

פרשת

ויגש

Parashat Vayigash

Genesis 44:18-47:27, Ezekiel 37:15-28

John 5:1-47

The Messiah being sent forth to guide us in God's Ways!

Judah (יהודה) was, according to the Torah in *Bereshit / Genesis*, the fourth son of Jacob and Leah, and the founder of the tribe of Judah. The Kingdom of Judah in the land of Judea was named after this tribe. The Hebrew name for Judah, Yehudah (יהודה), literally translates as “*thanksgiving*” or “*praise,*” and is the noun form of the root Y-D-H (ידה) meaning “*to thank*” or “*to praise.*” Judah’s birth is recorded at *Bereshit / Genesis 29:35*, where upon his birth, Leah exclaims, “*This time I will praise the LORD,*” using the Hebrew word for “*I will praise,*” odeh (אודה) sharing the same root as Yehudah. We read in this weeks Torah portion the idea of Judah being sent forth first ahead of his brothers and all that they had to sure up the way to Egypt, to find the location they were to go, and to make preparations. (*Bereshit / Genesis 46:28-34*) There are many parallels that may be drawn from the Scriptures that may be alluded to based upon what Jacob had done, sending Judah ahead, just as we see in the following verses.

Shemot / Exodus 13:21

13:21 And the LORD went before them in a pillar of

cloud to guide their way by day, and in a pillar of fire to give them light at night, so that they could travel by day or night. (NASB, כֹּה וַיְהִי הַלֵּךְ לְפָנֵיהֶם יוֹמָם בְּעַ־ מוֹד עָנָן לְנִחֹתָם הַדֶּרֶךְ וְלַיְלָה בְּעַמּוּד אֵשׁ לְהָאִיר לָהֶם לְלַכֹּת (יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה):

Shemot / Exodus 23:20

23:20 Behold, I am going to send an angel before you to guard you along the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. (NASB, כֹּה הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי שֹׁלֵחַ מִלְאָךְ לְפָנֶיךָ לְשַׁמְרֶךָ בַּדֶּרֶךְ וְלְהַבְיֵאֲךָ אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר הִכֵּ־ (נִתִּי):

Devarim / Deuteronomy 31:8

31:8 “The LORD is the one who goes ahead of you; He will be with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.” (NASB, הַ לַּיְהוָה הוּא | הַ הַלֵּךְ לְפָנֶיךָ הוּא יְהִי עִמָּךְ לֹא יִרְפָּךְ וְלֹא יַעֲזֹבֶךָ לֹא תִירָא (וְלֹא תַחַת):

Here the Lord God is described as going ahead to lead the way, to provide guidance, safety, and to fight our wars for us. Parallels may also be drawn to the Messiah who is sent forth first to guide us in God’s ways, and fight our wars for us as a leader. We are told the Messiah is the first born, not just as the first born child, but as *“firstborn of the dead,”* Yeshua is both first in time and first in preeminence. First in time since the rabbis describe him as having his name created before the world was created. (*Talmud Bavli Pesach 54a*) In the book of Micah Chapter 1, the prophet speaks of the Bethlehemite ruler, saying that his *“goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting,”* indicating the eternality of his name in agreement with the interpretations of the rabbis. The establishment of God’s throne is also found in the concept of accepting and living with the understanding that the Lord God in heaven has the primacy (first and foremost authority) in our lives. We who are His people are defined by who we are in the Messiah Yeshua, as the rabbis said was also established from before the

creation of the world.

The Scriptures we are looking at this week are from *Bereshit / Genesis 46:28-34*.

