

## The Deep Counsel

In this week's reading from Parashat Vayeshev (*Shemot / Genesis 37:1-40:23*) we learn that Jacob loved Joseph more than his brothers (37:3, וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל אֶהָב אֶת-יוֹסֵף מִכָּל-בְּנָיו). Joseph had a dream about his future (37:5-10) told his brothers and they became jealous (37:11). As the narrative continues, Joseph's brothers are plotting murder in their hearts (37:18-22) but instead put him into a pit (37:23) and then sell him into slavery to the Ishmaelites (37:27-29). This week's parashah primarily discusses Joseph the eleventh son born to Jacob and the first born of Rachael. The narrative tells us that Jacob showed Joseph favoritism over his brothers (וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל אֶהָב אֶת-יוֹסֵף מִכָּל-בְּנָיו כִּי-) (בְּן-זִקְנִים) saying that he loved him more. This favoritism led to Jacob using Joseph to bring him news of his brothers, whether good or bad. Though Joseph was spoiled by Jacob, he walked in righteousness (וַיִּצְדֵּק) and justice (מִשְׁפָּט) more so than his brothers. The Scriptures tell us that the Lord was with Joseph (וַיְהִי אִתּוֹ אֱלֹהִים) prospering him and preparing him for the future survival of Israel. This weeks reading from the MT, the Aramaic Targum, and Midrash Rabbah we find an interesting insight into the counsel of God.

### ספר בראשית פרק לו Bereshit / Genesis 37:12-17

יב וַיֵּלְכוּ אֶחָיו לְרֵעוֹת אֶת-צֹאן אֲבִיהֶם בְּשֶׁכֶם: יג וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל-יוֹסֵף הֲלוֹא אֶחָיֶךָ רְעִים בְּשֶׁכֶם לָכֵה וְאֶשְׁלָה-חָדָה אֲלֵיהֶם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ הַנְּנִי: יד וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ לֵךְ-נָא רְאֵה אֶת-שְׁלוֹם אֶחָיֶךָ וְאֶת-שְׁלוֹם הַצֹּאן וְהַשְּׂבִי דָבָר וַיִּשְׁלַחְהוּ מֵעֵמֶק חֶבְרוֹן וַיָּבֹא שֶׁכֶם: טו וַיִּמְצָאוּהוּ אִישׁ וְהִנֵּה תֹעָה בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיִּשְׁאַלְהוּ הָאִישׁ לֵאמֹר מַה-תְּבַקֵּשׁ: טז וַיֹּאמֶר אֶת-אֲחָי אֲנֹכִי מִבְּקֹשׁ הַגִּידָה-נָא לִי אִיפֹה הֵם רְעִים: יז וַיֹּאמֶר הָאִישׁ נִסְעוּ מִזֶּה כִּי שָׁמַעְתִּי אֲמָרִים גִּלְכָה דְתִינָה וַיֵּלֶךְ יוֹסֵף אַחַר אֶחָיו וַיִּמְצָאם בְּדוֹתָן:

37:12 Then his brothers went to pasture their father's flock in Shechem. 37:13 Israel said to Joseph, 'Are not your brothers pasturing the flock in Shechem? Come, and I will send you to them.' And he said to him, 'I will go.' 37:14 Then he said to him, 'Go now and see about the welfare of your brothers and the welfare of the flock, and bring word back to me.' So he sent him from the valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem. 37:15 A man found him, and behold, he was wandering in the field; and the man asked him, 'What are you looking for?' 37:16 He said, 'I am looking for my brothers; please tell me where they are pasturing the flock.' 37:17 Then the man said, 'They have moved from here; for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.' ' So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan. (NASB)

According to the narrative, Joseph's brothers were pasturing their flocks in Shechem. Previously in Parashat Vayishlach, Simeon and Levi killed all of the men living in the city of Shechem after having tricked them into being circumcised. The people of Shechem hoped to take the wealth of Israel (*Note that this is synonymous to performing a work of the flesh in the hope of receiving a blessing from the Lord in heaven*). Jacob moved away from Shechem following the rape of Dinah and the murder of the men of Shechem.

However, the sons of Jacob continued to return to Shechem to feed their flock. Based upon the narrative, they continue to return to a place of sexual sin and death to feed their flock. Jacob obviously is worried about his sons and the Torah indicates that Jacob did not know where they were and neither did Joseph. While looking for his brothers, Joseph happens upon a man in the field and he asks the man where his brothers are feeding their flocks. The man tells him that they went to Dothan and so Joseph found his brothers at Dothan.

The Aramaic Targum Pseudo Jonathan has the following to say regarding Joseph's journey to find his brothers.

