

## Drash on Parashat VaYechi (Genesis 47:28-50:26)

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Parashat VaYechi finishes the first Book of the Torah, Beresheet (Genesis in English). The Jewish name of the book means *In The Beginning* and the English means *origin* or *mode of formation*, in this case, of the Universe as well as the Jewish people.

The name of this parashat is derived from the first Hebrew word which means *and he lived*, he being Jacob renamed Israel. According to Wikipedia:

The parashah tells of [Jacob's](#) request for burial in [Canaan](#), Jacob's [blessing](#) of [Joseph's](#) sons [Ephraim](#) and [Manasseh](#), Jacob's blessing of his sons, Jacob's death and burial, and Joseph's death.

Discerning what The LORD wanted this drash to zoom into came suddenly while showering, although, as usual, the emphasis emerged as I researched the details.

Yah-a-mod, Karen bat George.

Karen will bless us with the Hebrew and English of two verses of Genesis, chapter 47 verse 28 and chapter 50 verse 22 (TLV):

<sup>28</sup> Now Jacob lived in the land of Egypt for 17 years, so the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were 147 years.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph remained in Egypt—he and his father's household—and Joseph lived 110 years.

Jacob and Joseph lived longer than most folks have in the last millennium or three. That is widely considered a blessing, especially if severely uncomfortable illness is held off until the very end, Jacob's eyesight notwithstanding. They both had plenty of time to prepare for their deaths.

What I heard in the shower was *finishing well*. This week we are given for consideration the last minutes of two highly significant historical figures.

Naturally, I began my research by Googling *finish well*. After scanning dozens of results, it became clear this word paring has thus far not been redefined by the world to separate it from its New Covenant foundational meaning—every result was a clearly Christian article. That realization prompted me to search for *Jewish finish well*, which produced a very short list. First up, however, was a drash entitled *Finishing Well* which was presented one year ago for today's parashat by a rabbi with a feminine first name. It was not a surprise she did not make reference to anything Christian. She introduced the thesis concept with a topic sentence:

If anything, this week's Torah reading can tell us much about living well and dying well.

and summarizes the thesis with a one-sentence paragraph:

What a powerful way to 'finish well', to forge goodness out of the crucible of family dynamics and existential fears.

She says nothing about God, however, which leads to the thought perhaps He was not involved with Jacob and Joseph finishing well. Maybe that's because He makes no stage appearance in this parashat, much like the entire Book of Ruth. However, Jacob quoted and referenced Him multiple times, so The LORD's not completely absent. Perhaps because Jacob and Joseph lived before Moses and the Torah he recorded, she believes they, like all Jewish people who have lived after the destruction of the second Temple and its system of sacrifices, must have needed to earn favor in the afterlife via *mitzvot* accomplished in this realm, particularly involving close relationships (assuming she believes there **is** afterlife—the drash contains no indication of that).

Nonetheless, leaving The LORD out of *finishing well* is a mind-boggling oversight. The emphasis of this word coupling is on the *quality* of the finishing, which is a judgment, and human judgments are not germane. Only God's judgment of how well a person finishes life matters, and Scripture suggests this final examination comprises most of the course grade (with some leeway for mercy on a case-by-case basis—some students have even been granted a retest, but that is quite rare).

In Matthew chapter 10, Yeshua gave his disciples final instructions prior to going out in pairs to minister as He ministered. After explaining why they should not fear negative responses they will likely encounter, He made clear in verses 32 through 33 His opinion of them is important to receiving a good grade:

<sup>32</sup> "Therefore whoever acknowledges Me before men, I will also acknowledge him before My Father who is in heaven. <sup>33</sup> But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven."

But acknowledging Him before men is no guarantee of getting a good grade, because He also said in The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:21-23):

<sup>21</sup> "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord!' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. <sup>22</sup> Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in Your name, and drive out demons in Your name, and perform many miracles in Your name?' <sup>23</sup> Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you. Get away from Me, you workers of lawlessness!'"

So in addition to acknowledging Him, He must know us, we must do The Father's Will, and we cannot be antinomianists—those who believe the Torah is null and void.

But wait! Maybe you can finish well even if you earned a criminal death. Luke 23:39-43 provides a conversation between three crucifixeers in the process of finishing, one being Yeshua (who clearly finished well):

<sup>39</sup> One of the evildoers hanging there was jeering at Him, saying, "Aren't You the Messiah? Save Yourself—and us!"

