

Torah Portion: Vayigash (Genesis 44:18-47:27)

[The focus of this Torah portion series is family structure and function as revealed in Scripture. I.e., headship, patriarchy, marriage, etc, graduating to understanding community and Israel as a whole. If you have not read other portions up to this point, you may want to as parts build on previous lessons in Torah, available at: <https://natsab.com/torah-portion-series/>]

Genesis 44:18 Then Judah approached him, and said, “Oh my lord, may your servant please speak a word in my lord’s ears, and do not be angry with your servant; for you are equal to Pharaoh.

Over the last couple Torah Portions, we have been watching Joseph exercise his authority as the designated firstborn, head of the family. His primary purpose has been to test the hearts of his brothers, particularly Judah, while establishing his position. Notice that while Judah does not know his true relationship to Joseph, he very much understands that Joseph is in control. Frighteningly so!!

Joseph is firm and, under the guidance of the Almighty, allows this conversation to fully reveal the changes in Judah’s heart. Judah is very clear to defend Benjamin, his half brother, the son of Rachel:

44:27 Your servant my father said to us, ‘You know that my wife bore me two sons; **28** and the one went out from me, and I said, “Surely he is torn in pieces,” and I have not seen him since. **29** If you take this one also from me, and harm befalls him, you will bring my gray hair down to Sheol in sorrow.’ **30** Now, therefore, when I come to your servant my father, and the lad is not with us, since his life is bound up in the lad’s life, **31** when he sees that the lad is not *with us*, he will die. Thus your servants will bring the gray hair of your servant our father down to Sheol in sorrow.

Christendom often condemns the fact that Jacob had four wives and they wrongly blame Jacob for the animosity within the family. The great problem with this view is that Jacob did not act unrighteously in taking any of the four women. Condemning Jacob is to apply judgment where God never does. What they fail to understand is that the animosity between the brothers was because they had sin in *their* hearts. The sin was *not* Jacob's but their own. It is this sin that Joseph is dealing with. Judah's animosity toward his half brothers, particularly Joseph and Benjamin, sons of Rachel, is a revelation of what is in *his heart!!* It is *this* that Joseph is testing. Has Judah changed and grown in righteousness?

In our passage above we see that Judah is deeply concerned for his father, the one whom he so callously sent Joseph's torn garment to and said, 'Examine and see if this is your son's robe, or not.' (Gen. 37:32) Judah, and presumably his brothers, are expressing a serious heart change. Instead of 'sacrificing' their little brother, they are moving to protect him and their father. Judah's final and gripping confirmation is to place himself into Joseph's hands. He says,

44:32 For your servant became surety for the lad to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him *back* to you, then let me bear the blame before my father forever.' **33** 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. **34** 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?"

Judah has offered *himself* as surety!! He has regarded his brother as more important than himself! He is willing to lay down his life for his [brother] to quote Yeshua. Greater love is on clear display here and Joseph can contain himself no longer. His own trials and pain are over and his own healing can begin!

To the shock and dismay of his brothers, he cries out, ‘Ani Yosef! ... Ani Yosef achichem!’ “I am Joseph, I am Joseph, your brother!”

Genesis 45 Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried, “Have everyone go out from me.” So there was no man with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. **2** He wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard *it*, and the household of Pharaoh heard *of it*. **3** Then Joseph said to his brothers, “**I am Joseph!** Is my father still alive?” But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence.

4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Please come closer to me.” And they came closer. And he said, “**I am your brother Joseph**, whom you sold into Egypt. **5** Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.

God is amazing!! We play checkers, or even chess, expecting each decision in our lives to have several consequences and results. God, on the other hand, is the ultimate 3-D (actually, 10-D, but that is a much longer explanation) planner and performer. He is using this set of circumstances for multiple facets and levels of His plan in the physical and spiritual realms. We cannot fully grasp the incredible depth and significance of every single detail in this story or of the details of our lives, but we can always rest securely on the fact that God is in control and using everything to perform His purpose and for His glory! Amazing!

In this story of testing hearts and wrestling brothers we find redemption and salvation for the family, we see prophecy and promise regarding Yeshua, the house of Judah, the house of Israel, the role of

Benjamin, and both the first and second Exodus. We also encounter lessons on family, the role of the firstborn, paths of righteousness, patriarchy and nation building! Let the reader seek Yah for understanding on several of the topics listed. Indeed, it is all too much to drink in on two or even ten passes through the ‘Joseph Portions.’

