

# Gather Together and Hear

## Torah Portion Vayechi – Genesis 47:28-50:26

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The video version of this teaching is at: <https://youtu.be/kbs1An26Ua8>

The scripture reading is Genesis 49

This Torah portion finishes the book of Genesis and records the end of the life of both Jacob and Joseph. But the name of the portion, Vayechi, means “and he lived.” This week we will focus on chapter forty-nine of Genesis where Jacob, nearing the end of his life, calls his sons to assemble before him.

Genesis 49:1-2 NKJV 1 And Jacob called his sons and said, "Gather together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in the last days: 2 "Gather together and hear, you sons of Jacob, And listen to Israel your father.

Chapter forty-nine is written in a poetic form. This calls special attention to the passage. Whenever we come across a passage of scripture that transforms from historical narrative to poetry, we know that there is a special message to be communicated. What does this chapter tell us about the sons of Israel, specifically Joseph and Judah? What does the prophetic nature and content of this chapter tell us about the future relationship of these sons of Jacob and tribes of Israel? What do the words of Jacob tell us about the promised Messiah?

The primary focus in these last few chapters of Genesis has been the relationship of the brothers, especially the relationship and interaction between Joseph and Judah. In this chapter Jacob called his sons together to issue his parting blessing to them just as his father did for him. But there is more to Jacob’s words than mere blessings. Jacob imparted to them prophecy. He told them what would befall them in the last days.

Although Jacob gives blessings and prophecy to all his sons, the words spoken over Joseph and Judah hold a messianic significance. He begins with his prophecy over Judah in verse 8:

Genesis 49:8-12 NKJV 8 "Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father's children shall bow down before you. 9 Judah is a lion's whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; And as a lion, who shall rouse him? 10 The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people. 11 Binding his donkey to the vine, And his donkey's colt to the choice vine, He washed his garments in wine, And his clothes in the blood of grapes. 12 His eyes are darker than wine, And his teeth whiter than milk.

Jacob’s blessing and prophecy over Judah opens with the statement that Judah will be held in high esteem by the other brothers. Even the name Judah indicates this to be the case. In the Hebrew, we see a word play in the poetry of this passage. The name Judah is number 3063 in the Strong’s Concordance derived from the root word yadah, number 3034 meaning to revere or worship, to praise. Yadah also means to confess. In this meaning we see that it is through Judah that Messiah will be manifest and salvation will come to all Israel. The word translated as praise in Verse eight is yadah. Verse eight could be translated as, “Judah, (Yahudah) you are he whom your brothers shall praise (yadah).

This prophecy implies that the brothers will, one day acknowledge the leadership of Judah. We can observe at least one future fulfillment of this prophecy when David, from the tribe of Judah, becomes king over the entire nation of Israel.

2 Samuel 5:1-2 NKJV 1 Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and spoke, saying, "Indeed we are your bone and your flesh. 2 "Also, in time past, when Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel out and brought them in; and the LORD said to you, 'You shall shepherd My people Israel, and be ruler over Israel.'"

There is further fulfillment in Messiah Yeshua, also from the tribe of Judah. The apostle Paul tells us that a confession (yadah) of faith is what brings salvation.

Romans 10:9-10 NKJV 9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Jacob's words to Judah were that he as well as his descendants would prevail over their enemies. Look at the middle part of verse eight.

**"Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies."**

This too looks to the future king David who prevailed time and again over the enemies who came against Israel. And Messiah, Son of David will prevail on Israel's behalf. These battles are described at length throughout the prophets and writings in both the Tanakah and the apostolic scriptures.

Micah 5:5-6 NKJV 5 And this One shall be peace. When the Assyrian comes into our land, And when he treads in our palaces, Then we will raise against him Seven shepherds and eight princely men. 6 They shall waste with the sword the land of Assyria, And the land of Nimrod at its entrances; Thus He shall deliver us from the Assyrian, When he comes into our land And when he treads within our borders.

At the end of verse eight, Jacob says that "your father's children shall bow down before you." This is contrary to Joseph's dream recorded in Genesis 37:5-7.

Genesis 37:5-7 NKJV 5 Now Joseph had a dream, and he told it to his brothers; and they hated him even more. 6 So he said to them, "Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: 7 "There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf."

By this prophecy Jacob is saying that the leadership or kingship will pass from the line of Joseph to that of Judah. The future Messiah and king will descend from the line of Judah!