Bereshit / Genesis 46:28-34

46:28 He had sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph to show the way before him in Goshen, and they came into the land of Goshen. 46:29 Then Joseph prepared his chariot and went up to meet Israel his father in Goshen. He presented himself to him and fell on his neck and wept on his neck a good while. 46:30 Israel said to Joseph, "Now let me die, since I have seen your face and know that you are still alive." 46:31 Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's household, "I will go up and tell Pharaoh and will say to him, 'My brothers and my father's household, who were in the land of Canaan, have come to me. 46:32 And the men are shepherds, for they have been keepers of livestock, and they have brought their flocks and their herds and all that they have.' 46:33 When Pharaoh calls you and says, 'What is your occupation?' 46:34 you shall say, 'Your servants have been keepers of livestock from our youth even until now, both we and our fathers,' in order that you may dwell in the land of Goshen, for every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians." (ESV)

כח וְאֶת־יְהוּדָה שְׁלַח לִפְנֵי אֶל־יוֹסֵף לְהוֹרֹת לִפְנֵי גִשְׁנָה
וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרְצָה גִשְׁן: כֵּט וַיֵּאָסֶר יוֹסֵף מְרַפְּבֹתוֹ וַיַּעַל לֵקֶרֶת
רֵאת־יִשְׂרָאֵל אָבִיו גִּשְׁנָה וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו וַיִּפֹּל עַל־צַוְנָאָרָיו וַיִּבְכֶּה
עַל־צַוְנָאָרָיו עוֹד: ל וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־יוֹסֵף אֲמוֹתָה הַפְּעַם
אֲחֵרִי רְאוּתִי אֶת־פְּנֵיךָ כִּי עוֹדָה חַי: לֹא וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל־
אָחִיו וְאֶל־בֵּית אָבִיו אֲעֹלָה וְאֶגִּידָה לְפָרְעֹה וְאָמְרָה אֵלָיו
אֲחִי וּבֵית־אָבִי אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ־כְּנַעַן בָּאוּ אֵלָי: לֵב וְהֶאֱנָשִׁים
רָעִי צֹאן כִּי־אֲנָשֵׁי מִקְנֵה הַיּוֹ וַצֹּאֲנָם וּבִקְרָם וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר
לָהֶם הֵבִיאוּ: לֵג וְהִנֵּה כִּי־יִקְרָא לָכֶם פְּרֹעֹה וְאָמַר מֶה־
מַעֲשֵׂיכֶם: לֹד וְאָמַרְתֶּם אֲנָשֵׁי מִקְנֵה הַיּוֹ עֲבָדֶיךָ מִנְעוּרֵינוּ

ועד-עתה גם-אֶנְחֵנוּ גַם-אֲבֹתֵינוּ בְּעִבּוּר תִּשְׁבוּ בְּאֶרֶץ גִּשׁוֹן
כִּי-תוֹעֵבֵת מִצְרַיִם כָּל-רְעֵה צֹאן:

There are two points of interest in this short section of Scripture. Judah was sent first (*Bereshit / Genesis 46:28*) to prepare the way and lead the people to the land of Goshen, and we are told a shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians. (*Bereshit / Genesis 46:34*) This section of the Torah appears to be teaching us something important regarding God's ways.

The Rabbis speak of Judah entering ahead of his brothers in the following way.

Chizkuni, Genesis 46:28 Part 1

ואת יהודה שלח לפניו אל יוסף, “*and he (Yaakov) had sent Yehudah ahead to Joseph;*” so that he would be informed about which route to travel to the province of Goshen and thus to avoid entering Egypt proper. Joseph had already told him that he would live there in order to be close to Joseph (*Genesis 45,6*).

