



## **Parasha Vayechi**

January 7, 2023

*Torah:* Genesis 47:28-50:26

*Haftarah:* 1Kings 2:1-12

*Ketuvim Shlichim:* 1Peter 1:3-9

*Shabbat shalom mishpacha!* Our *parasha* this week is *Vayechi*, “He lived!” The “he” is Jacob, who lived in *Mitzrayim*, the land of Egypt, for 17 years. In this *parasha*, the last one in the Book of *Bereshit*, Genesis, he is nearing the end of his life. Two important passages of Scripture in this *parasha* are his blessing of his grandsons, Joseph’s sons, *Ephrayim* and *Mana’she*, and his prophetic words over his twelve sons. Jacob’s first words to his sons were: *1 ...: “Gather together so that I can tell you what will happen to you in the last days”* (Genesis 49:1b TLV). He said: “in the last days,” *b’acharit hayamim*, בְּאַחֲרֵי הַיָּמִים. This is an important statement. What he told them was not what would happen through the years, but at the end of the age.

*Ya’acov* knew he was near death and he called Joseph to come to him and requested that he be returned to Canaan for burial. *Ya’acov*’s name means supplanter, “heel grabber.” That is what he seemed to be in his early life although he had ADONAI’s favor. ADONAI continues to call him *Ya’acov* now, but interchanges with the name *Isra’el*. Israel is what he became when ADONAI’s messenger blessed him and renamed him. The name has been interpreted in several different ways. Perhaps its most basic meaning is “struggles with El,” G-d, from his wrestling with ADONAI’s *malakh*, His messenger. Looking at it etymologically, that is, with regard to word origin and the root *sarah* meaning “to rule,” *Isra’el* can be interpreted to mean “Prince of *Elohim*,” Prince of G-d. A third possibility, also based on word origin, is “a man seeing G-d.” And, all three perfectly fit Jacob’s situation. Knowing his heart and by changing his name, ADONAI approved him to be the representative of his family and the bearer of His message to the people of the earth. And now, Jacob, Israel, as the bearer of ADONAI’s plan of blessing for the nations, is about to pass this task on to his descendants.

In *Parasha Toldot*, we were shown that Jacob had two different inheritances to pass on to his sons. One was the birthright and it included a double portion of Jacob’s wealth. When he called Joseph to him, he elevated *Yosef*’s sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, to the rank of sons, putting them in place of the two first-born sons: *5 So now, your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, they are mine. Ephraim and Manasseh will be mine, just like Reuben and Simeon.* (Genesis 48:5 TLV). *Re’uven* and *Shim’on* were the first two sons born, but Jacob now adopts Ephraim and Manasseh into his family at the highest level, the level of his firstborns. To Joseph, Jacob said: *6 Any descendent of yours whom you father after them will be yours; they will be identified by the names of their brothers for their inheritance.* (Genesis 48:6 TLV). Any children born to Joseph later would only inherit from him, *Yosef*. But Ephraim and Manasseh were now on the same level as their uncles. Then, at that point, *Ya’acov* crossed his hands as he laid them on the boy’s heads and with his right hand on Ephraim’s head, Jacob gave him greater prominence over his older brother. His name means “fruitfulness.” At his birth, *Yosef* prophetically named his second son, not knowing at the time that he would get the greater blessing and the greater prominence. The double portion of wealth went to both Ephraim and Manasseh, but Ephraim

was given the greater prominence. His descendants became the greater tribe and his name was even used at times to refer to the whole northern nation of Israel.