In verse nine, Jacob turns to the metaphor of a lion in his blessing and prophecy to Judah.

Genesis 49:9 NKJV 9 Judah is a lion's whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; And as a lion, who shall rouse him?

Jacob seems to be comparing Judah's enemies with the lion's slain prey. Just as a lion rests and sleeps after a kill and is satisfied, so too will Judah reside in peace following the final battles and defeat of his enemies. An interesting parallel is found in the second prophecy of Balaam.

Numbers 23:24 NKJV 24 Look, a people rises like a lioness, And lifts itself up like a lion; It shall not lie down until it devours the prey, And drinks the blood of the slain."

The reign of king David and his son Solomon foreshadow the peace that will be in the land in the Messianic era. Following the battles that David fought during his reign, Solomon's reign was in a time of peace.

1 Kings 4:25 NKJV 25 And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, each man under his vine and his fig tree, from Dan as far as Beersheba, all the days of Solomon.

In verse ten, Judah prophesized that the future king of Israel would arise from and be forever held by the descendants of Judah.

Genesis 49:10 NKJV 10 The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people.

The Hebrew word translated as scepter is shevat, number 7626. The word has multiple meanings. It literally means a stick for punishing, writing, fighting, ruling, or walking. But can also mean scepter, staff, or tribe. When we think of Judah's staff, we can't help but recall Psalm 23 where the good shepherd comforts his flock.

Psalms 23:4 NKJV 4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

The prophet Isaiah says that the Messiah will slay the wicked with the rod or shevet of his mouth.

Isaiah 11:4 NKJV 4 But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, And decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked.

The apostle John in Revelation repeats this same prophecy.

Revelation 19:15 NKJV 15 Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

There is a striking association of the shevet of Judah and the Messiah. This staff that will not depart from Judah means that the Messianic kingdom and the office of Messiah will forever belong to the tribe of Judah. Messiah, son of David must come from the line of Judah.

We will now skip ahead and turn our attention back to Joseph. As we have learned over the last several Torah portions Jacob considered Joseph to be his favorite son. This is apparent in this portion as well with the lavish blessings and the prophecy Jacob bestows on Joseph. Jacob's blessings over Joseph are a prophetic hint toward Messiah ben Joseph, the suffering servant. Jacob begins with a double statement.

Genesis 49:22 NKJV 22 "Joseph is a fruitful bough, A fruitful bough by a well; His branches run over the wall.

Most translations use the word bough, but the Hebrew word is ben, normally translated as son. Joseph is the faithful son. Through all of Joseph's life he faced much trouble but remained faithful. Joseph was rejected by his older brothers, first left for dead in a dry well, then sold into slavery. Joseph rose to a prominent position in the household of Potiphar, only to be falsely accused by Potiphar's wife and subsequently taken to prison. And while in prison, rose to a position of trust and authority over other prisoners. Ultimately, Joseph rose to a

position of second in command of all of Egypt. Through his faithfulness Joseph was able to overcome these adversities and prevail. Jacob speaks to the assaults that Joseph faced in the next two verses.

Genesis 49:23-24 NKJV 23 The archers have bitterly grieved him, Shot at him and hated him. 24 But his bow remained in strength, And the arms of his hands were made strong By the hands of the Mighty God of Jacob (From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel),

Jacob speaks of archers and being shot at with arrows. It is as if Joseph was pierced and yet prevailed because of his faithfulness. Both Zechariah and Isaiah speak of the suffering servant, Messiah ben Joseph as being pierced.

Zechariah 12:10 NKJV 10 "And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.

And in Isaiah chapter 53 verse 5.

Isaiah 53:5 NKJV 5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.

At the end of Genesis 49:24 Jacob refers to Joseph as the shepherd and stone of Israel. At 17 years old Joseph tended the flocks of Jacob and was Jacob's favored son. The hopes and dreams of Jacob, or Israel, rested on Joseph. Joseph was a kind of foundation for Jacob, a stone for Israel. Yet Joseph's position of leadership and authority was rejected by his brothers. Yeshua is also referred to a stone rejected by His brothers.

Psalms 118:22 NKJV 22 The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone.

Joseph was the key figure in the provision for and prosperity of the Children of Israel while they were in Egypt. His rejection by his brothers led Joseph to many trials and suffering. But ultimately Joseph would forgive his brothers for their mistreatment and provide salvation for them in the time of famine and beyond.