<sup>40</sup> But the other one, rebuking him, replied, "Don't you fear God, since you are under the same sentence? <sup>41</sup> We're getting what we deserve for our actions, and rightly so—but this One has done nothing wrong." <sup>42</sup> And he said, "Yeshua, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."

<sup>43</sup> Yeshua said to him, "Amen, I tell you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

So that criminal got his grade while still in this realm, as did Steven who perceived Yeshua giving him a standing ovation in Heaven at the conclusion of his testimony during his trial as recorded in Acts chapter 7.

Now a major consideration for preparing to finish well is the final exam may be administered as if it were a pop quiz, or, worst of all, you may discover without warning you are no longer in this realm. The common Christian children's bedtime prayer addresses the possibility of not waking up:

Now I lay me down to sleep.  
I pray The LORD, my soul, to keep.  
If I should die before I wake,  
I pray The LORD, my soul, to take.

Amen.

As last words, these have some merit, especially if they are heartfelt. God alone knows how many last words are inspirational versus regrettable or mundane. I wonder if the drash author thinks merit is ascribed to a Jew who recites the Shema while dying.

However it is true that actions performed are usually more significant than language dispensed. Not doing what you profess should be done and doing what you profess should not be done are certainly counterproductive approaches to finishing well. Maybe you'll have an opportunity in your final minute to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat, but if you're hoping for that opportunity, you should remember that sobering Wall Street proverb:

Hope is not a strategy.

Or, as Keith Green put it in his song *O God Our Lord*:

Will my name be there when the books are opened?  
You better know now, don't just be hoping.

So, circling back to Jacob and Joseph, how does what I've discussed affect our judgment of how they finished? Notice in Genesis 48:15-16 who Jacob invoked to bless Joseph's sons:

<sup>15</sup> [...] The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked,  
 The God who has shepherded me throughout my life to this day,  
<sup>16</sup> The Angel who redeemed me from all evil,  
 May He bless the boys, [...]

Among his last words, Jacob cited the Divine Redeemer that The Tenach identifies as *The Angel of The Lord*, clearly acknowledging Yeshua before men.

Perhaps you remember that a few weeks ago, Roeh Ralph addressed Hebrews 11:21-22:

<sup>21</sup> By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and he bowed in worship while leaning on the top of his staff. <sup>22</sup> By faith Joseph, when his end was near, made mention of the exodus of *Bnei-Yisrael* and gave instructions about his bones.

Here is precisely what Joseph said in chapter 50 verse 24:

<sup>24</sup> Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I'm about to die. But God will surely take notice of you and will bring you up from this land to the land that He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob."

Now listen to what Joseph had heard many years earlier in chapter 48 verse 21:

<sup>21</sup> Then Israel said to Joseph, "Look, I am about to die. But God will be with you and will bring you back to the land of your fathers.

See how similar Joseph's words were to Jacob's? Both said "I am about to die. But God will [...] bring you [...] to the land [...]" I believe he chose these words in part to honor his father, and, although it is not recorded, I also believe it likely he cited God using Jacob's invocation verbatim.

So here is a key to finishing well unmentioned in the rabbi's drash—the point of Hebrews 11 as stated in verse 6:

Now without faith it is impossible to please God. For the one who comes to God must believe that He exists and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

It requires faith in God to finish well.

Therefore, and with an eye to finishing this drash well, I recommend making a New Year's resolution to treat II Corinthians 13:5 as a periodic pop quiz:

<sup>5</sup> Test yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Examine yourselves! Or don't you know yourselves—that Messiah Yeshua is in you? Unless of course you failed the test.

Add it to your phone's calendar as a recurring event (I'm using the 27<sup>th</sup> of the month).

In the hereafter, you really don't want to hear something like, "For a tare, you finished well, but you're still a tare." Young tares look just like young wheat, but before the harvest, the fruit that tares develop is clearly different from the fruit developed by wheat. Regular honest examination of your fruit will reveal the truth of your spiritual condition. When you discern the fruit of a tare, you must immediately set about changing your spiritual DNA through the grace of God while time to do so remains.

Note deceived people are unaware they are deceived and can thus only become aware of that by someone pointing the deception out to them. It is a wise strategy to ask trustworthy people who know and love you if you're blind to anything about yourself. Oh, when you see such a speck in someone's eye and you have verified your own vision is unhindered, kindly remember it is usually unhelpful to spring such opinions upon people that have not solicited them, so first tactfully obtain permission to share.

Please don't fail the final—finish well!

The next parashat is *Shemot* which spans Exodus chapter 1 verse 1 through chapter 6 verse 1.