And then, Jacob began to bless his sons. The blessing was given in their birth order. The blessing that Jacob pronounced upon Joseph, the 11<sup>th</sup> born, was an excellent blessing, the most-praising of all the blessings given. All this may have been a well-deserved reward because Joseph was ADONAI's obedient servant throughout his life as well as his father Jacob's favorite son. Jacob blessed him this way: *22 A fruitful son is Joseph, a fruitful son beside a spring— daughters walk along a wall. 23 The archers were bitter and shot arrows and were hostile towards him. 24 Yet his bow was always filled, and his arms quick-moving— by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob. From there a Shepherd, the Stone of Israel, 25 from the God of your father who helps you, and Shaddai who blesses you, with blessings of heavens above, blessings of the deep that lies below, blessings of breasts and womb. 26 The blessings of your father surpassed the blessings of the ancient mountains, the desire of the everlasting hills. May they be upon Joseph's head, upon the crown of the one set apart from his brothers.* (Genesis 49:22-26 TLV).

The first inheritance is the firstborn inheritance of property. Joseph replaced his brother Reuven in this honor, but it was given to his sons rather than him. 1Chronicles tells us about the property right of the firstborn: *1 The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel—he was the firstborn, but when he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph son of Israel—so he is not reckoned as the firstborn in the genealogical record.* (1Chronicles 5:1 TLV). There is a second inheritance which went to the son whom ADONAI chose, not necessarily the firstborn, and was the right to carry on the lineage and the promise which ADONAI gave to Abraham, that “nations and kings would come from him?” Isaac was the second born and he got it. Jacob was the second born and he got it. Who got the birthright? *2 Though Judah was the strongest among his brothers, and a ruler came from him, the birthright belonged to Joseph.* (1Chronicles 5:2 TLV). Joseph got it. Even though Judah received the right to be ancestor of kings, he did not receive the birthright. Joseph received through his two sons. ADONAI gave blessings to the sons of Joseph and also the birthright, but not the right to pass on the lineage. This right, the right to pass on the lineage from which nations and kings would come, went to Judah, the fourthborn.

Here is Jacob's blessing of Y'hudah, the 4<sup>th</sup> born son: *8 Judah, so you are— your brothers will praise you: Your hand will be on your enemies' neck. Your father's sons will bow down to you. 9 A lion's cub is Judah— from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He crouches, lies down like a lion, or like a lioness— who would rouse him? 10 The scepter will not pass from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs will come. To him will be the obedience of the peoples. 11 Binding his foal to the vine, his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he washes his garments in wine, and in the blood of grapes his robe. 12 His eyes are darker than wine, and teeth that are whiter than milk.* (Genesis 49:8-12 TLV). Verse 10 is the definitive proclamation by ADONAI, prophesied by Jacob, that Judah would carry on the blood line from whom kings would come. In his earlier life Judah didn't have the best character. After Yosef was captured and put in the pit, Judah suggested that they sell him (Genesis 37:26). He also did not deal honestly with his daughter-in-law Tamar (Genesis 38:26), and he had sex with her as a prostitute (Genesis 38:18). Maybe he redeemed himself when he showed good character by interceding and offering himself to Joseph as a substitute for Benjamin (Genesis 44:18-34). But, did this qualify Judah to become the ancestor of the Messiah? Probably not in our minds, but Judah being chosen for this honor is another example of ADONAI's divine prerogative. ADONAI said to Moses: *19 ... “I will be gracious toward whom I will be gracious, and I will show mercy on whom I will be merciful.”* (Exodus

33:10b TLV). *Bi'lam's* prophecy about Israel shows us that ADONAI would bring forth a king from Jacob's descendant: 17 "I see him, yet not at this moment. I behold him, yet not in this location. For a star will come from Jacob, a scepter will arise from Israel..." (Numbers 24:17a TLV). This prophecy by Balaam is actually about Judah because of Jacob's prophecy about him in Genesis 49:10 several hundred years earlier. Jacob said: "Your father's sons will bow down to you" and "The scepter will not pass from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs will come. To him will be the obedience of the peoples." "To whom it belongs" is *ki-yavo Shiloh*, כִּי-יָבֹא שִׁילֹה. *Shiloh* is considered to be a messianic title and is sometimes translated "until *Shiloh* comes. These statements refer to the ruling position that Judah's descendant will have among his brothers which was hinted at in Balaam's prophecy. The leadership inheritance was passed on to Judah by his father Jacob in Genesis 49:10. The leadership position of the family meant that kings of Israel would come from the Tribe of Judah and that the Messiah, ADONAI's ultimate anointed, would also come from Judah.

