

THE OPEN BIBLE

Parasha Vayechi

- Genesis 47:28-50:26
- 1 Kings 2:1-12
- 1 Peter 1:1-9

The Torah

Portion

at a Glance



Ya'acov lives the final 17 years of his life in Egypt. Before his passing, he asks Joseph to take an oath that he will bury him in the Holy Land. He blesses Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, elevating them to the status of his own sons as progenitors of tribes within the nation of Israel.

The patriarch desires to reveal the end of days to his children. Jacob blesses his sons, assigning to each his role as a tribe: Judah will produce leaders, legislators and kings; priests will come from Lewi, scholars from Issachar, seafarers from Zevulun, schoolteachers from Simeon, soldiers from Gad, judges from Dan, olive growers from Asher, and so on. Reuven is rebuked for "confusing his father's marriage"; Shimon and Levi for the massacre of Shechem and the plot against Joseph. Napthali is granted the swiftness of a deer, Benyamin the ferociousness of a wolf, and Joseph is blessed with beauty and fertility.

A large funeral procession consisting of Jacob's descendants, Pharaoh's ministers, the leading citizens of Egypt and the Egyptian cavalry accompanies Jacob on his final journey to the Holy Land, where he is buried in the Machpeilah Cave in Hebron.

Yosef, too, dies in Egypt, at the age of 110. He, too, instructs that his bones be taken out of Egypt and buried in the Holy Land, but this would come to pass only with the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt many years later. Before his passing, Joseph conveys to the Children of Israel the testament from which they will draw their hope and faith in the difficult years to come: "YHWH will surely remember you, and bring you up out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Ya'acov."

(adapted from chabad.org)

The Messiah in the Torah Portion

The actual name of our Messiah is found hidden behind the translator's words in this week's Torah portion. Genesis 49:18 is just one example of how we miss so many faces of Scripture that can only be discovered in the Hebrew texts and not in English Bibles. In this verse, the

translation disguises the Messiah's name and prevents the casual reader from accepting the Savior's presence throughout the Old Testament.

This verse in English reads, "I have waited for Your salvation, O YAHWEH." IN Hebrew the verse is "Le Y'shua tehka keyoo eet'ee YHWH." Here, the exact word for "salvation" is the exact name of the Messiah as given to him by the heavenly messengers in Matthew 1:21. This verse could also be translated "To thy Y'SHUA I am looking, O YHWH." In this passage, Jacob is actually calling out the name of Y'shua and professing faith in the Moshiach before his incarnation. This isn't the only time the Savior's name is made known in the Tanakh. In Psalm 9:14, King David of Israel said "I will rejoice in thy salvation/Y'shua." The Prophet Isaiah agreed in 12:2&3 "Behold, Elohim is my Y'SHUA/salvation; I will trust, and be not afraid: for YHWH is my strength and my song; he also is become my Y'shua/salvation. Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of Y'shua/salvation." Later in Isaiah 62:11 we read, "Behold, YHWH hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation/Y'shua cometh; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him." And in Habakkuk 3:13 we find a startling verse that actually call's Y'shua the anointed Messiah! "Thou wentest forth for the salvation/Y'shua of thy people, even for salvation/Y'shua with thine anointed/messiah..."

Y'shua is found throughout the pages of the Torah, Prophets, and Writings if we will just look. May YHWH open our eyes that we could behold wonderful things from His Torah for Y'shua is the Torah made flesh.

Applying the Portion to Life Today

The Jewish people have kept the Torah for thousands of years. They have an understanding of what it means to obey the majority of the commandments. The Rabbis and Sages of Judaism have studied, discussed, fussed, and made decisions on the various mitzvah or commands. A single action of obeying a Torah command has overtime developed into a tradition through repetition. The action also has progressed into the culture as an accepted practice, thus becoming part of the Jewish identity. To put it plainly, the Jews have the Torah and so to learn how to obey the Torah you can learn how the Jews do it. The Jewish people's Torah keeping is a witness to the world on how a Bible believer should act. "What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew? Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of Yahweh," Romans 3:1.

Take for example the commandment in the Torah found in Devarim (Deuteronomy) 6:5-9. It says to "Love Yahweh your Elohim with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength. And these words (the Torah) which you are being ordered this day are to be on your heart...write them on the door frames of your house and on your gates..." You could ignore this verse as being in the "Old Testament" or in the "Jewish Law." But if you really want to follow the whole of scripture you would try to obey it. But how exactly do you do so?