After Joseph reveals himself to his brothers, he then sets about in earnest to fulfill his role of firstborn. He is protector, provider and primary decision-maker (behind his aging father) for the family. The remainder of chapter 45 is Joseph beautifully stepping into his role in the family and we see zero animosity toward his brothers. Rather, he displays deep concern for the whole family and provides for them abundantly! Further, his spiritual maturity is on full display when he articulates, ‘it was not you who sent me here (to Egypt), but God....’

God grants Israel/Jacob a vision of assurance that he is making the right decision on going to Egypt, but the vision also confirms God’s purpose. A nation is being born!

Genesis 46 So Israel set out with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. **2** God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, “Jacob, Jacob.” And he said, “Here I am.” **3** He said, “I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there. **4** I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will close your eyes.”

This is then followed by a listing of the genealogy of the family that is going to Egypt. We *must not miss* the connection. God is showing us several very key things about His people, His nation, that are completely lost when we do not understand *His* thoughts on marriage and family structure. In my Bible, I have begun to mark and take note not only of genealogies, but where they are placed, how they

are ordered and exactly who is listed. Pay close attention here and notice that in the context of 'I will make you a great nation' God intentionally lists not just sons and grandsons, but He orders them and names the respective mothers, Leah, Zilpah, Rachel, and Bilhah. The sons are in birth order by mother. *God is affirming the fruitfulness and plural marriage of our patriarch, Jacob.* He takes joy and pride in this and *never* condemns it. Therefore, we should *never* condemn or speak negatively of our father Jacob and his family!!

Jacob left the Land decades before and headed to Haran as a single man. Now, he is leaving for Egypt with 66 men plus wives, daughters-in-law, daughters, granddaughters and granddaughters-in-law. He has *exploded* in numbers, precisely because he has been obedient to God.

Western Christianity errs greatly in several ways. First, the general attitude of contraception and limiting childbirth for convenience or career is almost always sin rooted in selfishness, rather than God's command to be fruitful and multiply. Second, concerning ourselves with the global agenda of population control by having 1.4 babies (or some absurdly low average per couple) is acquiescence to the agenda of the enemy of our souls. Finally, our rejection of plural marriage/polygyny as entirely Biblical and accepted/allowed by God, is an embracing of the adversary's lie that God's ways are not necessarily the best. It is this last point that I would like to develop a bit with evidence from external documents.

Without question, as already revealed in this [Torah Portion series](#), and as articulated and evidenced on the [Biblical Marriage](#) page, God does not care how many wives a man has, whether one or more. His only concern is that a man not marry foreign (ungodly) women and that he fulfill his righteous duties of caring for the woman or women he has assumed responsibility for. (Ex. 21:10)

More importantly, what we see in this passage of genealogy and family is God's design of patriarchy.

His people, His nation, is *founded on patriarchy in a plural family*. Most ignore this little truth that is absolutely foundational! When hit with it, it is like a ton of bricks that shatter dearly held, almost idolized, western Christian monogamy-only ideals that are nowhere supported by Scripture. In fact, we need to take a little stroll through history to identify the roots of the monogamy-only fallacy and more importantly, why the enemy loves that fallacy!

Biblical Israel was not, nor has it ever been, a monogamy-only people or nation. Further, Biblical Israel was not, nor has it ever been, a democracy or democratic republic. The truth that is easily forgotten is that Biblical Israel, both past and future, is a *patriarchal theocracy*. And, patriarchy, by definition, places the central role of power and authority on individual men, heads of families and clans. Biblical Israel is a *tribal* people, both past and future. (e.g., Ezekiel 47, 48; Revelation 7:4-8; 21:13, etc.)

So, where did ‘monogamy-only’ come from and why? To understand this will help understand *why* patriarchy and family are so central to the heart of God and why *He* is restoring His plan in the world today!

Absorb the following quotes and their implications from *The Western Case for Monogamy Over Polygamy* by John Witte, Jr.