The firstborn had the right of inheritance. Usually, he became the leader of the family and in addition was entitled to a double portion of the inheritance, receiving twice as much as any of the other brothers. But in this case it was divided. *Yehudah* got the inheritance of leadership and *Yosef's* sons got the double portion inheritance of property. Judah's leadership inheritance was prophesied, but was not received until David became king some 600 plus years later, a partial fulfillment. The complete fulfillment will not occur for some 3,600 years when *Yeshua* will return to earth to take his rightful place as the *Melekh BenDavid*, King, Son of David. Jacob's prophecy about Judah tells us that the scepter, the ruling staff of kings, would not leave Judah's descendants until *Shiloh* comes. This name is a reference to *Yeshua*, a messianic title, understood from ancient times to refer to the Messiah.

We understand regarding Judah, the ancestor of Messiah *Yeshua*, that his selection was by ADONAI's grace and favor. What about the father of the tribe of the priests and the Levites? *Levi's* prophecy was not one which anyone would want: 5 *Simeon and Levi are brothers, instruments of violence are their knives. 6 In their secret counsel may my soul not enter. In their contingent may my honor never be united. For in their anger they slew men, and in their self-will they maimed oxen. 7 Cursed be their anger for it was strong and their rage for it was cruel—I will disperse them in Jacob, I will scatter them in Israel.* (Genesis 49:5-7 TLV). Both Moses and Aaron were descended from *Levi*. It was *Shi'mon* and *Levi* who tricked the Hivites into circumcising themselves and when they were in pain they entered the city and murdered all the men. It was ADONAI's grace working in His choice of *Levi's* descendants as well. There is no Scriptural evidence which explains it. The last sentence, "I will disperse them in Jacob, I will scatter them in Israel" could be a reference to their inheritance of land. As priests and Levites, their inheritance was scattered among all the tribes, rather than receiving a single tribal area as the other brothers did. What Ephraim, Manasseh, Levi and Judah received from ADONAI was because of His grace.

What is grace? We usually hear the definition as "ADONAI's unmerited favor," and it certainly is. But, do some seek to receive His grace when there is no grace? Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran pastor in Nazi Germany coined the term- "cheap grace." Cheap grace is not a reference to G-d's grace, but a counterfeit. It's a grace that is "cheap" in value, not cost. It is a man-made grace. An example is the indulgences that a person could buy from the Catholic Church in Martin Luther's time. A person could sin and then pay a fee to cover it and then sin again. That kind of grace is totally worthless before ADONAI. The term "cheap grace" implies that a person believes that a sin is justified but without the sinner actually

being spiritually justified. In the modern body of Messiah, it can be outward piety and physical works without a relationship with Yeshua. To those people, He said: "Depart from me, I never knew you." (Matthew 7:21-23). It is a theology which ignores the biblical truth which *Sha'ul* taught: *11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12 training us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live in a manner that is self-controlled and righteous and godly in the present age.* (Titus 2:11-12 TLV). Instead today, many live as if grace is a ticket to heaven free from any moral demands. This kind of grace calls sinners to come to Messiah but does not require them to surrender to Him. In this kind of grace they accept Him, supposedly receive Him, but do not find it necessary to be obedient to Him. The prevalence of this type of grace within Yeshua's body is why we must have revival today, *teshuvah*, repentance of sins and a return to the Biblical lifestyle which He teaches. Not only is our greater society morally bankrupt, but also a large portion of those who claim to follow Yeshua. They claim to follow Him but deny it with their actions. We have major Christian denominations today with millions of participants who choose to change ADONAI's word to suit their social beliefs, both ordaining clergy and marrying individuals who violate G-d's Law. *13 If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination, and they should surely be put to death. Their blood should be on them.* (Leviticus 20:13 TLV). We are not in ADONAI's theocracy today, so we do not put people to death for this sin, but without repentance, this sin can lead to spiritual death, final separation from Him. We are to love them and pray for them.

