



MORDEKAI'S DRASH — VAYASHEV

Torah: *Vayashev* (And he settled), *B'resheet* (Genesis) 37.1-40.23

Haftorah: *Z'kharyah* (Zechariah) 2.14(10)-4.7 *Shabbat Hannukah*

Suggested **Messianic Writings** reading: *Mattityahu* (Matthew) 1.1-6; 16-25

Shalom,

Torah moves into the story of *Yosef* (Joseph) now, and for the rest of *B'resheet* he will be the primary character. Some of the commentators point out that as important as *Yosef* was to the history of Israel, he is not considered by the sages to be one of the Patriarchs; that role is filled only by *Avraham*, *Yitz'khak v'Ya'akov* (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob). There is no real definite answer as to why *Yosef* is not considered a patriarch also; one idea is that as much as ADONI aided him, there is a marked contrast in the way that ADONI operated with *Yosef*. ADONI had direct 2-way communication with *Avraham*, *Yitz'khak* and *Ya'akov*, but He did not communicate that way with *Yosef*, even though *Yosef* saved and *in a sense* began the nation of Israel. The “why not” is not answered in Torah; we can only speculate. This does not in any way lessen the importance of *Yosef*, nor diminish his spirituality or his walk with ADONI.

The narrative begins with *Yosef* as a young man of 17 years of age pasturing sheep with a four of his elder half-brothers, the sons of the concubines of *Ya'akov*. This was *Dan* and *Naftali*, sons of *Bilhah*, *Rachel's* slave-girl; and *Gad* and *Asher*, sons of *Zilpah*, *Leah's* slave-girl (see *B'resheet* 35.25-26). Some commentators note that here *Bilhah* and *Zilpah* are called *נְשִׂאֵי* *n'shey*, from *נְשִׂאֵי* *ishah*, generally used as the term for a legal wife. The sages believe that by this time both *Rachel* and *Leah* had passed away, and possibly *Avraham* had elevated the two slave-girls to the position of legal wives. If this was so, that probably caused some turmoil within the family also.

The JFB [*Jamieson, Fausset & Brown*] Commentary notes that the Hebrew of vs 2 is literally, “Joseph, being seventeen years old, was a shepherd over the flock.’ This seems to imply oversight or superintending, whether so because he was son of a principal wife, or from the qualities of his own character. With this being a probability, we can know that *Yosef* was not coming to his father as a tattle-taleing gossip, but rather as a ‘faithful steward’ reporting on the bad conduct of the other sons.”

We get a clue to *Yosef's* position from vs 3, “Now *Isra'el* loved *Yosef* the most of all his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a long-sleeved robe” (Complete Jewish Bible [CJB]). It has been pointed out that if just being a son of *Ya'akov's* old age was the reason of favoritism, then *Binyamin* (Benjamin) should have been the favorite. The literal Hebrew meaning, according to JFB, is that *Yosef* was a “son of old age to him” – a *Hebrew phrase* for ‘a wise son’ – one who possessed observation and wisdom above his years – an old head on young shoulders.” This would explain *Yosef* being in a position of authority at age 17 over some of his older brothers.

Note in the above verse that the CJB translates the garment *Ya'akov* made for *Yosef* as “a long-sleeved robe”. This is very probably the correct translation, as opposed to “a coat, robe, or tunic, of many colors”. In cultures of that day, noblemen, kings, and those of a preferred position would wear a robe with sleeves reaching to the wrists, and the garment reaching to the ankles. There may have been a few varied colors and multiple fabrics sewed together, but it would not be the bright multi-colored garment that many artists like to picture. At any rate, there was a favoritism shown that does not bode well in any family. *Ya'akov* had essentially promoted the younger *Yosef* to the position of a prince over his elder brothers. It was probably well known among all of the sons that *Rachel* had been the favored and chosen wife; *Leah* of course had been given to *Ya'akov* by *Laban* in a move of deceit and trickery. It would stand to reason then that the sons of the favored wife would be the favored sons. To elevate the second to youngest son, who was already favored, to a royal position was sure to cause problems. And to those familiar with the story, there were indeed troubles to come.

In fact, verse 4 states that his brothers grew to hate *Yosef* so much that they could not speak to him in a civil manner. The commentators say this means that the brothers could not even return the common salutation, “*Shalom aleikhem*, Peace be unto you”. JFB explains: “It is deemed a sacred duty to give all this form of salutation; and the withholding of it is an unmistakable sign of dislike or secret hostility. The habitual refusal of *Joseph's* brethren, therefore, to meet him with ‘the *salaam*’ [the usual expression of good wishes among friends and acquaintances] showed how ill-disposed they were towards him. It is very natural in parents to love the youngest, and feel partial to those who excel in talents or amiableness. But

in a family constituted as Jacob's - many children by different mothers - Jacob showed great and criminal indiscretion."

A favored child usually tries to get away with more, and oftentimes does. Yosef began relating to his family about the dreams he had been having, all which pictured him as ruling over the rest of the family. We, as readers of the story know that the dreams were prophetic, but at the time they did nothing but create more hatred of Yosef by his brothers. Yosef, in his youthfulness and more than likely feeling good about his favored position, was a little braggadocio about his dreams, which further ruffled feathers. Some commentators stated that it is possible that the brothers believed that the dreams could possibly come true, and they figured that if they got rid of Yosef altogether, there was no chance of the dreams coming true. What they had not planned on was the intervention of the Creator Himself in this drama.

B'reshet 38 is one of those parenthetical chapters that appear from time to time in Hebraic writing. Of course, the original text does not contain the chapter breaks, and scholars debate back and forth as to whether the events in this section could have taken place in the approximate time of 23 years from the selling of Yosef to the moving of Israel down into Egypt, with feasible arguments on both sides. The chapter begins with the words, similar in all translations, "At that time it came to pass...." The unknown factor is whether "at that time" is right after the selling of Yosef, or shortly after Ya'akov arrived back to Shechem from the abode of Laban. But we see from the events of this chapter the truth of Romans 8.28, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God." Some of the events of this chapter are indiscretionary; some are cultural of the day. But I think that inside, Judah loved ADONI, and ADONI used the events here to bring through this family line the Messiah Yeshua.

The narrative then moves back to Yosef, and the events surrounding his life at Potiphar's home, his promotions, his being thrown into prison when he refused the advances of Potiphar's wife and thus angered her, the interpretation of dreams of fellow prisoners, the interpreted dreams coming true, and the now freed chief cupbearer forgetting about Yosef in prison. And thus at the end of the reading we are left with a cliff-hanger – what will happen to the imprisoned Yosef? Stay tuned.

שְׁאַלוּ שְׁלוֹם יְרוּשָׁלַם – *Sha'alu shalom Yerushalayim* – Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!

B'rakhot v'todah rabbah
(Blessings & thank you very much)

Mordekhi

This Yeshua, who has been taken away from you into heaven, will come back to you in just the same way as you saw him go into heaven.
(Acts 1.11 CJB)