

ויגַשׁ

VAYIGASH/AND HE DREW NEAR

Bereshith/Genesis 44:18-47:27

Sibling rivalry is a reoccurring theme throughout the book of **Bereshith**. The first story of siblings was dramatic with **Cain** killing his own brother, **Abel**. Then, the story of **Noach**'s sons, with **Cham**'s line being cursed while sons **Shem** and **Yapheth** were blessed. Continuing, we have the story of **Ishmael** and **Yitzchak** who can't get along, resulting in **Ishmael** being expelled from his home. In the next generation, another set of brothers, **Ya'acov** and **Esav**, who began with conflict in the womb and ended when **Ya'acov** ran away to his **Uncle Lavan**'s house to escape the threat of murder. After 20 years, they meet up, and although there's some level of peace, they part ways. And now, we have been reading the story of more conflict between brothers...that is of **Yosef** and his siblings. Before we take an in-depth look, let's consider how all the sibling conflicts ended:

- Between Cain and Abel – murder
- Between Noach's sons – a curse
- Between Yitzchak and Ishmael – expulsion
- Between Ya'acov and Esav – separation
- Between Yosef and his brothers – forgiveness, peace and co-existence in Egypt

Despite all the dysfunction, ה' would see that the family ended up in Egypt, according to the covenant promise made to Avram:

Bereshith/Genesis 15:13 Then He said to Avram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land *that is* not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years.

Our parasha contains the last time ה' Voice will be heard until he speaks to **Moshe**. The covenant promise first made to **Avraham** to make him a "**great nation**" is repeated to **Ya'acov** as reassurance:

Bereshith 46:3 So He said, "I am El, the Elohim of your father; do not fear to go down to Egypt, for **I will make of you a great nation there.**

Shemot/Exodus gives us the historical account of Israel's enslavement, redemption, their establishment as a nation, and the continuance of the covenant. The cycles of murder, curses, expulsion, separation, and exile will also continue for thousands of years until the promises of the covenant arrive – a redeemed and reunited nation and the reestablishment of the covenant between ה' and Israel. Before redemption can occur, reconciliation of the tribes/brothers must be complete:

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

Restoration of the family is also the focus of the Haftarah this week – **Ezekiel 37:15-28**.

Ezekiel 37:19 "say to them, 'Thus says יהוה Elohim: "Surely I will take the stick of Yoseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Yisrael, his companions; and I will join them with it, with the stick of Yehuda, and make them one stick, and they will be one in My hand.'" "

And does this not sound like the completion of the original covenant promise made to Avraham?

Ezekiel 37:25 "Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Ya'acov My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children's children, forever; and My servant David shall be their prince forever.²⁶ "Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore.²⁷ "My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their Elohim, and they shall be My people."²⁸ "The nations also will know that I, יהוה, sanctify Yisrael, when My sanctuary is in their midst forevermore." " "

Let's narrow our focus now to the part **Benjamin** plays. Oh, how I wish I could fully understand who Benjamin represents. In time, we will know the answer. For now, we can only make observations. From the Torah, we know this about Benjamin:

- Benjamin was the only brother to not bow to Esav
- He is the only son born to **Yisrael** (that is, he was born after Ya'acov's wrestling match and his name change to **Yisrael**) – all others were born to **Ya'acov**
- Benjamin's birth was an answer to a prayer connected to Yosef's birth and he was the only other son of Ya'acov's beloved wife, Rachel:
 - **Bereshith 30:24** So she called his name Yosef, and said, " יהוה shall add to me another son."
- His father and mother both named him. Even from the beginning, his life seemed fated to one defined by both hardship and success:
 - **Bereshith 35:18** And so it was, as her soul was departing (for she died), that she called his name Ben-Oni (son of my sorrows); but his father called him Benjamin (son of the right hand).
- Benjamin was the only brother to be born in the Land of Israel (although he was conceived in Padan Aram); he was born near Beit Lechem (Bethlehem) and his mother died in child-birth

- Ya'acov was over 100 years old when Benjamin was born. With the death of Rachel, the child had no mother. It is likely that Leah would have stepped in, along with the handmaidens and other servants. Thus, in essence, Benjamin was everybody's child.
- He was not involved in the betrayal of Yosef.
- Benjamin was the only brother never to be held in prison.
- Benjamin is absent from most of the narrative, while the other brothers are being tested by Yosef.
- Yosef showed favoritism towards Benjamin:
 - **Bereshith 43:34** Then he took servings to them from before him, but Benjamin's serving was five times as much as any of theirs. So, they drank and were merry with him.
 - **Bereshith 45:22** He gave to all of them, to each man, changes of garments; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred *pieces* of silver and five changes of garments.
- Benjamin becomes a main character and the focus of controversy, yet it is never recorded that he speaks for himself.
- Benjamin was set up as a thief by his brother, Yosef. The “**silver cup?**” Perhaps symbolic of the blood of the Lamb. Silver is about redemption. And the grain...is it not Torah? So, the cup must be found within the grain, (the Torah) to be the complete message.
 - **Bereshith 44:12** So he searched. He began with the oldest and left off with the youngest; and the **cup was found in Benjamin's sack**.
 - **1 Corinthians 11:25** In the same manner *He* also *took* the **cup** after supper, saying, "**This cup is the new covenant in My blood.**"
- Yehuda offers himself as a substitute for Benjamin. A repentant Yehuda pleads with Yosef on behalf of a father who has already ‘lost’ a child dear to his heart. What is true repentance? It is the ability to face precisely the same temptation and this time take a different path, i.e., to return to the proper path. Yosef recreated the circumstances of his own sale to test the brothers, to see if they were truly repentant.
 - **Bereshith 44: 33** "Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad as 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, lest perhaps I see the evil that would come upon my father?"
- It is recorded that Benjamin had 10 sons (although some may have still been in his loins when he went with the family to Egypt).
 - **Bereshith 46:21** The sons of Benjamin *were* Belah, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard.
- Somehow, only **Benjamin** can reveal **Yosef**'s true “**face**” to the sons of **Yisrael**:

