



B'NAI CHAYIM

CHILDREN OF LIFE

19 Kislev 5781 (05/12/20) **Deut. 4:2: Diluting or Polluting the Word is Carnal Foolishness** J. M. Terrett

Yayislach	And Jacob Sent	Jacob Settles into the Land
Torah:	Genesis 32:3 (4) – 36:43	
Haftarah:	Obadiah 1:1-21	
Brit Chadashah:	Hebrews 11:11-20	

Just before our portion begins, Jacob encounters some angels (or messengers) of G-d. When the portion begins, he sends his own messengers to his brother Esau. The word for angel is the same word for messenger, but we need to examine the context to determine which meaning is intended. Only G-d can send angelic messengers. The Talmudic commentary on this portion would make even Steven Spielberg cringe in their flights of fantasy.

When you read the Bible, look first at the ordinary meaning of the words which are used, and when numbers are symbolic or when symbolic language is used, the context needs to be used to determine the meaning which is intended. In some cases, we have to examine other portions of Scriptures to clarify meaning. In the rare instances when this does not clarify, we need to consign the passage(s) in question to Deuteronomy 29:29 and not pollute or strangle the Bible with the opinions of men.

Jacob has encountered some angelic messengers, and while we are not told what they say, he knows that G-d is going before him and has his back. He is still nervous, but no longer appears terrified and initiates first contact with his brother who is wandering between Canaan and the mountains of Seir with his flocks.

In the message he calls Esau lord and says that he is Esau's servant, to let his brother know that he is coming to reconcile and not to fight. He assembles 400 of his men and sets out to meet Jacob. He wants to show his brother that he no longer feels inferior to him and is making a display of his elevated new status.

Jacob panics and initially divides his extensive camp into two groups, and as this is being organized, he offers what I call a chicken prayer to G-d. We all have offered a couple of these from time to time. He says he left with nothing but his walking stick and now returns with two large camps. He is afraid that he and his family will be killed (and that his flocks will be taken). Just in case G-d has forgotten, he reminds G-d that he promised to make his descendants as the sand on the seashore. This prayer is more to boost his own morals and that of his camp.

He makes defensive arrangements, but his first move is to assemble an appeasement offering of some 580 livestock animals in five distinct flocks. He sends them to Esau at intervals, and the servants who shepherd them repeat his submission phrase (you are lord and I am your servant). Jacob hopes the livestock will appease Esau and he sends his wives and children in three groups with an interval between them, and he stays behind alone to engage in some serious intercession – which is a good strategy when we are worried and in danger. Later he would take up possession in front of them and introduce them to his brother.

He fights all night with the angel of the L-rd, and even when the angel strikes Jacob's hip socket and wounds him, Jacob does not give up. The Talmud contradicts itself when it speaks of this incident. At first the angel is called Satan and the evil guardian angel of Esau, whom they claim is an evil man. But suddenly, the angel is no longer Satan or evil. But just before dawn, the angel has to return to take his praise shift and blesses Jacob. Such strange twists on what the passage actually says. While the Talmud does often give some good insights, whenever it adds to the text or changes the meaning of texts, we need to treat it as a collection of human opinion and stick to what the Torah actually teaches.

The angel of the L-rd wants to leave before the break of day, so Jacob will not be consumed once the protective darkness lifts. Once Jacob realizes he is wrestling with the angel of YHVH, the blessing he receives is twofold. First, his name is changed to Israel (one who has fought with G-d and men and has won). The name change also indicates that he with vanquish man and if it came down to it, this would include his brother.

The angel does not give his name, because he is appearing as a messenger from YHVH and not on his own behalf. Because of his injury, Jews do not eat tendons associated with the hip socket. He limped for the rest of his life as a reminder to never again doubt the provision and protection of G-d. He advances to meet his brother, likely accompanied with a contingent of his servants.

Jacob prostrates himself seven times before Esau, and introduces his family to Esau. Jacob really had nothing to worry about – Esau has about as much blessing as he can handle and at first refuses to take the appeasement offering. Jacob insists and Esau takes it, thus formally sealing their reconciliation. When Esau tries to merge the two camps, Jacob politely declines, but agrees to hook up later at Esau's camp on Mount Seir. Jacob also declines the offer of an escort because he not only has the assurance of G-d's protection, but he likely has enough men of his own.

