

# TORAHSCOPE: VaYigash (And he drew near)

by Mark Huey posted 14 December, 2007 www.outreachisrael.net

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

## “Judah and Joseph Reconciled”

“God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt” (Genesis 45:7-8).

*VaYigash* is an annual reminder of the Father’s plan to restore Israel to a place of wholeness. Each year the student of the Torah has the opportunity to review these dramatic interactions between the sons of Israel. The sovereign hand of the Creator is clearly recognized throughout these events. The followers of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob can be confident and assured that our Creator is still maintaining His covenants with His people. The encouraging example of brothers finally being reconciled to one another at this particular juncture gives us great hope that eventually that place of unity will be achieved. The Psalmist reminds us each of how glorious it is when we dwell together in unity.

“A Song of Ascents, of David. Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!” (Psalm 133:1).

But what is it about this portion that can be so encouraging to our generation, now looking back at these events after almost 4,000 years of intervening history? Are there some things that we could be focusing on in light of our present circumstances with a house still divided? What about the Messianic qualities exemplified by the two principal characters of this familial drama? Is it possible that for our edification and instruction we have been given excellent examples of the self-sacrifice of Judah, and then the mercy of his brother Joseph?

### The Self Sacrifice of Judah

As the previous portion concludes and this one begins, we are discovering that Judah is increasingly becoming a spokesman for his brethren seeking sustenance from the grain-rich Egyptians. Remember one distinction among the brothers from the previous portion: Judah has pledged his life to his father Israel for the life of his brother Benjamin:

“Judah said to his father Israel, ‘Send the lad with me and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, we as well as you and our little ones. I myself will be surety for him; you may hold me responsible for him. If I do not bring him *back* to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame before you forever” (Genesis 43:8-9).

What has happened to Judah so that he is willing to lose his life for Benjamin? Could it be that his life experience with the Adullamites has softened his heart? Earlier, we remember Judah urging his brothers to make a profit from the sale of Joseph rather than murdering him. We also know that he has endured the loss of a wife and two sons, and knows the pain of those tragedies. Finally, the humbling circumstances with Tamar are obviously used to bring him into recognition of his unrighteousness. Through it all he has developed a sincere tenderness for his father’s feelings. As he concludes his appeal to the yet revealed Joseph, he makes the following declaration:

“Now, therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers. For how shall I go up to my father if the lad is not with me—for fear that I see the evil that would overtake my father?” (Genesis 44:33-34).

Obviously, something has occurred in the life of Judah that he cannot stand to think about his father’s loss of his precious son Benjamin. Here, Judah exemplifies one of the principal traits of the Messiah of Israel: he is willing to give his life for the life of his brother. Is this a trait

that we should consider as we address reconciliation with our brothers? Are we willing to place the needs of our brothers ahead of our own? This is admittedly difficult to do.

## **The Mercy of Joseph**

In this reading, we are also exposed to the Messianic characteristic of mercy that is exemplified by Joseph. By the time the famine has taken its toll on the region, Joseph is in place to extend mercy to his brothers. In his position as the viceroy of Egypt, he has the authority to do anything he wants with his brethren, but instead of taking revenge, he understands clearly that the Lord has placed him in this position for the salvation of the family of Israel:

“God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt” (Genesis 45:7-8).

Joseph knows that the hand of the Almighty is upon him and that he has been sent ahead to keep a great deliverance. The thought of vengeance is never mentioned, but instead as we read about Joseph’s actions toward his brothers, we are able to focus on the attribute of mercy.

Just how merciful have we been to our brothers with whom we may be estranged? Can we trust the sovereign hand of our Creator who is working through all the circumstances of life to accomplish His will? These, and a multitude of questions, arise as we meditate on just how merciful we have been or are at this very moment.

## **The Eventual Reconciliation**

It is interesting to note that the Haftarah portion that corresponds to this Torah reading is Ezekiel 37:15-28, which deals with the future reconciliation of the Two Houses of Israel. At some point in time, our Heavenly Father is going to take the remnant of Israel from among the nations and make them all one nation on the mountains of Israel:

“Say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king will be king for all of them; and they will no longer be two nations and no longer be divided into two kingdoms”’” (Ezekiel 37:21-22).

Perhaps one way to expedite this event is when the followers of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob begin extending the mercy of Joseph, while exemplifying the self-sacrifice of Judah. This is imperative if one understands now that the Messiah of Israel has come and is implementing the New Covenant promised by the Prophet Jeremiah:

“Behold, days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,’ declares the LORD. ‘But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,’ declares the LORD, ‘I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people”’ (Jeremiah 31:31-33).

What is that Law written on the hearts of the House of Israel? Do mercy and self-sacrifice sound like elements of the people called to be a light unto the nations?

If you desire to be reconciled like Joseph and Judah from ages past, perhaps the extension of mercy and self-sacrifice can be coming forth from your heart. Maybe then we will understand just how good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!

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