

That We May Live and Not Die

Parashat Vayigash



Parashat Vayigash: That We May Live and Not Die

This week's Torah portion is "Vayigash" (he approached). Our parasha unfolds after Joseph suspected Benjamin of stealing the cup of the viceroy. The situation looked bad for Joseph's brothers.

The previous time that they went down to Egypt, they were accused of being spies. One of the brothers, Simon, was even taken prisoner right before their eyes and remained in the Egyptian prison up until now.

At this moment, they've been incriminated as being thieves – there seems to be no good outcome to this saga. Judah, the leader and most prominent among the brothers, approached Joseph and spoke to his heart. Immediately afterwards, Joseph confessed to his brothers, saying "I am Joseph."

Like Joseph, Yeshua Reveals Himself to His Brothers

Similar to Joseph, Yeshua truly longs to be amongst his brothers. As soon as the people of Israel are ready, Yeshua will likewise immediately confess to us and say, “I am Yeshua your brother, come to me and I will give you the bread of life.”

Like the reunion of Joseph with his brothers, this encounter between the people of Israel and Yeshua the Messiah will be exhilarating.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, ‘Come close to me.’ – Genesis 45:4a [NIV]

Joseph called his brothers to him and explained to them that this was actually the plan of God:

And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. – Genesis 45:5 [NIV]

So Yeshua invites us all unto Him:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. – Matthew 11:28 [NIV]

Yeshua will comfort us so that we will no longer worry, because it was God’s plan to save Israel, as well as the entire world. Just as Joseph said, “It was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you,” God also sent Yeshua the Messiah to deliver us, so that we may have eternal life in Him.

In Genesis 45:9, Joseph asked his brothers to inform their father that he is alive and living in Egypt like a king. Joseph asks his brothers to bring their father and all that they have to Egypt, so that they may have food and life, because there was a great famine in the world during this time.

In comparison, Yeshua sent us and his disciples to proclaim the good news: that Yeshua lives as king seated on the throne, and that He has the power to feed us with the bread of life.

In Genesis 45:25 The brothers returned to their father's house according to the command of Joseph:

*They told him, 'Joseph is still alive! In fact, he is ruler of all Egypt.' Jacob was stunned; he did not believe them. – Genesis 45:26
[NIV]*

Indeed, with their own eyes the brothers saw that Joseph was alive and well, leading a prosperous life in the Egyptian empire. At first they couldn't believe it, Joseph had to convince them of his true identity.

Afterwards, the brothers returned to Jacob, with wagon loads full of various gifts which including food, clothing, and money. Even after Jacob saw the wagons containing the numerous presents, he was still unable to comprehend it.

The situation is similar for us today. It took us some time to realize that Yeshua is the Messiah of Israel, who is alive and well, sitting at the right hand of God. Likewise, when we return to our family's home, to our brothers, they do not believe us.

We have to work hard and prove that Joseph is really Joseph, and that he is alive and well. That is, that Yeshua is really our brother, and that He is truly the Messiah of the world. The day shall come when we all shall say: "Yeshua, the King of Israel, is alive and well!"

God promises us a happy ending even though at first it seemed as if everything was lost. The situation today is bad, most of the time there is no hope. The condition of the world is decaying and the political outlook is grim. On the face of things, it seems like Yeshua is far from Israel. However, there is still hope and the story doesn't end here.

Judah, the Natural Leader

The patriarchs of Israel were in Egypt, Simon was in prison, the rest of the brothers were suspected of being spies as well as thieves, and it looked like there was no way out of this mess. In the middle of it all, Judah, the leader amongst the brothers, approached Joseph despite their gruesome situation.

Judah proved multiple times that he was a natural leader. Those who

examine the scriptures see that Judah strived to make wise decisions and that he possessed the skill of being able to read people.

If we go back a little, the Bible tells us that the brothers aimed to kill Joseph. When he arrived at Dothan, we see that Reuben and Judah were the two brothers who were interested in sparing his life. Reuben's plan was to rescue Joseph later on from the pit.

However, Judah waited for the other brothers to eat, rest, and lose some of their anger before he offered to sell Joseph into slavery instead of killing him. He did so because Joseph was nevertheless their brother and the flesh of their flesh. The main point was Judah's timing, and the fact that he succeeded in persuading the other brothers away from their original, murderous plan (Genesis 37:26).

This was the case once again when the brothers tried to persuade Jacob to let them take Benjamin down to Egypt with them, in order so that they could bring more food as well as release Simon from the Egyptian prison. Reuben tried to persuade his father but it proved to be unsuccessful. Despite this, Judah was able to persuade him.

In fact, he actually used the same reasoning that Jacob used to send them off to Egypt the first time:

...So that we may live and not die. – Genesis 42:2b [NIV]

Judah used the exact same words:

...So that we and you and our children may live and not die. – Genesis 43:8b [NIV]

Again, we see that Judah's words touched Jacob and succeeded in convincing him to let them have charge over Benjamin, which was against his will.

Now, in this week's Torah portion, Judah approached Joseph, as was mentioned previously. Judah used his wisdom, identifying and raising a sensitive point for Joseph, which was a father figure.

The main goal of this speech was to clarify to Joseph that they do not want to hurt their father. Judah's speech hit spot-on and Joseph couldn't control himself. He broke down crying, and the first question he asked was,

Is my father still living? – Genesis 45:3b [NIV]

A Life of Eternal Significance

Today's world makes us think of how small we are, that everything is passing, temporary, negligible, and unimportant. When we think of the heroes from our weekly Torah portions, perhaps we wonder about what was going on in their heads.

Could they have imagined that their lives and deeds were of eternal significance, and that in thousands of years people would read, study, and tell about their actions? I think that they probably had no idea the magnitude of their words and accomplishments.

Yes, God promised them that a great people was going to be born from them, they were aware of this fact. However, they did not see how it was executed through their daily actions.

In fact, only from a great distance, of many years, can we look and examine the pages of history and appreciate the greatness of those people and the historical processes that God set in motion through them. We can see that history is written word by word, person by person, action by action, until the world suddenly finds itself elsewhere.

To a certain extent, the Bible is not yet finished. Today we live the prophecies predicted many years ago. We are still humanity created by God, and He, of course, has not abandoned us.

Even if we do not feel it daily, our lives have meaning and we carry responsibilities. The day will come out of our complicated lives, when another chapter will be written in the pages of history. People will learn about what we have done, how we have lived, and about God who led us and who continues to lead those who follow Him to a better future.

Invest in the Next Generation

One of our most important goals, as a movement and as a community, must be the education of the younger generation, because they are the continuation and the future of the Messianic movement. Upon them will the generations be built, thus signifying their profoundness.

We must strive to be a positive influence on the next generation and bring them into a more biblical lifestyle. The future, both that of the Body of Messiah and that of the relationship between Israel and Yeshua, is based on our actions and on the actions of our children.

People like Judah, Reuben, Jacob, and even Joseph, never dreamt or thought that after so many years, people would talk about what they did – and about what God did through them. Even if they intended for this or not, whether they sought after good or evil, God used these people and created the history that we are living in today.

We too, are part of this history, and God uses us and will use our children in the future. We must prepare the ground as best we can for the Kingdom of Heaven, it is in our hands here and now.

Judging from what I've read in the Bible, Judah was a wise man, and he knew how to deliver the right words at the right time.

We must learn to follow suit in this way. This is especially true when we speak with our spouses, our children, and also when we talk about the words of the Bible. Let us bear this all in mind as we continue to make history and do God's will.

Shabbat Shalom.

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