Chizkuni describes Judah being informed of the route so that they do not enter Egypt proper. If we consider the polytheistic nature of Egypt, it could be that this was so they would not walk in the Egyptian way by formally entering into Egypt and taking upon themselves their ways. This also could be related to their being shepherds and this occupation being an abomination to the Egyptians seeing all of their flocks coming along with them into Goshen. *Bereshit / Genesis 46:34 you shall say, 'Your servants have been keepers of livestock from our youth even until now, both we and our fathers,' in order that you may dwell in the land of Goshen, for every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians.*” (*ESV, וְאָמַרְתֶּם אֲנָשֵׁי מִקְנֵה הַיּוֹ עֲבָדֶיךָ מִנְעוּרֵינוּ* וְעַד-עַתָּה גַם-אֶנְחֵנוּ גַם-אֲבֹתֵינוּ בְּעִבּוּר תִּשְׁבוּ בְּאֶרֶץ גִּשׁוֹן כִּי-תוֹעֵבֵת מִצְרַיִם: (כָּל-רְעֵה צֹאן: Rashi states on *Bereshit / Genesis 46:28 Part 2* saying, “*BEFORE HIM — means before he should arrive there. A Mid-rashic comment is: לְהוֹרֵת לְפָנָיו (in the sense of, “that there might be teaching before him”)* — to establish for him a House of Study from

which Teaching (הוראה or תורה) might go forth (Genesis Rabbah 95:3).” Rashi describes Judah going into Goshen ahead of his brothers in order to establish a Torah school, a place of teaching, or so that the Word of the One True God would go forth and be proclaimed prior to their arriving. This is consistent with the idea of their not entering into Egypt proper such that they are not going down to dwell in Egypt to take upon themselves the ways of the Egyptians. The imagery we receive from the Torah, the Rabbis, and history is of the pharaohs being vain, heartless, immoral, idolaters, holding crude superstitions and a reverence for idols, focused upon life after death, and blind to human suffering. The ancients tell the story of Egypt being tainted with the impurity of wicked ways that are practiced not just by the kings, but by all of its peoples.

The rabbis speak of the Egyptians despising the work of a shepherd according to the following commentaries:

Chizkuni, Genesis 46:34 Part 2

כי תועבת מצרים, “for it is something that the Egyptians detest;” Rashi understands the line as “for it is a deity of Egypt;” i.e. it is something that G-d detests, i.e. an idol. Their favorite astrological constellation was that of the lamb, which they worshiped. [“Worshipping” in the language of pagans means “to be afraid of.” Ed.] We find a similar expression concerning the favorite idol of the Moabites, (Kings II 23,14) i.e. שקוץ מואב ולמלכום תועבת בנימין, “kemosh the abomination of Moav, and Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites.”

Chizkuni states that the Egyptians detest shepherds because sheep are one of the deities of Egypt. A similar expression is given for the idol of the Moabites, of Moav, and of the Ammonites. He also states that the Egyptians worshiped the animal figure (the idol lamb).

Daat Zkenim on Genesis 46:34 Part 1

כי תועבת מצרים כל רעה צאן, “for the Egyptians despised people whose vocation was the rising and tend-

ing of sheep. The reason they did so was because they hated sheep meat, i.e. mutton, just as they hated goats' meat. This was something not unique to the Egyptians. This is also why they could not sit at the same table as the Hebrews when the latter were being served lamb. They harbored a deep aversion for anyone stemming from the Euphrates-Tigris region. They considered the Sumerians as a lower class of human beings. (Exodus 8,9) The Hebrews claimed that they would insult the Egyptians if they slaughtered their animals as service to their G-d inside the boundaries of the land of Egypt. They would risk being stoned by them. It is interesting that they did not refer to being just killed, but they spelled out by which method they would be killed, a method which in Jewish law is the most severe kind of death penalty. Our author states that he has also heard a different interpretation of our verse. The Egyptians considered anyone slaughtering sheep or goats and eating their meat as guilty of the kind of perversion that would stamp such a person as a subhuman species. We find the word רועה, which we normally translate as "tending," i.e. shepherding, also used by the Targum for "providing food" (transitive) on Genesis 48,15 by Yaakov in his blessings for his children when on his deathbed.

Daat Zkenim states that the Egyptians detested shepherds because they detested the taste of lamb meat. This is an interesting observation because eating, consuming something is paralleled to taking something and making it a part of our bodies. (i.e. Solomon wrote of wisdom calling us to drink of her mixed wine that she has prepared suggesting by doing so we make wisdom a part of our lives.) If we consider the blood of the lamb that was spread upon the mezuzot (door posts) and the Egyptian rejection of the lamb of God and His ways. The slaughtering of the lamb was considered an abomination to the Egyptians and they were not interesting in learning God's ways. There is a connection to pride over other peoples, saying those who slaughter and

eat the lamb are guilty of a perversion and are a subhuman species.