What is the opposite of cheap grace? There are a number of different definitions of grace today. Here is one: real grace is "ADONAI's reward to those of us who do not deserve it, His mercy to undeserving people." *Sha'ul* frequently contrasted grace with law. He said: *21 I do not nullify the grace of God—for if righteousness comes through Torah, then Messiah died for no reason!"* (Galatians 2:21 TLV). If salvation could be attained through works or obeying laws, then Yeshua would not have needed to die as our sacrifice for sin. *Sha'ul* also said: *4 You who are trying to be justified by Torah have been cut off from Messiah; you have fallen away from grace.* (Galatians 5:4 TLV). If you try to get to heaven by works, you have fallen from grace. That is not what we are trying to do. We have a balanced understanding of salvation by faith through ADONAI's grace which is then followed by righteous behavior. *Sha'ul* was careful to say that grace does not do away with the moral requirements of ADONAI's law. Grace does not cancel out the righteous requirements, the commandments of the law. It confirms them and validates them. He said: *31 Do we then nullify the Torah through faithfulness? May it never be! On the contrary, we uphold the Torah.* (Romans 3:31 TLV). Our salvation in Messiah Yeshua is by trusting faithfulness. But, our acceptance of His gift does not abolish our need for *Torah*. Without the teaching and instruction of the *Torah* in its greater sense, that is, Genesis through Revelation, we do not know what righteous conduct is. It is through the *Torah* that we learn how to live a righteous life, the life taught to us by Yeshua.

How can we who have received Yeshua as Messiah continue in His grace? The only way is to follow the example of our Messiah and to deny ourselves. If we don't deny ourselves we are receiving "cheap grace." Yeshua said: *24 ... , "If anyone wants to follow after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me. 25 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.* (Matthew 16:24b-25 TLV). This really means that by denying ourselves we are putting away our selfish desires and following the example that Yeshua has shown us.

Have you ever thought about the Day of *Yom Kippur* as something which has ongoing meaning beyond just on that one day? We think about the message of Passover regularly,

why not *Yom Kippur*? ADONAI said: 27 “*However, the tenth day of this seventh month is Yom Kippur, a holy convocation to you, so you are to afflict yourselves....*” (Leviticus 23:27a TLV). Other versions say “deny yourselves.” The *Talmud* tells us that this means that we are to fast, and we do follow that tradition on *Yom Kippur*. But I really think that it means something else. The Hebrew word is *va-initim*, וַעֲנִיְתֶם, from the Hebrew root *anah*, אָנָּה, which means to “bow down or afflicted.” Afflict is used in the sense of “humble.” It means that we are to give ourselves totally to G-d. The meaning of this verse is that “we are to humble ourselves.” It’s good to fast in unity with our brothers and sisters in traditional Judaism, but that’s not what ADONAI is requiring of us in this verse. He is telling us that we are to approach Him on *Yom Kippur* or on any day that a person seeks salvation, with a humble heart, a heart which is totally given to Him. In this regard, our own personal day of salvation, if you remember when it was, was *Yom Kippur* for us. Understanding it this way means that we are to deny our human desires of pleasure or whatever and totally give ourselves to Him. Yeshua’s statement about denying ourselves is slightly different in Luke: 23 *Then Yeshua was saying to everyone, “If anyone wants to follow Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross every day, and follow Me.”* (Luke 9:23 TLV). He said that denying ourselves must be a daily thing. If we specifically think about that each day, we will be much less likely to allow our “old man” to have his way.