Already half a millennium before the time of Jesus, ancient Greece and ancient Rome had chosen monogamy as the only valid form of marriage that could produce legitimate and heritable widows and children. Sixth- and fifth-century BCE laws of various Greek city-states made clear that valid marriages had to be monogamous, and this norm also became commonplace in the first Roman law collections that have survived from the mid-fifth century BCE. Monogamy was a “quintessentially Greek” institution of the ancient world, Stanford ancient historian Walter Scheidel has shown, and the Thracian Greeks and the Romans after them regarded polygamy as “a barbarian custom or a mark of tyranny.” (p.104)

Even though monogamy was the marital ideal of this classical Western world, both Greek and Roman laws did allow a married man to have sex with his slaves and prostitutes with impunity. These laws also allowed a married man to retain a longstanding concubine so long as she did not live in the marital home and did not inherit anything from the man. (p.107)

Until the third century CE. roman law did not criminalize polygamy. If a man claimed to have two or more wives, the law simply recognized as valid only the first properly married wife. It was considered “legally impossible” to have more than one wife or marriage at the same time. (p.108)

The prohibition on a married man living with or marrying his concubine in addition to his wife, “appears to be very old law,” Gellius went on; “it is said to be King Numa’s” -that is, Numa Pompilius, the second king of Rome (ca. 716-673 BCE). (p.109)

Plato’s student Aristotle (384-321 BCE) viewed monogamous marriage *as the foundation of the polis*. (p.105) (Italics mine)

William of Auvergne (ca. 1180-1249), Bishop of Paris, offered a second argument against Muslim polygamy that would also become a staple of the broader Western case against polygamy.....Moreover, Williams continued, polygamous households can become independent powers that rival and distort the rule of legitimate political powers. Aristotle had properly seen that the “household is the foundation of the polis.” (p.161)

The Western Case for Monogamy Over Polygamy, 2015. Witte, John Jr., Cambridge University Press.

While his argument is for Christian monogamy-only, it is interesting that he has to make his case, not from Scripture, but from Greco-Romanism. Further, it is clear that he understands and articulates that the *reason monogamy was implemented* and eventually enforced by Greco-Romanism was to insure loyalty to the State and to *destroy familial wealth and patriarchal power building*. Please, let that sink in. The reason the State prefers monogamy is because *it prevents tribalism. It prevents clannish power bases. It prevents the people of God from functioning in the very structure GOD designed and*

ordained!! In essence, the monogamy-only 'ideal' prevents the restoration of the house of Israel!!

As noted above, monogamy-only did not 'value women' and it did not decrease sexual promiscuity. In fact, the debauchery of the Greco-Roman empire is well documented including temple prostitution in conjunction with worship of the vindictive and jealous goddesses of monogamy and marriage: Juno and Hera with 'a heavy side dose' of Diana. Monogamy-only did not improve the lot of women, it did the opposite. Further, it led to the acceptance of serial divorce, mirrored in the church today!!

Conversely, God's Word allowed for a man to marry more than one woman as Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Gideon, and David did. His righteousness values and insures the protection and provision of every woman in the house of a godly man. Christendom denigrates Jacob for having four wives, but we see in our passage of Scripture that even though his life had been quite challenged by twelve rambunctious sons, he has laid the foundation of a nation, been fruitful and multiplied and established a wealth and power base that will rival Egypt!

Lest we assume that polygyny was an 'old testament' practice, here are a few more quotes from Witte's excellent, though ill concluded, work.

While the Qumran community may have prohibited polygamy, most other Jewish communities permitted the practice, before and after the destruction of the Temple and the diaspora of the Jews in 70 CE. Jewish historian Josephus (37-ca 100 CE), for example, said that "it is our ancestral custom that a man have several wives at the same time." Early Church Father, Justin Martyr (d.165 CE), included in his diatribe against Judaism a complaint the the "blind and stupid sages" of his day permitted Jewish men "to marry four or five wives at a time." Justin Martyr went on derisively:

If any of you [Jews] see a beautiful woman, and desire to have her, they [the rabbis] cite the example of Jacob, who was Israel, and other Patriarchs to prove that there is no evil in such practices.... (p.50)