***Targum Pseudo Jonathan, Bereshit / Genesis 37***

*And his brothers went to feed their father's flock in Shekem. And it was at the time of days that Israel said to Joseph, Do not thy brethren feed in Shekem? But I am afraid lest the Hivite come and smite them, because they smote Hamor and Shekem and the inhabitants of the city. Come now; and I will send thee to them And he said, Behold me. And he said, Go, see the welfare of Your brethren, and the welfare of the flock, and return me word to the deep Counsel. But he sent him according to the deep counsel which was spoken to Abraham in Hebron; for on that day began the captivity of Mizraim.*

*And Joseph arose, and came to Shekem. And Gabriel in the likeness of a man found him wandering field. And the man asked him, saying, What seekest thou? And he said, I seek my brothers; show me, pray, where they feed. And the man said, They have journeyed hence: for I heard beyond the Veil, that behold from to-day would begin the servitude to the Mizraee; and it was said to them in prophecy, Hivite would seek to set battle in array against them. Therefore said they, we will go unto Dothan.*

Based upon the Aramaic Targum, Jacob (Israel) did know where his sons were feeding their flock and he was afraid that they would be attacked and so he sent Joseph to bring back word how they are doing. The rabbis say that Jacob asked Joseph to bring him word to the “*deep Counsel*.” The Targum goes on to say that he (Jacob) sent him according to the “*deep counsel*” which was spoken to Abraham at Hebron. What is this “*deep counsel*” the rabbis are referring to here in the Targum text? The Targum continues saying that Joseph rose and went to Shekem and there he met the angel Gabriel wandering in the field. The angel asked him what he was looking for and Joseph said he seeks his brothers. The angel responds saying that he “*heard beyond the veil*” of the enslaving of Israel in Egypt, of a prophetic message (given to Abraham), and that they had traveled on to Dothan. The angel is speaking of *Bereshit / Genesis 15:13* when “*God said to Abram, “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years.” (NASB)*

Based upon the Tanach, we find throughout the Scriptures terminology and imag-

ery that depict God as the enthroned King who is surrounded by powerful supernatural creatures. In the books of Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Daniel for example, we find that God gives divine counsel enthroned above in heaven. These counsel sessions, or throne visions, focus upon the Lord's authority in heaven and on earth to make decisions, judgments, and to show mercy and forgiveness. The counsel terminology and imagery that occurs throughout the Scriptures illustrates the enduring place that the counsel of God has within Israel's faith. Based upon the vision given to Abraham in *Bereshit / Genesis 15:13*, Israel believes in the reality of God's counsel, indicated by the Targum translation that Jacob sent Joseph according to the deep counsel. One of the ancient ways to describe God's authority is in His divine counsel which often conveys a theological message, like what we find here in the Targum on the power of God to save His people having foreknowledge that Joseph was going into slavery at this appointed time, and it is the Lord who was sending him for the purpose of the future salvation of all of Israel. The counsel and angelic beings testify to God's power and presence in the world and in the lives of His people. Likewise, in the inter-testamental period, the period of the Dead Sea Scrolls, are many writings of throne and apocalyptic visions, and there is much interest in the divine counsel. References to angelic beings are so numerous, every instance can hardly be cited. In biblical fashion, God's angels offer praises to the Lord, deliver messages to mankind, and intercede and interpret on behalf of man. These angels ultimately fight in the final eschatological war against evil, the fallen angels, and wicked mankind (see the book of Revelation). In the Targum Pseudo Jonathan, the rabbis make reference to the deep counsel, which is obviously a reference to the divine counsel of God according to the vision given to Abraham of the enslavement of Israel in Egypt.

*Midrash Rabbah Bereshit, Parashat 84, Part 14* has the following to say about Joseph's search for his brothers.

***Midrash Rabbah Bereshit, Parashat 84, Part 14***

*And a certain man found him, and, behold, etc. (Bereshit / Genesis 37:15). Rabbi Jannai said, He was met by three angels, for Scripture says, And a certain man found him...and the man asked him and the man said. Let us go to Dothan. For such are the designs of the Almighty. And they saw him afar off, etc. (Bereshit / Genesis 37:18). Said they, let us kill him by inciting the dogs against him. And they said one to another, behold, this dreamer comes (Bereshit / Genesis 37:19). The rabbi said, they exclaimed, behold, it is he, who is coming wrapped in his dreams. Rabbi Levi said, they exclaimed that this one was to ensnare them into serving foreign overlords. Come now therefore, and let us slay him...and we will see what will become of his dreams (Bereshit / Genesis 37:20). Said the Holy One blessed be He, to them, You say, And we will see, and I say, We will see, indeed, we will see whose words will be fulfilled.*

**מדרש רבה בראשית פרשה פד סימן יד**

יד וימצאהו איש והנה תועה בשדה, א"ר ינאי ג' מלאכים נזדווגו לו, וימ-

צאהו איש, וישאלהו האיש, ויאמר האיש, נסעו מזה, ממדותיו של מקום, ויראו אותו מרחוק, אמרו בואו ונשסה בו את הכלבים, ויאמרו איש אל אחיו הנה בעל החלומות, רבנן אמרי היידי ליה אתא וטעין חלמיה, א"ר לוי זה עתיד להשיאם לבעלים, ועתה לכו ונהרגהו, אמר הקב"ה אתם אומרים ונראה ואני אומר נראה, עתה נראה דבר מי יקום או שלי או שלכם.