Midrash Tanchuma Vayigash 8 draws attention to the miraculous reconciliation between two brothers which may be indicated by Jacob sending Judah to Joseph as his emissary. This is an example of what Isaiah had in mind when he wrote (*Isaiah 65:25*) “*the wolf and the lamb shall graze together and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.*” The wolf in that verse is a reference to Benjamin, based on *Bereshit / Genesis 49:27* “*Benjamin is a predatory wolf.*” The lamb in Isaiah is a reference to the tribes of Israel as *Jeremiah 50:17* describes the tribes as “*Israel are scattered sheep.*” The words “*the lion and the ox will eat straw,*” are a reference to Judah and Joseph. Joseph has been compared to an ox in *Devarim / Deuteronomy 33:17* “*like a firstling bull in his majesty.*” Judah symbolizes the lion as we know from *Bereshit / Genesis 49:9* “*Yehudah is a lion cub.*” The brothers have been described as sharing the same meal in *Bereshit / Genesis 43:33* “*he seated them, the oldest according to his birthright, etc.*” The rabbis say the fact that Jacob sent Judah ahead to Joseph is proof that the brothers had reconciled completely. What we find here in the text is the reconciliation and forgiveness of Joseph and his brothers. All of the children of Israel (Jacob’s family) went down into Egypt to survive the famine. The rabbis parallel this to the creation account, the first book of the Torah begins with the creation of the world. The second book of the Torah (Sefer Shemot) is another genesis, the creation of the Jewish people, where Israel becomes a nation. Similar to the initial genesis of the world, the creation of the Jewish people is not just about proliferation. The history of the people of Israel in Egypt is the story of the creation of a distinctive identity, a nation of people that are unified by faith in the God and Creator in heaven. This nation of great importance whom the Lord God Almighty delivers with a mighty hand and determines to dwell in their midst.

The Jewish concept of God is found in the witness of the power of God delivering His people from slavery in Egypt as a central point summarized in the Shema (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 6:4*). The Shema functioned as the ancient affirmation of God’s character and as verbally accepting the kingdom of heaven. It is within this context, understanding the power and the love of God that we receive the kingdom of heaven and welcome the presence of God into every aspect of

our lives. The rich Jewish concept of the divine nature of God had impacted the message and the meaning of the Messiah in the proclamation of the kingdom of heaven. The Apostolic Writings (NT) contains references to the Shema, Judaism's central doctrine, as it bears witness to the teachings of Yeshua, James, and Paul. In the ministry of Paul, the Shema became a central point in his teachings to the Jews and the Gentiles. This Jewish concept of the kingdom of heaven is captured in Yeshua's teachings as referring to the sovereignty of God in our lives. The idea of the divine presence, just as we see in the descriptions of the Torah, are revealed in the teachings of Yeshua as God's sovereignty being the driving force for change, renewal, completeness, unity, and the singleness of God in a world filled with the worship of many gods (polytheism). In the descriptions of Judah as going forth to determine the way and to lead his brothers to the place that is prepared for them, reminds us of the Messiah, the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the Torah, the worship of God, the promises, the patriarchs, the race that we run (the life we live), and the mercy of God. We find the entirety of the Gospel Message right here in Parashat Vayigash! The concept of God in Jewish belief remains a pillar of faith for people from every nation seeking the God of Israel. In Yeshua's statement to seek first the kingdom of heaven and God's righteousness, we are given a powerful testimony to the Jewish inception of the faith and trust in God, with the kingdom of heaven in the rabbinic literature, and Yeshua's message of God's reign in our lives, coupled with the Torah's teaching on the presence of God in our lives, the common bond of God's Messiah guiding us in the way of serving God and bringing glory to His name.