

## Understanding the Parsha

Genesis 44:18-47:27

We will Learn how to

- 1) interpret the main theme (subject) of a Parsha (weekly reading from the Torah),
- 2) make thematic connections to that Parsha (study the Scriptures related by a common theme [subject], line upon line and precept upon precept)
- 3) learn how to gain greater understanding of the Parsha we are looking at through its thematic connections to other portions of Scripture.

## The Final Days of Jacob and Joseph

You may wish to do this study in two parts due to it's length.

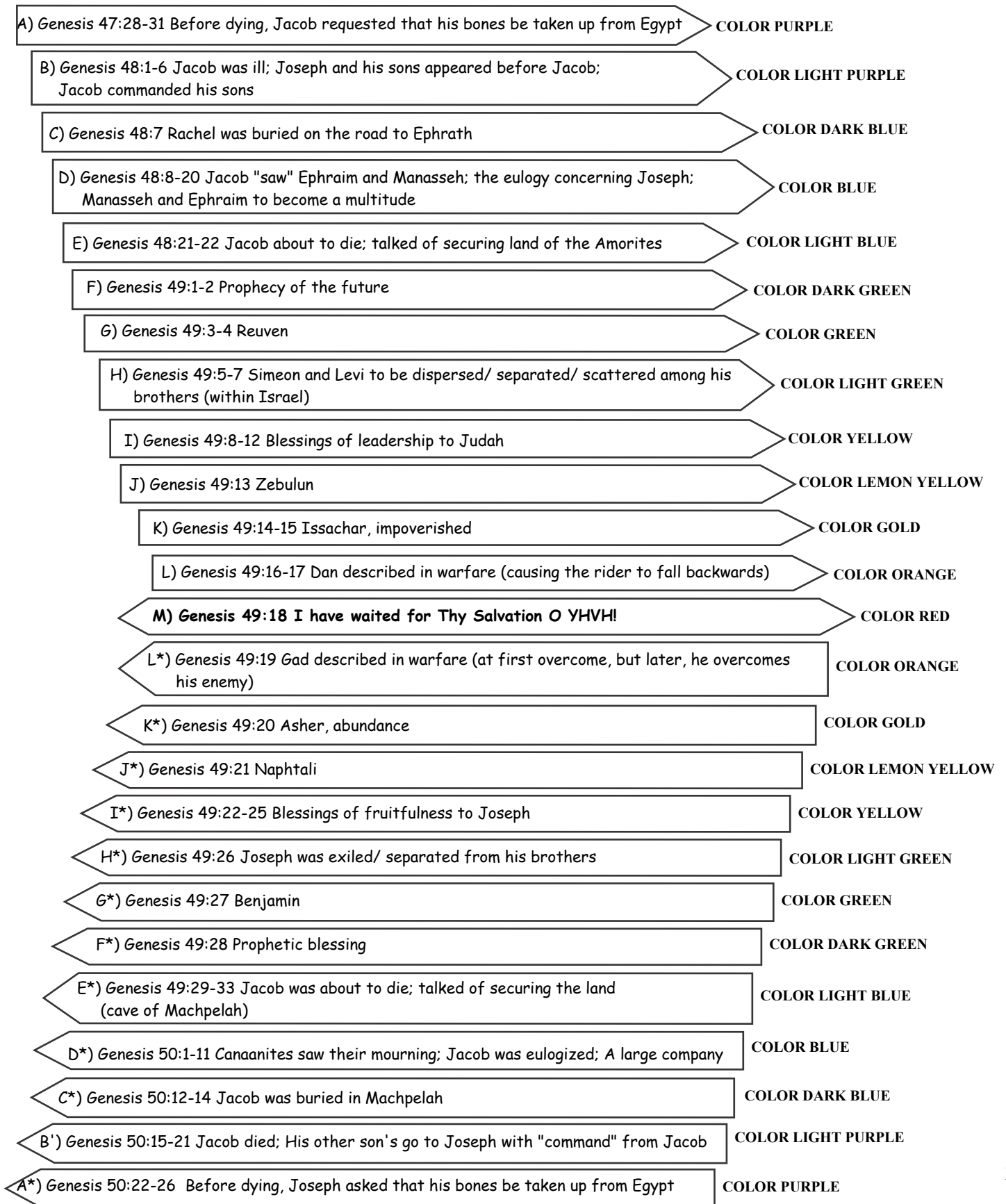
Read Genesis 47:28-50:26. Compare the first four verses of this passage to the last three verses. Do you see any connection between these two passages?

They both are related because both Jacob and Joseph are about to d\_\_\_\_\_ and they both ask to be b\_\_\_\_\_ in the Land of Israel.