While Sephardic and Karite Jews continued to regulate polygamy by contractual provisions and communal policies, the Ashkenazi and Western Christendom officially prohibited polygamy and banned from the community any Jew who continued the practice....The ban effectively mandated faithful monogamy as the new ideal of Jewish law -... The ban (or *herem* in Hebrew) is attributed to Rabbi Gershom ben Judah of Mayence (960-ca. 1040), and is commonly referred to as “the ban of our tacher, Gershom.” Most scholars think the ban was issued around 1030...the ban was a major shift, because it explicitly prohibited practices that the Torah and the Talmud had long permitted... (p.59-60)

Here is the significant point: Polygyny was practiced at the time of Messiah and He said nothing about it, but early Church Fathers aligned themselves against the Torah, and with Greco-Roman law, in support of the State. Then, nearly 1000 years later, Ashkenazi Judaism came into alignment with Western Christianity against the Torah by embracing monogamy-only as a legislated ideal, presumably to deter persecution. Just like Christianity, they *chose Greco-Roman doctrine* over the clear and simple Word of God.

God’s Word says, ‘He who finds a wife, finds a good thing.’ God describes Himself in Ezekiel 23 and Jeremiah 3 as having [two brides](#), the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Further, God says that ‘[He] was a husband to them’ in the New Covenant. (Jeremiah 31:32)

Here is our point: It was *God* who led Jacob to have four wives and it was *God* who caused him to be fruitful and multiply, and He did so to establish a family and a nation. He has no problem or concern with whether a man has one wife or more than one. His only concern is that the man leads them in paths of righteousness and provides for and protects them until death! This, Jacob did! He safely brought his whole family to the place God planned to multiply and grow them, Egypt.

In the restoration of kol Israel, it is very reasonable to assume that God will not only restore His Torah,

but will also restore a proper and true understanding of patriarchy, marriage, and family structure for the purpose of returning power and authority to male headship and tribalism. He designed it that way and the monogamy-only fallacy is clearly used by the adversary to undermine God's plan.

Genesis 47:7 Then Joseph brought his father Jacob and presented him to Pharaoh; and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. **8** Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How many years have you lived?" **9** So Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The years of my sojourning are one hundred and thirty; few and unpleasant have been the years of my life, nor have they attained the years that my fathers lived during the days of their sojourning." **10** And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from his presence. **11** So Joseph settled his father and his brothers and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had ordered. **12** Joseph provided his father and his brothers and all his father's household with food, according to their little ones.

One would expect Pharaoh to bless Jacob, but it is Jacob, the 'loathsome' shepherd and patriarch who blesses Pharaoh. Of course, it is Israel's son, Joseph, who has saved Egypt and is in the process of enriching Pharaoh abundantly. What we must note is the authority that comes from a patriarch and the desire of others, including even the Pharaoh, to receive a blessing from such. We recognize, Israel's blessings came from the Almighty, but it was because Israel was walking in obedience. He was not embracing the ways of the world, rather he was seeking the Elohim of Abraham and Isaac! As such, he has authority that even the Pharaoh wants.

Jacob makes an interesting statement to Pharaoh. He says, "The years of my sojourning are one hundred and thirty; few and unpleasant have been the years of my life, nor have they attained the years that my fathers lived during the days of their sojourning." I have heard some use this statement to

rationalize that Jacob's hard life is a good reason not to emulate him with a big family, but I find this to be a 'head scratcher.' No doubt, Jacob's sons gave him fits and there is no doubt that losing Rachel and Joseph were incredibly hard. Worse still is the twenty years he spent grieving Joseph only to find that his sons had played him for the fool. But, as hard as that lot was, Scripture holds Jacob up as a standard! He *is Israel!!!* Far be it from us to judge him! God declares in Hebrew 11 that Jacob was a man who 'gained approval through faith' and is an example for us to follow! Let us be very careful not to judge Jacob or his family too harshly. He is, after all, the father of kol Israel!

A final note from these verses supporting what we have seen throughout the 'Joseph portions;' 'Joseph provided his father and his brothers and all his father's household with food, according to their little ones.' What a testimony to a firstborn fulfilling his duty and caring for all of the family!! May we rear our sons to walk in the pattern and image of Joseph who is an image of the Messiah.

Genesis 47:27 Now Israel lived in the land of Egypt, in Goshen, and they acquired property in it and were fruitful and became very numerous.

Shabbat shalom!!