To literally obey this command to write the words of the Bible on your doorframes and gates is pretty strange. You could come up with your own interpretation and try to do it. Your imagination might lead you to write Bible verses with a magic marker all over the frames of your house. Or you could accept the traditional Jewish observance of this mitzvah. You could follow an age-old tradition by affixing a mezuzah to your doorpost. A mezuzah is a small encasing that holds a

Torah scroll inside. The custom of the mezuzah helps fulfill the commandment in a special way. Yes, using the mezuzah is not the only way to obey this verse and yes it is the Jewish way to do it, but what is wrong with following their example here?

The same yesterday, today, and forever

The Hebrew word for tradition is "masoret." The Encyclopedia Judaica says, "Masoret is the general name for tradition. It is found in Ezekiel 20:37 and means originally "bond" or "fetter." Tradition is the discipline which establishes the correct practice and interpretation of the Torah and was therefore regarded as a hedge or fetter about the Law (Avot 3:14). Since this knowledge was handed down by successive generations, it was also associated with the Hebrew word masor, denoting "to give over." In the talmudic literature, the term masoret is used to include all forms of tradition, both those which relate to the Bible and those which concern custom, law, historical events, folkways, and other subjects." Masoret remain virtually unchanged over long periods of time to provide examples, uniformity, and help with belief.

Jewish obedience to the Torah is not just mindless or faithless work. No, their practice of Torah has over time developed into a culture of events that express a lifestyle. It is not just about a religion. "Tradition has given Judaism a continuity with its past and preserved its character as a unique faith with a distinct way of life," says one source.

Ok, so what does all this talk about masoret and customs have to do with the torah reading called "Vayechi?" Well, this parasha is full of traditions. Just skim over the reading to learn about life then and life now. Some of the traditional actions within these few chapters are of benefit while others are questionable. Here are just a few examples of the masoret found in this parsha:

1. Blessing or "B'racha" in Genesis 48:1-49:33
2. Embalming the dead in Genesis 50:1-3
3. Laying on of hands in Genesis 48:12-20
4. Burial with other Hebrew people in Genesis 49:7-50:13
5. Mourning the dead in Genesis 50:1-13

Other traditions are found in this parsha, like saying important dying words to those near you. These life events define who you are and attest to your identity and culture. Your traditions show to those around what you believe and whom you worship.

Friend, obedience to the Torah requires a different lifestyle than that of the world. Believers in the Bible must make a decision about the Torah. Either we will dismiss the Torah or we will accept the Torah. Either we will follow the Messiah's example and keep the commands of Moshe or we will follow the preachers' example and pig out on pork. Either we will agree to the traditional way of obeying a command or we will make it up as we go. You can dismiss the Torah as being "too Jewish" or you can accept the Torah and strive to obey it, the choice is yours. Yet when you choose to obey the Torah you will soon be confronted with another big problem. This is the problem of "how."

To find the answer on "how" just look to the Jewish people and the first followers of the Messiah. The Jewish people's faithful obedience to the Torah over the years serves as an example on how to fulfill the commandments. Sadly, most "New Testament Christians" have both testaments yet know very little about how to practically apply the mitzvah to everyday life. Yet, as a follower of the Bible, how do you know which rituals from Judaism to keep? As a person who wants to keep the Torah, how do you know which customs of the Jews to stay away

from? If it is wrong to practice the routines of the pagans, what makes everything Jewish so special? When it comes to the Torah the Jews have already set the “halakhah” or the way to do it.

Yes, the Jewish people have kept the Torah for thousands of years. They have hashed out the difficult verses and set standards on the way to live. The majority of Jewish observances concerning the Torah are of benefit. By following the traditional adherence to the Torah your actions can model that of the first believers in Messiah. The early Believers were “just like the Torah keeping Jews” and their accepted practices differed in no way, teaches the church historian Eusebius.

Halakhah is the Hebrew word for the “way to walk” or the way “to go” in obeying the commands. It is found throughout the scriptures and is based on a verse from Shemot/Exodus. “And thou shalt show them the way wherein they are to go and the work that they must do,” Shemot (Exodus) 18:20. When a teacher/Rabbi sets halakhah that teacher is saying, “we’re going to obey this command in this manner.” Or as one rabbi has put it, “Torah is the doctrine while halakhah is the way to walk out that doctrine.” There is much freedom when it comes to determining halakhah.