In the beginning of our *parasha*, Jacob said to his sons: 1 ...: “*Gather together so that I can tell you what will happen to you in the last days*” (Genesis 49:1b TLV). This is really a prophecy about the end times, a period which seems to have begun when Yeshua came to earth. *Shimon Kefa* quoting Joel 3:1 said: 17 “*And it shall be in the last days,’ says God, ‘that I will pour out My Ruach on all flesh. Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.’*” (Acts 2:17 TLV). That was *Shavuot*, the time when ADONAI poured out His Spirit upon those worshipping Him on the Temple Mount, a time that was near the beginning of “the last days.” Before Joel prophesied about ADONAI pouring out His *Ruach* on all flesh, he also prophesied: 23 *So be glad, children of Zion, and rejoice in Adonai, your God. For He gives you the early rain for prosperity, Yes, He will bring down rain for you, the early and latter rain as before.* (Joel 2:23 TLV). Was Joel using rain as a symbol of the *Ruach Kodesh*? I believe that he was. ADONAI, speaking to Jacob, Israel, about the latter days, said: 3 “*For I will pour (A) water on the thirsty land and (B) streams on the dry ground. I will pour (A) My Spirit on your offspring, and (B) My blessing on your descendants.*” (Isaiah 44:3 TLV). We see Hebrew parallelism in this verse, A with A and B with B. Water being poured, *mayim*, is rain and is parallel with “My Spirit.” If rain is a symbol of the *Ruach*, ADONAI’s Holy Spirit, then would not Joel’s early rain be the outpouring at *Shavuot* in the 1<sup>st</sup> century? In a similar way, would not the latter rain be an outpouring of ADONAI’s Holy Spirit in the end of the last days, a time where we are now, some two thousand years future to the early rain? We are fasting and praying for that outpouring to come, the time of refreshing

Our *Shlichim* reading today proclaims: 3 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah! In His great mercy He caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Messiah Yeshua from the dead. 4 An incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading inheritance has been reserved in heaven for you.* (1Peter 1:3-4 TLV). That is what awaits those who have trusted Yeshua in faith, received ADONAI’s grace and then walked faithfully in His commandments. But, *Kefa* also says to those who have strayed: 19 *Repent, therefore, and return—so your sins might be blotted out, 20 so times of relief might come from the presence of Adonai and He might send Yeshua, the Messiah appointed for you.* (Acts 3:19-20 TLV). The Greek word translated relief in this verse is *anapsyxeōs*, (an-aps-e-ze-os). It is

also translated as “refreshing,” something Yeshua’s body needs. We all need our spirits to be refreshed, to “repent and return,” because we have all sinned and fallen short of ADONAI’s glory. *Shimon Kefa* seems to have seen a future time, a time when Yeshua’s body would need to return, a time also near His return for us.

Jacob said to his sons: *1 ...: “Gather together so that I can tell you what will happen to you in the last days”* (Genesis 49:1b TLV). We are living in the last of the *acharit hayamim*, the last days.” This period began with Yeshua’s early disciples and the *yoreh geshem*, the early rain Holy Spirit poured out on them. We are living in the end of the *acharit hayamim* and awaiting the *malkosh gemshem*, the latter rain outpouring of the *Ruach Kodesh* and end time revival. We cannot afford to live with “cheap grace.” We must have the grace which causes us to take up our execution stake daily. If we want to live in Yeshua's grace then we must daily turn away from our own desires and be willing to die for Him. *Ya’acov’s* prophecy spoken over his son *Yehudah* was a time specific prophecy, a prophecy about our near future. He said: *10 The scepter will not pass from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs will come. To him will be the obedience of the peoples.* (Genesis 49:10 TLV). This could only be about the end of the *acharit hayamim*, our time. When Yeshua first came, He came not as a king, but as a servant. Jacob’s words to his son Judah are a prophecy of Yeshua’s coming as king at the end of the *acharit hayamim*. The time is near. Pray for *teshuvah*, repentance and revival, but also pray for the *malkosh geshem*, the latter rain of ADONAI’s Spirit which will empower it. Yeshua is coming soon! *Shabbat shalom!*