The midrash states that Joseph was met by three angels, derived from the Hebrew text that *“a man found him”* (וַיִּמְצְאֵהוּ אִישׁ), then *“the man asked him”* (וַיִּשְׁאַלְהוּ הָאִישׁ), and *“the man said”* (וַיֹּאמֶר הָאִישׁ). The three occurrences of the word *“man”* leads to this sort of interpretation that is based upon the Aramaic Targum. The midrash has the angels traveling with Joseph to Dothan and the rabbis comment saying *“For such are the designs of the Almighty”* indicating that all of these things are within the plan of God. As Joseph approaches his brothers, their plan however is to kill him. The concept put forward in the midrash is that Joseph’s brothers thought him to be a dreamer, which is interpreted to mean that he will enslave them to serve foreign overlords (the Egyptians) therefore the brothers plan to kill him. The Lord God on the other hand has other plans, and the midrash concludes saying *“Said the Holy One blessed be He, to them, You say, And we will see, and I say, We will see, indeed, we will see whose words will be fulfilled.”* The Lord’s plans will be what comes true; the Lord works to bring to completion his plan regardless of the plans of mankind.

This week’s study, based upon the Aramaic Targum and Midrash Rabbah introduces an important concept of *“the counsel of God.”* In the Apostolic Writings, the Apostle Paul also wrote of the counsel of God in *Acts 20:25-30* in his warning to the believers.

### **Acts 20:25-30**

*20:25 And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. 20:26 Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. 20:27 For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. 20:28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. 20:29 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. 20:30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. (KJV)*

<sup>25</sup>Καὶ νῦν ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ οἶδα ὅτι οὐκέτι ὄψεσθε τὸ πρόσωπόν μου ὑμεῖς πάντες ἐν οἷς διῆλθον κηρύσσων τὴν βασιλείαν: <sup>26</sup>διότι μαρτύρομαι ὑμῖν ἐν τῇ σήμερον ἡμέρᾳ ὅτι καθαρὸς εἰμι ἀπὸ τοῦ αἵματος πάντων, <sup>27</sup>οὐ γὰρ ὑπεστειλάμην τοῦ μὴ ἀναγγεῖλαι πᾶσαν τὴν βουλὴν τοῦ θεοῦ ὑμῖν. <sup>28</sup>προσέχετε ἑαυτοῖς καὶ παντὶ τῷ ποιμνίῳ, ἐν ᾧ ὑμᾶς τὸ πνεῦμα

τὸ ἅγιον ἔθετο ἐπισκόπους, ποιμαίνειν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ, ἣν περιποιήσατο διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ ἰδίου.<sup>29</sup> ἐγὼ οἶδα ὅτι εἰσελεύσονται μετὰ τὴν ἄφιξίν μου λύκοι βαρεῖς εἰς ὑμᾶς μὴ φειδόμενοι τοῦ ποιμνίου,<sup>30</sup> καὶ ἐξ ὑμῶν αὐτῶν ἀναστήσονται ἄνδρες λαλοῦντες διεστραμμένα τοῦ ἀποσπᾶν τοὺς μαθητὰς ὀπίσω αὐτῶν.

According to the KJV translation, Paul speaks of “*the counsel of God,*” feeding the ekklesia, and a warning against false teachers. The phrase “*all the counsel,*” πᾶσαν τὴν βουλήν (pasan tēn boulēn), the word “*counsel*” (βουλή boulē) denotes “*consolation, deliberation,*” and “*will or purpose,*” (e.g. see *Luke 23:51, Acts 2:23*). Here Paul is saying “*the will or purpose of God*” as it has been revealed in regard to the salvation of His people. Paul’s statement of guilt and need for a savior, the provision of mercy, the future of rewards and punishments, and the danger of false teachers, all of these things are consistent from a Torah perspective. Paul states that he did not forbid to declare all the counsel of God. This is a reference to the counsel of God being all of Scripture, the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings, and the message of the Messiah Yeshua and his saving power. In Parashat Vayeshev, we read from the Aramaic Targum that Jacob sent Joseph by the deep counsel, or by the counsel of God. The counsel of God is the message of His word. The importance of God’s word as a guide for our lives is illustrated in the angel Gabriel’s statement when he said, “*I heard beyond the Veil, that behold from to-day would begin the servitude to the Mizraee; and it was said to them in prophecy, Hivvee would seek to set battle in array against them.*” Jacob listened and believed the word of the Lord that was spoken from the vision given to his grandfather Abraham. Similarly, God gave our Fathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) His word to instruct us in righteousness and truth and of His Messiah Yeshua our Savior. It is the duty of God’s people to listen with respect and with a desire to know the truth and to be saved by that truth. When we seek the Lord according to His word in the Scriptures, we are seeking the counsel of God. In addition to this, when we speak the word of God, from the Scriptures, we are declaring the counsel of God. This counsel of God (the Scriptures) should have an enduring place within our faith and lives. The Torah portion reveals to us that God’s plan is revealed in His counsel for truth and for life. His counsel is all of Scripture which is given ultimately for the Salvation of His people. Now, let’s take God’s word seriously because He may be telling us something that will effect many generations to come.