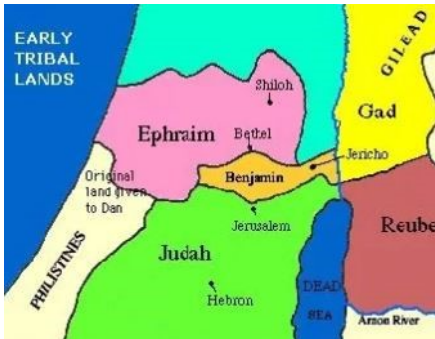
- **Bereshith 44:26** "But we said, 'We cannot go down; if our youngest brother is with us, then we will go down; for we may not see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.'
- The soul of **Benjamin** is “**bound together**” with the soul of **Ya’acov**, such that if the son dies, the father will die. After **Yosef** disappeared, **Benjamin** most closely represented his father:
 - **Bereshith 44:30** "Now therefore, when I come to your servant my father, and the lad *is* not with us, (and his soul is bound up in his soul) ³¹ sees that the boy isn't there, he will die.
- There is a great display of emotion between **Yosef** and **Benjamin**:
 - **Bereshith 45:14** Then he fell on his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck.
- Before he died, **Ya’acov** gave each son a prophetic blessing, hinting at their future. Over the tribe of **Benjamin**, **Ya’acov** said:
 - **Bereshith 49:27** "Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; In the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil."
 - The tribe of Benjamin fulfilled Ya’acov’s prophesy by becoming extremely skilled warriors. They trained their fighters to be ambidextrous in combat, and in fact, the Bible records a few stories of Benyamite warriors catching an opponent off guard by fighting with their left hands. The Benyamite warriors were indeed as fierce as “**ravenous wolves**” and adopted that animal as the symbol of the tribe. Some say they were the muscle behind the southern kingdom of Yehuda after King David’s death.
- Benjamin is called “**beloved of יהוה**” in Moshe’s blessing over the tribe:
 - **Devarim/Deuteronomy 33:12** Of Benjamin he said: "The beloved of יהוה shall dwell in safety by Him, *Who* shelters him all the day long; And he shall dwell between His shoulders."
 - What does it mean to be “**between His shoulders**”? The image is one of security, flanked by the shoulders of **יהוה**, protected by His Presence on all sides. It is a remarkable blessing for a tribe who would be mighty warriors, often putting themselves in the line of fire for the Almighty.



Going beyond the Torah, we continue to find Benjamin as a key player in the plan of **יהוה**. In fact, Benjamin’s presence continues even into the Brit Chadasha. Following are only a few of the times when Benjamin shows up in the Hebrew Scriptures:

- Benjamin’s land allotment was sandwiched between the territory given to Yehuda and the territory given to the sons of Yosef:

- **Yehoshua/Joshua 18:11** Now the lot of the tribe of the children of Benjamin came up according to their families, and the territory of their lot came out between the children of Yehuda and the children of Yosef.



- During the time of Yehoshua, land allotment for the tribe of Benjamin was small, although very strategic. Main trade and caravan routes would travel through their land, thus connecting the north and the south, the east and the west. The land of Benjamin would become the bridge between the future northern kingdom (Israel/Ephraim) and southern kingdom (Yehuda).
- The future temple would eventually be positioned right at the border between the territories of Benjamin and Yehuda. Some believe the Holy of Holies was in Benjamin's land, while the Temple courtyard was in Yehuda. It is said that the unity between a son of Leah and a son of Rachel is what created the atmosphere for the Temple.
- The tribe of Benjamin was indeed far from perfect. Sadly, they committed a terrible atrocity which nearly led to their annihilation as recounted in the story of the concubine and the civil war that followed. It is interesting that it was Yehuda that was first to bring judgment against Benjamin:
 - **Judges 20:4** So the Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered and said, "My concubine and I went into Gibeah, which belongs to **Benjamin**, to spend the night. ⁵ "And the men of Gibeah rose against me, and surrounded the house at night because of me. They intended to kill me, but instead **they ravished my concubine so that she died.**
 - **Judges 20:18** Then the children of Yisrael arose and went up to the house of Elohim to inquire of Elohim. They said, "Which of us shall go up first to battle **against the children of Benjamin?**" הַיְהוּדִים said, "**Yehuda first!**"
 - **Judges 20:35** הַיְהוּדִים defeated Benjamin before Yisrael. And the children of Yisrael destroyed that day twenty-five thousand one hundred Benjamites; all these drew the sword... **48** And the **men of Yisrael turned back against the children of Benjamin, and struck them down with the edge of the sword -- from every city, men and beasts, all who were found. They also set fire to all the cities they came to.**
- In the book of **Samuel**, הַיְהוּדִים tells Samuel that the first king will come out of the tribe of Benjamin. Samuel is to anoint the man that Elohim has chosen. The fact that this man was from the decimated tribe of Benjamin probably surprised all of Israel, since this event wouldn't have taken place that long after the above disaster with the concubine.
 - **1 Samuel 9:16** "Tomorrow about this time I will send you a **man from the land of Benjamin**, and you shall anoint him commander over My people Israel, that he may save My people from the hand of the Philistines; for I have looked upon My people, because their cry has come to me."