Because these two passages are at the beginning and the ending of the sidra means they are thematically related. Which means that this week's entire sidra is a (circle one) chiastic structure parsha theme

That's right. Remember, a chiastic structure is a pattern organized with the story divided into two halves. The themes of the first half of the stories unit are **repeated** in the second half of the unit in **reverse order**. And, the first and second halves of the story usually point us to the most important part of the story, **the central axis**.

This week, we will rely upon the following chiastic structure to guide us in our analysis. You may want to try your hand at this. Let's color our chiastic structure to find the central axis.



**Do you know how points G – K are thematically related?**

All the sons mentioned from G - K are sons of L  
Leah  
Jacob's first wife.

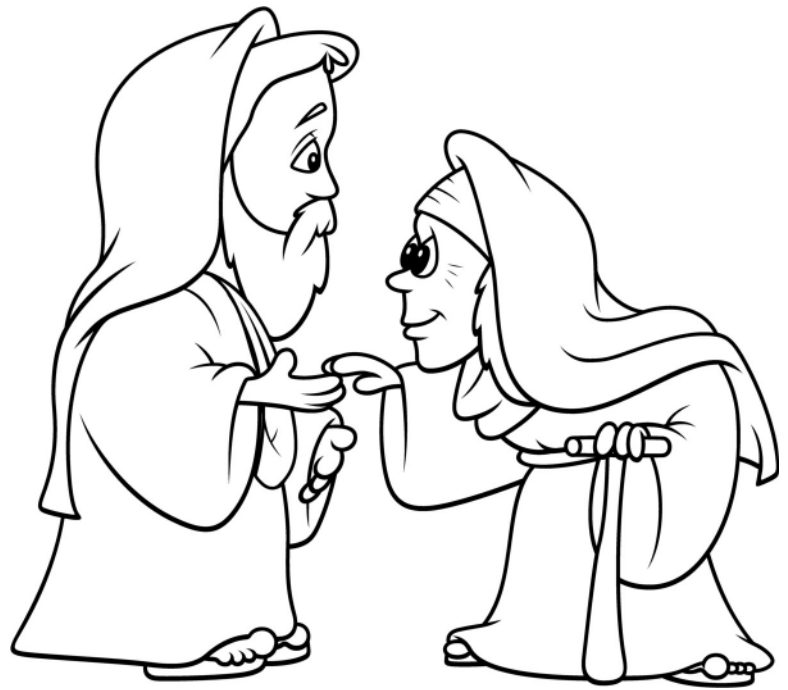
**Do you know how points L – J\* are thematically related?**

These sons are all sons of Jacob's wives'

h  
handmaidens

**Finally, do you see how points I\* – G\* are thematically related?**

These are the sons of R  
Rachel  
whom Jacob loved the most.



As you can see, this is a very structured text. It is not haphazard in the least!

See how almost every theme in the first half of the structure is thematically connected to the identical theme in the second half of the structure! There were a couple of themes I could not decipher, so I just listed the tribe. But be assured, they are there. I just couldn't see the connection this time, maybe you can.

**Look at how points A – E (Genesis 47:28-48:22) and E\* – A\* (Genesis 49:29-50:26) both have the last words of the dying and their burial.**

**Read Genesis 47:28-31. What passage can you think of that is strongly thematically connected to this?**

When Abraham had Eliezer swear to find a W  
wife  
for Isaac from his relatives in Charan.

**Read Genesis 24:1-4 and 12, a passage from Chayei Sarah. How many thematic connections can you make?**

Both stories talk about a Patriarch who was O  
old  
and advanced in Y  
years.

In both stories, a Patriarch asked someone to S  
swear  
by placing their hand under his thigh.

Both stories use the phrase, "k  
kindness  
and t  
truth  
."

In both stories, the subject involved someone's l  
location.

In both stories, the Patriarch is concerned that someone is t  
taken  
from a city of the world to Eretz Yisrael.



These stories are **DEFINITELY** thematically related. In what ways are they different? Draw a line to the correct match.

In Genesis 24:1-4, the Patriarch is concerned about the location of the spouse of his heir.

In Genesis 49:28-31, the Patriarch asked that someone be taken to their family.

In Genesis 24:1-4, the Patriarch sent his servant.

In Genesis 49:28-31, the Patriarch is concerned about where his bones would be buried after he dies.

In Genesis 24:1-4, the Patriarch asked that someone be taken from their family.

Genesis 49:28-31 concerned death.

Genesis 24:1-4 was about life (getting a bride for the heir to make descendants, which will birth a nation).

In Genesis 49:28-31, the Patriarch sent his son.

**The key to thematic analysis is to compare and contrast scriptures.** This will lead you to the Torah's wisdom. Look at our contrasts, we see that the wife who is to be taken to Eretz Yisrael is associated with life, and the bones that are to be taken to Eretz Yisrael are associated with death.