Decisions of halakhah are interpretations by a group of teachers or a teacher on how to best fulfill the Torah. Some groups have strict halakhah will others have very liberal teachings.

Throughout the world, Rabbi’s halakhah differ on how to do certain things, say Hebrew words, and obey the various commands. Haven’t you ever struggled with the “correct” way to keep a command? Halakhah conquers that struggle with a scriptural answer. Sometimes halakhah includes several different scriptural answers. This is why two groups can perform a mitzvah differently, yet both are in their own eyes “right.”

Much halakhah is based on scriptural traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation. There is nothing wrong with a *Biblical tradition* that offers, “You can keep the commandment this way.” What is wrong is *traditionalism*, which says, “YOU HAVE to keep the commandment our way.”

Traditions of the Bible are ok. Traditionalism of man is not ok. Traditions produce heritage, unity, and love. Traditionalism produces legalism, bondage, and rejection. Traditions are a means to an end. Traditionalism is the end in and of itself.

When Y’shua spoke about masoret he was rebuking a group of Torah teachers who were exalting their traditionalism over the Torah. “You have let go of the commands of Elohim and are holding on to the traditions of men. You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of Elohim in order to set up your own traditions!” said Y’shua in Mark 7:8-93. Notice that he did not tell them to get rid of their traditions. What the Messiah did do though is rebuke the teachers who valued, upheld, and created traditions that replaced obedience to the Torah. If any tradition takes the place of Torah, negates Torah, or hinders your walk of Torah then this is a tradition that needs to be dropped and replaced.

For example many people did not and even do not use the sacred name of Yahweh because the Torah says to “not take the name of Yahweh in vain.” Traditionalism says “to keep you from taking His name in vain just never use his name. If you never use his name then you can never

misuse it.” Sorry folks, but this is just not what the scriptures mean. Tradition will support the Biblical mandate to use his name as found throughout scripture, yet it might teach you to use his name with a “w” sound or a “v” sound.

“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life,” says Mishlei (Proverbs) 4:23. Traditions can be used to aide and assist your spiritual walk. But they can also become idolized and control your heart.

Good or “tov” traditions will lead you towards intimacy with Yahweh. But with so many customs, web sites, articles, books, teachers, and ways to do things how do you know what to do? What should you do about how to exactly obey the various mitzvah? In looking to Judaism for information on Torah, what should you accept and what should you reject?

Finally here’s some help! Here’s a short “Truth Test” to use when deciding what traditions to use and what traditions to stay away from. When your family or ministry is making a decision on how to keep the commandments use this litmus test to assess the situation. The truth will set you free while pagan rituals, false worship days, and legalistic religious actions will bind you up. You have a rich culture and heritage of Biblical customs and traditions awaiting you.

Truth Test

Use this short test to examine your actions and as a tool to help you decide which traditions you should receive with open arms and which customs you should shy away from.

- 1. Is it Biblical?** Does this custom or action go against certain verses or principles found in the Scriptures?
- 2. Is it pagan?** Does this custom or action have pagan roots, pagan affiliation, or have pagan connotations to it?
- 3. Does it grieve the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit)?** Do you have peace with doing this? Does it promote unity, love, and shalom? Do you feel the Spirit’s tug when you do or don’t do it this way?

Portion Points to Ponder

1. The Hebrew name for this portion is “Vetch.” What does this mean?
2. Read 1 Kings 2:1-12. How does this relate to the story of Genesis this week?
3. Consider the words found in 1 Peter 1:1-9. What did you learn from studying this passage?
4. How does this Torah portion speak of the Messiah Y’shua?
5. Describe two ways that you can apply this week’s Torah portion to your life.
6. Why is it important that Jacob is buried in the Holy Land?
Where exactly is Ya’acov buried?
7. Give two reasons why Ya’acov didn’t want to be buried in Egypt.
8. How old was Ya’acov when he died?
9. Describe the blessings to Ephraim and Manasseh. What do these mean?

