or his descendants) held their favoured position in Egypt.

Although he is buried in an Egyptian sepulchre, he does not want either his heirs or his bones to remain in the land of their sojourn, because he and the great nation he is cherishing have a greater destiny and it is not in Egypt.

They may have been able to dwell there indefinitely as a privileged minority, but the purposes of G-d wanted them to one day become a light to all nations dwelling in the site of the original Garden of Eden, nothing more, nothing less.

The Haftarah portion deals with the transition from David to Solomon and David gives his son advice about how to succeed in the L-rd: faithful obedience to Him through His Word. David wants his son to finish the business he was unable to deal with and makes sure that the blessing of the ruling sceptre remains among his descendants until Shiloh comes. David lived many generations after Jacob and Joseph, but as part of the house of Judah, he realized that he had a generational destiny as part of the great nation which would bless all nations. Our calling is still to bless and the L-rd has not forsaken or set aside the great nation, even as He blesses all nations before His return to set up the everlasting Kingdom.

The New Testament portion deals with the total sufficiency of both the promises and the provision of G-d for believers who have received everlasting life at the price of their faith. Like Jacob and Joseph, our faith will also be tried as if through fire, but the promises are fire proof and we are still part of the great nation, either as natural branches or as those who have been grafted in. The generational promises which were given through Jacob, still apply and we are part of that process which will continue unbroken until they are all fulfilled. The great nation which was birthed in Egypt and scattered twice among the nations delivered the Messiah of promise and still blesses the nations because the Word of G-d cannot be overthrown and His promises will never remain unfulfilled. Next year the story of the Exodus and our long wandering until we enter the Promised Land. Happy New Year's, campers!

Chazak, Chazak, v'Nitchazek

Haftarah: I Kings 2:1-12

Brit Chadashah: I Peter 1:1-9

(Aaron p. 165) **Ps. 41.** Jewish Hero: Joshua. Torah Carrier: Tom

Chazak, Chazak, v'Nitchazek Happy New Year!

Sermon: What is the Point of the whole Matter?

Passage: *If someone teaches false doctrines and does not attach themselves to the wholesome words of our L-rd, Yeshua HaMashiach and the doctrine which is according to holiness, he is puffed up with pride and knows nothing and has a morbid craving for controversy and disputes about words which gives birth to envy, quarrels, slander, evil suspicions and vain discussions by those who are depraved in mind and who are deprived of the truth, believing that holiness is a source of gain; for we have brought nothing into the world and it is evident that we can take nothing out of it. It is true that holiness (godliness) is a source of great gain when it is combined with contentment. If then we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who wish to become rich, fall into temptation and are trapped by senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root for all kinds of evil and some who are possessed by it have wandered far from the faith and have thrown themselves into many torments. (I Tim. 6:3-10)*

As we shift gears in the holidays and prepare for New Years, it is good for us to ask ourselves why we are celebrating and what is really the point of all the merry making at the season where so much effort is put into having a good time. We are exhorted to purchase the perfect

gift and have the perfect family gathering and it almost seems that people feel that the better time you have during the holidays, the better time you will have during the coming new year. What should be a time of great spiritual reflection and gratitude has become the most materialistic and hedonistic times of the year as people fill their lives with senseless things.

However, with all the greed and all the hype, there is still a sense that people understand that it is not what you get over the holidays or how much noise you make with as many people as possible. Lonely people who have lost all hope seem to make more noise and party harder than those who are content with their lot and have a lot to live for. How about you?

Now, you all understand that I am not anti-materialistic and do not believe that poverty has any more virtue than great wealth, but it is a matter of not getting confused about what is really important. We live in a society which has so much, and yet so many people have lost their way and levels of satisfaction are lower now than when our society was much poorer. I do not expect people in the world to understand that holiness is worth more than all the gold and diamonds in the world, because the Scriptures say that to a hungry soul, every bitter thing is sweet. Like the aging Mick Jagger, they can't get no satisfaction, but they keep looking in all the wrong directions. They want more and more and are less and less happy.