We are not told when Jacob visited Esau on Mount Seir, but he does stop at a place he calls Sukkoth because he makes shelters for his animals and performs a necessary transaction with the local inhabitants. He has to buy back the land that his grandfather had bought from the Hittites because it has now become Canaanites land.

He moves his camp near to the town of Schehem and his daughter goes into town to visit the ladies of the town. She likely would not have gone alone, but the prince of Schehem overcomes her escort and has sexual relations with her. He also takes her into his household and sends a message to her father asking for her hand in marriage.

The sons of Jacob and their entourage are not in the camp and stalls before giving an answer. He does not have enough manpower if it came to a fight. His sons are enraged, but do not take immediate action. They offer terms to the prince of Schehem that their camp will merge with the town, if all the men of Schehem are circumcised. The prince agrees and convinces all the men of his town to undergo the ritual.

Here is a problem. Once they are circumcised, they have become Jews, even if their theology still needed some work. Levi and Simeon lead an attack on the town while the men are suffering and slaughter all of them. They despoil the city and take everything and everybody (pre-adolescent males, women and children). They justify the deception and murder of so many people because they claim their sister was being treated like a prostitute when she wasn't. It was after this incident that Jacob is called to Bethel to fulfill the promises he made to G-d when he left Canaan from this location.

Before Jacob sets out, he calls on all members of the camp to surrender all their strange gods. The people are also to purify themselves by washing and are to change their clothes because the whole camp is personally dedicating itself to YHVH. Apparently, Rachel was not the only one harboring strange gods. They surrendered both their idols and their idolatrous jewelry, and these were buried at Schehem. These false gods were dead, buried and powerless.

The inhabitants may have witnessed or heard about this purging, and the terror of G-d spread among the local inhabitants. They did not attempt any retribution because of the murder at Schehem. Jacob builds an altar and calls it El-Bethel (House of the G-d of Bethel).

There is a strange interlude in this section of the portion. While Rebekah's death is not mentioned, the passage does mention the death of her nurse Debora. There are several possible explanations for this mention. Either Rebekah is already dead and Jacob invites her nurse to join them, or both ladies joined his camp and only one death is mentioned.

The portion goes on to mention a mighty encounter which Jacob has with YHVH where the name change is formalized, and where his reception of the Abrahamic blessing is repeated. Jacob has now come full circle and prepares to settle into the land with all the mighty blessings he has received from YHVH.

Jacob was still a wandering shepherd and had to move on from Bethel in search of forage for his flocks. Along the way, Rachel has a difficult birth and dies giving birth to her second son Benjamin, who was the last of Jacob's sons. She died close to Bethlehem, called also called Ephratha, and Jacob built a monument to her.

With Rachel out of the way, Reuben has sex with the now defenseless Bilhah, who was Rachel's nurse. Jacob does nothing to rebuke or punish his eldest son until he hands out blessings from his death bed. A mini genealogy lists all the sons of Jacob and then moves on to mention the burial of Isaac by his two sons. Isaac was 180 when he died, which would mean his twin sons were 120. From comparing ages given in the Bible, this would have occurred nine years before Jacob left for Egypt and after Joseph had already been sold into slavery.

The passage ends with a detailed genealogy of Esau. The passage mentions that both camps were too large to wander over the same territory and so Esau moves onto Mount Seir and established a permanent camp, which became the center around which the search for fresh pasture was conducted. They would have organized towns and fields as they gradually shifted from wandering shepherds to become farmers and town dwelling merchants.

The genealogy is quite extensive because Esau is a son of Isaac, and one of the most interesting features of this listing of descendants is that chieftains are also mentioned who did not descend from Esau, but who married into this newly formed people. Eleven territorial tribal leaders are mentioned, and these groups both assimilated into Esau and also continued to absorb fragments of former people groups who had been defeated and scattered.

Even though at times Esau was hostile to Israel and was conquered more than once, in the times of the Maccabees this group was offered a choice – to convert or to be annihilated. They chose to convert and many of us may have more Edomite blood than we would care to admit in public.

Sermon: Deuteronomy 4:2 Diluting or Polluting the Word is Carnal Foolishness.