Next Jacob blesses Joseph with prosperity in agriculture stating that God will bring blessings in the form of dew and rain.

Genesis 49:25 NKJV 25 By the God of your father who will help you, And by the Almighty who will bless you With blessings of heaven above, Blessings of the deep that lies beneath, Blessings of the breasts and of the womb.

This is all about life. Water is central to life and it is God who provides the dew and rain. In their time in Egypt, the Children of Israel were greatly blessed of God. Before they were reduced to slavery under a later Pharaoh, they multiplied to great numbers and acquired great wealth while living in Goshen on the banks of the Nile river. Blessings of the breast and womb speak to how quickly they multiplied to countless numbers. At first, life was good in Egypt for the Children of Israel under the leadership of Joseph and his two sons.

This blessing calls to mind the words of Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, when Mary, the mother of Yeshua, came to visit her.

Luke 1:41-42 NKJV 41 And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!

The blessings Joseph would receive going forward will be greater than the blessing of his fathers.

Genesis 49:26 NKJV 26 The blessings of your father Have excelled the blessings of my ancestors, Up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills. They shall be on the head of Joseph, And on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers.

The phrase “everlasting hills” alludes to the blessings of Joseph being extended over the entire earth. This tells us that the promise given to Abraham is being passed on to Joseph.

Genesis 22:17-18 NKJV 17 "blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. 18 "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."

Extending this blessing over Joseph implies that the sovereignty of Messiah will extend to the entire earth.

Matthew 25:31-32 NKJV 31 "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. 32 "All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.

Jacob ends his prophecy over Joseph with an interesting phrase. “They shall be on the head of Joseph, And on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers.”

The Hebrew word translated as separate is nazir, number 5139 meaning to be separate, consecrated, or a Nazarite. Jewish tradition says that Joseph did not partake of the fruit of the vine for the entire twenty-two years that he was separated from his brothers. This may point to Yeshua’s separation from His brothers following his death and resurrection.

Matthew 26:29 NKJV 29 "But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

First Fruits of Zion in their work “Shadows of the Messiah” quote a Jewish Rabbi’s commentary on this final blessing of Joseph in terms of a Messianic promise.

“... “The one distinguished (separated) from his brothers.” He is Messiah son of Joseph who goes out from him in his merit and is sorrowful and bears their punishments. He will ascend to greatness, like Joseph, who was separated from his brothers and bore troubles peacefully. And the blessings rest upon “the crown of the head” because of the anointing that is there.”<sup>i</sup>

In this poetic section of the Torah portion Vayechi, Jacob give a blessing and prophecy to all twelve sons from the eldest, Ruben to the youngest, Benjamin. The majority of the blessings and prophecy are spoken over Judah, alluding to Messiah ben David, the conquering king who will come from the descendants of Judah. And also to Joseph alluding to Messiah ben Joseph, the faithful suffering servant who will bring salvation and blessings, first promised to Abraham, to the entire earth.

Study Questions:

1. What characteristics, attitudes and actions, of Joseph point to him as the suffering servant? What characteristics, attitudes and actions, of Judah point to him as the conquering king?

2. Jacob uses the symbolism of a lion in his prophecy/blessing of Judah. How does the lion represent the reign of both David and Solomon? How do the lion prophecies here in this portion as well as other scripture foreshadow Messiah ben Joseph and Messiah ben David?
3. The staff or shevat is most often associated with judgment. Compare Psalm 2:9, Revelation 2:27, and Revelation 12:5, what does the “iron scepter or shavat symbolize? What other ways is a staff or rod used in the scriptures?
4. Jacob begins his prophecy over Joseph with a double statement (Read Genesis 49:22). We mentioned that the word translated as “bough” is ben, and also means son. The Hebrew word for spring is ayin which normally means eye. How does this meaning apply to Jacob’s prophecy for Joseph?
5. We did not cover the other 10 sons of Jacob included in chapter 49 in this teaching. In closer examination of those, what do you find in the blessings and prophecies given to the other sons?
6. What were some other mysteries of Messiah that were revealed in this teaching and this Torah portion? What new insight did you gain from this teaching? How do you respond to this new insight? How will you realign your life based on this new understanding?

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<sup>i</sup> Torat Mosheh in Malkut Moshiach: Vayechi, 458; 348