- **Chronicles** lists many descendants of Benjamin and calls them “**men of valor**”:
 - **1 Chronicles 8:40** The sons of Ulam were mighty **men of valor** -- archers. *They had many sons and grandsons, one hundred and fifty in all.* These *were* all **sons of Benjamin**.

- The tribe of Benjamin remained close to Ephraim and Manasseh throughout the early parts of Israel’s history. However, Yehuda’s intercession and his willingness to pay the penalty on behalf of his brother Benjamin had lasting ramifications. During the split of the 12 tribes into the southern and northern kingdoms, Benjamites officially declared themselves loyal to Yehuda, the southern kingdom.
 - **2 Chronicles 11:1** Now when Rehoboam came to Jerusalem, he assembled from the house of Yehuda and Benjamin one hundred and eighty thousand chosen *men* who were warriors, to fight against Yisrael, that he might restore the kingdom to Rehoboam...¹² Also in every city *he put* shields and spears, and made them very strong, having **Yehuda and Benjamin on his side**.

- Both Yehuda and Benjamin came together to restore David as King after Absalom’s attempt to take the throne:
 - **2 Samuel 19:15** Then the king returned and came to the Jordan. And Yehuda came to Gilgal, to go to meet the king, to escort the king across the Jordan. ¹⁶ And Shimei the son of **Gera, a Benjamite**, who *was* from Bahurim, hastened and **came down with the men of Yehuda to meet King David**. ¹⁷ *There were* a **thousand men of Benjamin with him**, and Ziba the servant of the house of Saul, and his fifteen sons and his twenty servants with him; and **they went over the Jordan before the king**.

- At some point, **Yehuda** and **Benjamin** would be grouped together and known as “**Jews**”:
 - **Esther 2:5** In Shushan the citadel there was a certain **Jew whose name was Mordecai** the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, **a Benjamite**.
 - **Acts 21:39** But **Sha’ul** (Paul) said, "**I am a Jew** from Tarsus...**Philippians 3:5** circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, *of* the **tribe of Benjamin**, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the Torah, a Pharisee

So now what have we learned about Benjamin? And who does Benjamin represent today? Hmm...still difficult questions. Yet, it seems fairly obvious that יהודה had/has a special role for the Benjamites that will be together, with the kingdom of Yehuda (Jews). In His words:

1 Kings 11:36 'And to his son **I will give one tribe**, that My servant David may always have a **lamp (נֵר) before Me in Jerusalem**, the city which I have chosen for Myself, to put My name there.

The “**one tribe**” that יהודה gave to King David’s son Rehoboam, was the tribe of **Benjamin**. Notice the tribe of **Benjamin** was given to **Rehoboam (Yehuda)** in order that “**David may always have a lamp (נֵר) before יהודה in Jerusalem.**” But what does that mean? The Hebrew word for “**lamp**” is **ner (נֵר)** and refers to the small bowl like objects which contained oil and a wick to be lit to provide “**light**.” The menorah in the Tabernacle held the seven “**lamps**.”

Remember that the very Holy of Holies was within the borders of the land of the tribe of **Benjamin**. Other verses to consider:

2 Samuel 22:29 "For You *are* my **lamp** (נֵר – ner), O יהוה; יהוה shall **enlighten my darkness**.

Psalm 119:105 Your **Word** is a **lamp** (נֵר – ner) to my feet And a light to my path.

Psalm 18:28 You, O יהוה, keep my **lamp** (נֵר – ner) burning; my God turns my darkness into light.

Luke 12:35 " Let your **waist be girded** and *your* **lamps burning**;

Is there a clue in this last verse? To have your “**waist girded**” means to be ready for a dangerous confrontation or to be prepared for a military attack. Do those words point to the “**fighters**” of the tribe of Benjamin? Did יהוה give the tribe of Benjamin to Yehuda to be the warriors, the “**ravenous wolves**” who would battle for the light of the truth?

Okay, that’s all the farther we’ll go for now. To be continued...

Shabbat Shalom!

Ardelle