

APOSTOLIC SCRIPTURE REFLECTION:

for *V'yeshuv*

by Mark Huey posted 12 December, 2009 www.outreachisrael.net

Acts 7:9-16

“Character, Dreams, and Words”

After thirty-six chapters of the opening the Torah scroll—as the narrative on personal stories transfers from Adam to Noah to Abraham to Isaac to Jacob—the illuminating lens finally *focuses on the life of Joseph*, for the final fourteen chapters of the Book of Genesis. With slightly more than a third of Genesis dedicated to the details of Joseph’s life, and the sojourn of Jacob’s family from Canaan to Egypt, one should easily expect more references to this great and influential man in the Apostolic Scriptures.

There are a number of points made in *V'yeshuv* (Genesis 37:1-40:23) this week that we could reflect upon further in the Apostolic Scriptures. However, other than a listing of the different tribes in reference to the 144,000 of Revelation 7, and a brief recollection about the faith of Joseph in Hebrews 11:21-22, I would instead like to look at the reference that the martyr Stephen makes to Joseph in Acts 7:9-16. There are some distinct similarities in the character and witness of Stephen, which in some regards parallel the life of Joseph. For the next few weeks, as we prepare to close out our readings through the Book of Genesis, we will encounter some of the attributes, trials, tribulations, and triumphs of Joseph—who in many regards plays a role as a Messianic prototype of Yeshua—which can be seen in Stephen’s defense.

But before delving deeper into the life of Joseph, it is critical to first consider the unique call upon his life, and how at a young age he received dreams that became literal “words” from God that sustained him through his life challenges. Many centuries before Stephen’s apologetic speech before the Sanhedrin, the Psalmist presented another historical synopsis that directly connected the dreams or words Joseph received, with the fortitude he maintained as he waited patiently for the Lord to accomplish His promise (cf. Jeremiah 1:12). The key is noting that Joseph was incredibly impassioned for life, *by the words for his life* received in his childhood dreams. The Psalmist decreed,

“Do not touch My anointed ones, and do My prophets no harm.’ And He called for a famine upon the land; He broke the whole staff of bread. He sent a man before them, Joseph, *who* was sold as a slave. They afflicted his feet with fetters, He himself was laid in irons; **until the time that his word came to pass, the word of the LORD tested him.** The king sent and released him, the ruler of peoples, and set him free. He made him lord of his house and ruler over all his possessions, to imprison his princes at will, that he might teach his elders wisdom. Israel also came into Egypt; thus Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham. And He caused His people to be very fruitful, and made them stronger than their adversaries” (Psalm 105:15-24).

The statement made, “till what he foretold came to pass, till the word of the LORD proved him true” (Psalm 105:19, NIV), is a vivid testimony on how Joseph was positively impacted by the dreams that he received from the Almighty. When at a relatively young age, it was revealed to Joseph that he would rule over his family, it was something he took to serious heart. Nevertheless with boyish enthusiasm, Joseph was compelled to tell his brothers and even his father about the dreams:

“Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a varicolored tunic. His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers; and *so* they hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms. Then Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. He said to them, ‘Please listen to this dream which I have had; for behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf rose up and also stood erect; and behold, your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf.’ Then his brothers said to him, ‘Are you actually going to reign over us? Or are you really going to rule over us?’ So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. Now he had still another dream, and related it to his brothers, and said, ‘Lo, I have had still

another dream; and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.' He related *it* to his father and to his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, 'What is this dream that you have had? Shall I and your mother and your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?' His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying *in mind*" (Genesis 37:3-11).

Even though it appears Joseph was unwise in so openly sharing his revelations, provoking jealousy among his brothers, it is clear from Genesis that his "dreams" or "words" sustained him through the trials of betrayal, rejection, sexual temptation, false accusations, and imprisonment that he endured in the years after he was sold into slavery. Joseph knew the reality of who the Creator God was, and he feared Him as seen in his righteous lifestyle. Is it not amazing how a true appreciation for the reality of God, can significantly transform and mold the character of a person?