I am troubled when believers preach the prosperity Gospel and measure the blessing of G-d in material terms, rather than in spiritual terms. We have to pay our bills and it is not wrong to get ahead, but unless we have the two essential elements of true satisfaction, we have missed the whole point of it all and are wasting our time with things which do not matter. Here is a quote from Shakespeare which speaks to this kind of folly:

I have wasted time, now time doth waste me. (Richard II)

Godliness (spirituality) and contentment are the two greatest riches we can possess in this life. Whether you are born into a golden palace or in a mud hut, you bring nothing with you into this life, and even if you are buried in the biggest mausoleum on the planet, you can take nothing with you when you go. Money is not the source of all kinds of evil, but it is the love of money which chokes and renders our spirituality (godliness) void causing our contentment to evaporate. We get all we can and can all we get and sit on the lid, without ever being happy.

Our planet is getting richer as well as more polluted and even the poorest nations dream of becoming part of the economic elite with all of its gadgets and vulgar wealth. Our Lord asked a question when He said: What shall it profit a man to gain the whole world if he loses his soul? I have heard it falsely claimed that every man has his price and the apostle Paul had to deal with believers who learned about the wealth which Israel possessed in times of G-d's great blessing and wanted to have it as well.

Great wealth may come and great wealth may go, because all of the prophets have said unanimously that the great treasure of Israel is the Torah because in it we find the keys to everlasting life and are not bound up and restricted to the temporary things of this life. The solution to materialism is not to give away everything and plunge ourselves into absolute poverty. The solution lies in living for that which really matters – godliness (spirituality) and contentment and not to be sidetracked by that which can never really satisfy.

There will always be those among us who are wealthy and those among us who are poor, but

as long as we are all focused in unison and harmony on walking with G-d in faithful obedience, then we will not be shipwrecked in our pilgrimage from conception to the grave and beyond. People who live for more things leave no room for what really matters.

Solomon had great wealth, but most of it was acquired by his father and it was Solomon's extravagant lifestyle which caused him to wander away from the godliness which his father reminded him to always embrace. While he continued to acquire great wealth, he allowed himself and his people to become spiritually poor. Yes, the temple was beautiful and covered with expensive building materials, but it was only a reminder of the beauty and wonder of the King who still owns the cattle on a thousand hills and whose glory still fills the earth.

Contentment is not a form of laziness where we settle for mediocre, underachieving lives and believe that being second best and living in obscurity is the will of G-d for us in this life. Contentment looks at our fiscal potential and never confuses it with our spiritual potential and builds a life focused on the only priceless commodity which is worth our time and energy - godliness (spirituality). All the rest is inconsequential details which have no real importance or meaning apart from holiness (godliness, spirituality). Don't settle for anything less!

The point of the whole matter is not the size of our portfolio, but the state of our spirituality. Contentment cannot be bought from either Amazon or Kijiji and is not available with three easy payments, free shipping and handling along with a money back guarantee. It lifts us out of the tyranny to which the love of money wishes to enslave us, because just as hell and destruction are never full, the eyes of man are never satisfied. Spiritual satisfaction is the most dynamic drive in our lives and once we are driven by it, none of the criminal, futile lusts and desires which drive our consumer based, global economy can snare us and drag us away from the joy and wonder which only comes from walking with the L-rd.

The point of the whole matter is that money and fame and power are not sources of satisfaction and regularly chew up, use up and spit out those who are trapped into a spiritually futile lifestyle. Naked we came, but spiritually enriched we can go, because nothing else really matters. Think about it. We had nothing coming into this life and we can take nothing with us when we leave this life, so the things of this life should never be our focus and should only be used to serve the life which is to come. The winner is never the one who dies with the most toys, but the one for whom toys are seen for what they really are – ultimately meaningless apart from godliness and contentment. May you be blessed with lots of what really matters as we bid farewell to 2015 and prepare for the challenges of 2016 and may you always have a solid grasp of the whole point of the matter in our beloved Messiah.