10. Explain how Genesis 48:20 is fulfilled by the Jewish people today. Why would the generations of Jewish men desired to be blessed like Ephraim and Manasseh?
11. Who are Ephraim and Manasseh today?
12. Did Ephraim and Manasseh replace Simeon and Reuven? Was Ephraim treated as the first born?
13. Why did Ya'acov bow before his grandsons?
14. Ya'acov placed his hands on his grandchildren in the opposite order of their birth. Why?
15. Ya'acov blessed them to be like fish in the midst of the earth. Explain how "fish" are
16. often symbolic in the Scriptures for "people" and how "waters" are often metaphorical for the "nations." Does the words of Y'shua in Matthew 4:19 have anything to do with this?
17. Why was Ephraim blessed as the first born?
18. "His seed shall be the fullness of the gentile nations," Genesis 48:19 is an important verse in relation to the nation of Israel. How does this verse correspond to Romans 11:12 and 11:25? When will this promise occur? Who are the fullness of the gentiles? Are you ready to share this answer with your friends and family?
19. Ya'acov called his sons together to hear a message about the end of days. How is this a prophetic reunion of Israel during the last days? Does this mean we are living in the last days?
20. Romans 8:15 is similar to the words in Genesis 48:5. Explain.
21. Does Ya'acov reveal the end of days to his sons or does he instead speak blessings over his sons?
22. Explain the message of YHWH's appearance at Luz to Ya'acov.
23. Reuven was blessed with might and strength. However, sin stopped him from being all that he could have been for YHWH. How does sin prevent a person from accomplishing the will of YHWH?
24. Simeon and Lewi did what to be called "instruments of cruelty?"
25. Ya'avoc cursed the anger of Simeon and Lewi. Is it wrong to be angry? Can you be angry and sin not?
26. How were Simeon and Lewi divided and scattered within Israel and Jacob?
27. Judah was promised to be a Lion that would receive the praise of his brothers. Explain how this verse compares to Zechariah 8:23.
28. When would the scepter depart from Judah? Has this happened?
29. Who is Shiloh?
30. Why was Zevulon blessed to be near the sea?
31. Isachar is a donkey? What does this mean?
32. The tribe of Dan is called to judge the people. What is the name of a judge from Israel that would come from this tribe?
33. Ya'acov made a stunning confession in Genesis 48:19 while he was blessing his children. He stated "I have waited for your salvation oh YHWH." In Hebrew he said "I have waited for your Y'shua oh YHWH." How was Ya'acov professing faith in Messiah?
34. How is Yosef double blessed?
35. Yosef is prophesied to be fruitful and then hated by archers. How does the adversary shoot fiery darts as the sons of Yosef today? Is Israel hated in the nations?
36. Which tribe is prophesied as a wolf?
37. Who is the Shepherd and Stone of Israel?
38. Which blessing by Ya'acov was the shortest? Which blessing was the longest?
39. Where does the custom of embalmment originate?
40. Should Israelites desire to be embalmed today?

41. How long did the Egyptians mourn for Ya'acov? How does this verse foreshadow Romans 12:15?
42. Who went to bury Ya'acov in Israel?
43. Should Yosef had returned to Egypt or should he have stayed in the land of Israel?
44. Torah repeats many themes throughout its pages. When Jacob died, Yosef's brothers were afraid that Yosef might exact revenge. Explain how this is similar to what happened between Esav and Jacob when Isaac passed away.
45. Did Yosef's brother lie about Jacob's message from beyond the grave?
46. The actions of Yosef's brothers reveal to us about how it is sometimes hard to accept forgiveness. Did his brothers expect revenge or love from Yosef? How do you relate?
47. Yosef exclaimed that the evil that was meant to be against him was made into goodness. Where else in the Bible has this occurred? When in your life has a supposed bad thing turned out to be beneficial?
48. Yosef told his brothers to "fear not." How many times in the Bible does this phrase appear? What does this number mean?
49. Yosef's last words that he absolutely would be carried out of Egypt echoed hope through the ages. When would this phrase be important the Hebrew people? Were his bones ever removed from Egypt and taken to the Promised Land?
50. Study and discuss the blessings found for each of the tribes in Deuteronomy 33 and Genesis 49. How are the words of Moses and Jacob similar? How are they different?
51. The last verse of Gen 50 has a translated word, 'coffin', which is used only once from the Hebrew word, 'aron'. The word Aron was translated 199 times as something else that has life. Do you know what this word could be and what does it mean to you?
52. What did you learn from this week's "Open Bible" teaching?

The Open Bible is a teaching series written by Daniel Rendelman of Emet Ministries. Daniel Rendelman is the found and leader of Emet Ministries and the author of the book "Finding the Truth." He, his wife, and five children live in Newberry, South Carolina. He can be reached at emetministries@gmail.com. Find more teachings, audio messages, videos, and music at www.emetministries.com.