Passage: “ You shall add nothing to that which I prescribe to you and you shall not remove anything from it in order that you will be able to observe the commandments of YHVH, your G-d in the same manner as you have received them.”

As we come to the season of Chanukah, it should be one of our annual spiritual reality checks. After the Greek rulers of Syria embarked on an extended campaign of forced assimilation, many of our people succumbed and lost their grip on both their faith and their obedience. They assimilated into Greek paganism. Our global secular society is aggressively also trying to separate us from our biblical faith and is even using the force of law to prevent us from speaking out against that which our Bible calls an abomination. Never give in!

I have been told that university professors, who admit that they are creationists, have lost their tenure and sometimes even their jobs. Instead of lamenting our fate and withdrawing from this onslaught, we need to have the courage of the Maccabees to dialogue with our detractors and firmly and creatively point out the glaring contradictions which the secular world is forcing on the next generation. We need to firmly and respectfully push back.

But it gets worse. Fully convinced believers are allowing themselves to be pulled into the weeds of the works of the flesh when they encounter danger and fear. Sometimes they lash out in rage and make horrible accusations against anyone who they disagree with or are afraid of, even though the Torah and the Gospel strictly forbid this carnal, pagan behaviour. They forget that on the Day of Judgment, we will not be judged on what has happened to us or even how people have treated us. We will be judged on the heart and life responses which we have allowed to become rooted in our lives in glad times as well as in sad times.

Too many moral and spiritual compromises turn disagreements into wars where believers engage in biting and devouring and express hatred for others whom none of us have the right to despise, or even hate, in our hearts. We need to always remain a field where the fruit of the Spirit flourish, where forgiveness is a fence which keeps the carnal works of the flesh on the

outside. In my short life, I have heard any number of lame, carnal excuses for mistreating and disrespecting people, and over the centuries, feuds between believers have turned into military conflicts where hundreds of thousand believers have needlessly perished.

Many evangelicals condemn the Crusades, the Inquisitions, and the various religious wars that nearly tore Europe apart, all in the name of wrongly justifying violence as a means of enforcing what we believe. And yet, among evangelicals there are violent disagreements over minor points of doctrine, and almost a blanket condemnation of non-evangelical believers.

Our passage requires that we neither add to nor delete from the commandments we have received, so that we can put them into practice without diluting or polluting them. We are never justified in taking up arms against anyone whose theology contradicts our own. We need to learn the art of negotiation and dialogue and not automatically consign our opponents to hell for our disagreements. Those who love fighting really don't love the L-RD. Especially over the holiday season, I cannot stress enough the importance of understanding that our principle judgment, when we stand before the Awesome Messiah from Nazareth, will not be primarily theological, but it will be based on our practical spirituality.

Now, I am not saying we should accept all and any foolishness which departs from the unchanging Word of G-d, but if we are solely focused on being doctrinally correct without at least as strong concern for practical spirituality, we have greatly strayed from the truth of the Torah and the Gospel. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the priest and the Levite did not stop to help the man who was beaten and robbed, for fear of defiling themselves. A despised Samaritan stopped and took care of the man. That is also our calling, every day and in every way. How well are you fulfilling this calling?

There are a lot of wounded and defiled people in our world, and the ditches are filling up to overflowing. Some are innocent victims, and some are broken by their own foolishness. There are any number of effective outreaches which we should wholeheartedly support, even those who might not exactly share our theology. You know me well enough to know that there are two kinds of theology which are doing untold damage to the body of our Messiah.

The first over emphasizes minor points of theology and mixes it with the teachings and traditions of men, and states that all of those who do not agree are in danger of hell fire (even if that is not what the Scriptures teach). The second justifies arguing, gossiping, and various forms of character assassination with no regard for actually telling the truth, or more importantly, speaking the truth in love.

There are extensive systems of traditions in both Judaism and Christianity, where things have been added which are not found in the Scriptures. This week's Torah portion had some interesting Talmudic traditional teaching which was strange in the extreme. At this season of the year, many branches of Christianity also have their own traditions which are just as weird as what you find in the Talmud.

G-d's commandments are not grievous, and keeping them is what the love of G-d consists of (I John 5:3). Loving Yeshua is also a commitment to keep the commandments of G-d, which remain indivisible, and cannot be violated without risking great loss when His Kingdom finally comes. They remain a package deal. Are they a package deal in your life?