Moving ahead to Acts 7, the martyr Stephen defends himself for believing that Yeshua is the Messiah, and he seeks to establish how the arrival of Yeshua is the culmination of what has been foretold in the Tanakh Scriptures—covering a great deal of space and incorporating a great deal of detail (Acts 7:2-53). Stephen has just transitioned his speech from detailing the covenant of circumcision established with Abraham, and continues describing Isaac and Jacob, and the sons of Jacob who become jealous of Joseph (Acts 7:8-12). Stephen does not describe the details of the brothers selling Joseph to the Midianite traders (Genesis 37:28), who are responsible for him being transported to Egypt. But, some of the afflictions found in this week's *parashah*, along with some of the favor that Joseph receives from Potiphar, are mentioned:

"The patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt. *Yet* God was with him, and rescued him from all his afflictions, and granted him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he made him governor over Egypt and all his household. Now a famine came over all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction *with it*, and our fathers could find no food. But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers *there* the first time. On the second *visit* Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family was disclosed to Pharaoh. Then Joseph sent *word* and invited Jacob his father and all his relatives to come to him, seventy-five persons *in all*. And Jacob went down to Egypt and *there* he and our fathers died. *From there* they were removed to Shechem and laid in the tomb which Abraham had purchased for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor in Shechem" (Acts 7:9-16).

While Stephen encapsulates Joseph's life and actions in Acts 7:9-16, the information seen in *V'yeishev* from this week, is only detailed in Acts 7:9-10a, up to the point of Joseph being able to interpret the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker (cf. Genesis 40). It is not until the next Torah reading, *Mikkeitz* (Genesis 41:1-44:17), when Pharaoh seeks an interpretation of his own dreams, that Joseph is granted the favor and wisdom in his sight of Pharaoh, and he is made as a governor over Egypt.

It is easy to see how Stephen possessed many of the same godly characteristics that Joseph had. Reviewing Luke's record in Acts 6 of the Hellenistic Jews who received Yeshua, we see seven different attributes, which in various ways describe Stephen as one very much like the Patriarch Joseph. Recall how the Twelve Apostles were expanding their number by selecting new leaders and servants with obvious virtuous and righteous traits, evident in their respective walks. Stephen is one of those who is highlighted:

"Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.' The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them. The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith. And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people. But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, *including* both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from

Cilicia and Asia, rose up and argued with Stephen. But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking” (Acts 6:3-10).

Apparently, Stephen was recognized as a mature Believer who

1. had a good reputation
2. was full of the Holy Spirit
3. was full of wisdom
4. was full of faith
5. was full of grace
6. was full of God's power
7. was able to perform signs and wonders on behalf of God

Stephen was actually chosen to fulfill a relatively minor ministerial role, to serve tables (Acts 6:2-3), in order to free up the Twelve Apostles to share the good news and expound upon the Scriptures. Like the similarly spiritually endowed Joseph, Stephen takes on a humbling role as a servant of others, before he is placed in a position to let the Holy Spirit (cf. John 16:13) speak through him—eventually to the accusing members of the Sanhedrin.

Another personal parallel, that Stephen shares with Joseph, is the false accusations of some brought against them. Joseph dealt with the false claims of Potiphar's wife (Genesis 39:11-20), just like Stephen had to deal with the false statements made about him (Acts 6:11-14).

As you consider the life of Joseph this week, have you also taken a look at the life of Stephen? Perhaps you will see how these two servants of God—with characters that exemplify a genuine walk with Him—are people to be imitated by modern day followers of Messiah Yeshua. May their examples inspire each of us to humbly submit to God's will for our lives!

Until the restoration of all things...

Mark Huey (B.A., Vanderbilt University in History and Graduate Studies at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University) is the Director of Outreach Israel Ministries (www.outreachisrael.net). He is the author of several books, including: *TorahScope, Volumes I & II*, and *Counting the Omer: A Daily Devotional Toward Shavuot*. He is also co-author of *Hebraic Roots: An Introductory Study*.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard, Updated Edition* (NASU), © 1995, published by The Lockman Foundation.