There are also those who subtract from the commandments, as if they were options and not requirements. The Scriptures are not do-it-yourself, where you are free to keep some of the commandments and violate or ignore the rest. You all know how I feel about Sabbath observance, but there is another aspect to violating the commandments which I want to discuss with you briefly. We are commanded to forgive those who have sinned against us and if we cease to forgive, we cease to be forgiven. Whenever, and for whatever reason, we functionally hate our brothers and sisters, I John 3:15 calls us murderers who do not have the love of G-d dwelling in us.

Now I know there have been some pretty scaly people who come our way, pretending to be believers, when their hearts are full of hatred, bitterness and any number of major sinfulness which they willingly wallow in. Some we have had to exclude, some wandered off on their own. None of them have not been forgiven, but none of them have been indulged when they refused to stop promoting the works of the flesh. I want to say something which I want you to think about carefully, so that you hear what I am trying to say. It is translated from the French, so bear with me. To be despised by the despicable is better than when being well thought of by fools. Bottom line, we are required to love both the fools and the despicable, as well those sheep in whom we can safely put our confidence.

Reconciliation is also not an optional feature of how we need to live our lives in our Messiah. Matthew 18 and 2 Thessalonians 3 outline a process which we need to follow when we are trying to work things out with a fellow believer. I Corinthians 5 and 6 say that if they call themselves a believer and persist in acting like a non-believer, treat them accordingly, but only after you tried your best to reconcile. We will be judged on the Day of Judgment for all the times we have refused to reconcile with believers, whether we are right or wrong.

Some love to argue and will not listen, except to wait for the next chance they have to talk. If the truth be told, I have met more than my fair share of carnal, annoying, argumentative believers and they appear to be happily ignorant of how far they are from the L-rd and His Word. Arguing is always sin. Don't let anyone drag you into it. Walking away and excluding those who disturb the peace of our shul is a positive strategy as long as we still forgive those we have to break off contact with.

The Day of Judgment is going to cause a lot of spiritual zombies to suddenly come back to life and see all the carnal folly they have tried to keep buried in this life. Anger, lust, greed, and deception can be hidden, but unless they are repented of, and unless reconciliation and restitution have been engaged, those so infected will suffer great loss when all the wood, hay and stubble is burned away on the Day of Judgment.

We need to let the L-rd search out the depths of our beings, and also the way in which we live our daily lives, so that we are not storing up a treasure of wrath for ourselves as we walk through this life. Romans 12:18 says that as much as it depends on us, we need to be at peace with all the brethren. When this is not possible, we need to do the best we can to work things out, and when that is not possible, we move on and cultivate the precious fruit of the Spirit. We need to always forgive even the worst offenders. I will be friends with anyone who wants to be friendly and I will do my best to uphold scriptural standards of morality and spirituality. This needs to remain the focus of our hearts and lives.

So, I count some people who are not believers as my friends because they do not try and mess with my head, and judge me and put me down. They also let me share my faith and many ask some very discerning questions without any fear of being ragged on. Some fault-finding believers are stuck in a negative judgmental rut and feel that engaging in endless disputes is their calling from the Messiah. Unbelievers avoid them like the plague.

There is a right way to be wrong and a wrong way to be right and we need active, positive spiritual credibility as both the foundation of our lives and the basis upon which we build our outreach when we share our faith. We need to do all of this without adding or subtracting to the Scriptures. Anger, meanness, arguing, a lack of forgiveness and indulging in all and any of the works of the flesh is both a subtle and a direct way of adding foolishness to what we believe and how we live. Not cultivating the fruit of the Spirit and not living in peace with harmony is both a subtle and a direct way of taking away from what the Torah teaches.

Unless we engage in regular spiritual reality checks and know what it means to have credibility in our Messiah, and actually walk according to the stipulations of His Word, judgment day will be the big cosmic reality check with eternal loss consequences which we could have so easily avoided. Real spiritual courage and spiritual perseverance are the only goals worth striving for in this life. Let us consciously do our very best to avoid all and any forms of carnal foolishness. Messiah has said what He meant and means what He says, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. Shabbat Shalom and Shavua Tov.