**Where else in the Torah is there a wife thematically connected to life?**

Genesis 2-3, Chava (Eve), who was the mother of all living!

Think about the pictures in the creation of Chava (Eve) for Adam, he was caused to sleep (a picture of death) so that Adonai could bring his wife to life — she was fashioned from his side (rib=bone).

## The Blessing

**Read these verses, with the goal of making a thematic connection to a previous story in Genesis. Please read them in this order: Genesis 48:1-2, 10, 13-19; and 50:12-18.**

**What do these collection of verses remind you of?**

How Isaac blessed Jacob instead of Esau!

**That's right! Notice these thematic connections to Parashat Toldot, Genesis 27:18-45:**

Isaac and Jacob were both old.

Two sons approached both of them to receive a blessing.

Both Isaac and Jacob could not see well.

Both Isaac and Jacob asked who it was visiting them.

In both stories, the Patriarch kissed the lad to be blessed.

In both blessings, the younger son was placed before the older.

In both stories, the younger was prophesied to be greater than the older.

In both stories, someone feared punishment from the other.

Genesis 27:41 says that Esau “harbored hatred” against Jacob. So likewise, in Genesis 50:15, the brothers think that Joseph will “harbor hatred” against them. The words for harbored and harbor have the same Hebrew root!



Wow! Are these just a coincidence? I think not. The Holy One has many lessons to teach us. Let's see if we can glean just one more deeper insight from these connections.

**In our analogy, who is thematically connected to Jacob— this is trickier than you may think?**

**E** \_\_\_\_\_ and **M** \_\_\_\_\_  
Ephraim Manasseh

**The real issue is between Joseph and his brothers for these reasons:**

The two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh represent the singular Joseph. The reason why Jacob blessed them is because he wanted to give Joseph the double portion of the birthright. He did this by **adopting Joseph's two sons and blessing them**, giving Joseph a double blessing through them.

Both Ephraim and Manasseh are blessed with the same blessing. It's just that Ephraim will be physically larger. Israel will bless "like Ephraim AND Manasseh."

**At the end of the story, it's the brothers who thought Joseph wanted to kill them just as Jacob knew Esau wanted to kill him. According to Genesis 50:12-18, who represents Esau and who represents Jacob and why?**

**J** \_\_\_\_\_ represents Esau because the brothers think that Joseph wants to kill them, just as Jacob thought that Esau wanted to kill him. This makes the brothers represent **J** \_\_\_\_\_. Huhh???

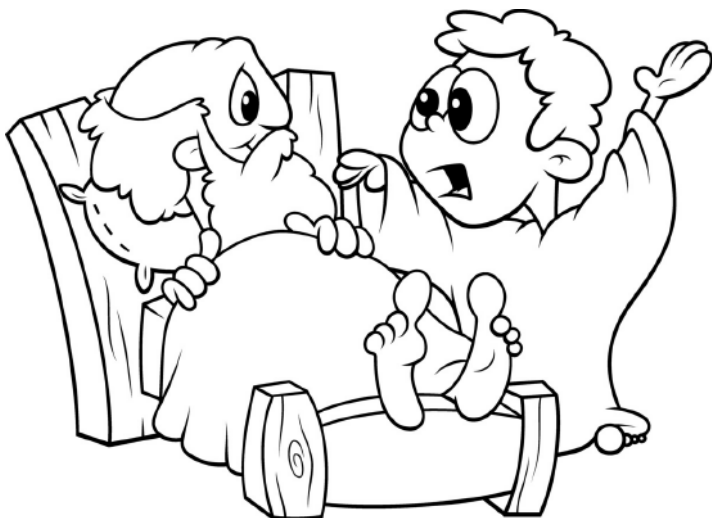
Sounds weird doesn't it? Well, let's really think about what the Torah is trying to show us.

What does Joseph do about his brothers' plan to save their own necks by making up a story from their father? It says that he cried. Now why did he cry? Think about it before you answer. Joseph had provided for their every need for the past seventeen years, but his brothers did not think he had really forgiven them! Now that their father is dead, we see their true hearts. They think Joseph will want to get revenge for what they did to him.

So why did Joseph cry? It's because of what our thematic analysis has shown us. The brothers really thought Joseph wanted vengeance! Well, did Joseph want vengeance? Of course not! His heart was sincere. He had truly forgiven them. But guess what? They didn't believe it! They completely misjudged and mischaracterized him, just as our thematic analysis has shown. Our analysis equates Joseph with Esau, which we know is not true. So too, the brothers have equated Joseph with Esau because they think Joseph wants to harm them. This also is not true. The brothers' false view of Joseph is clearly seen in the thematic connection between Joseph and Esau. It is a very painful picture of the false views of the brothers even though Joseph showed them nothing but love, grace, mercy and forgiveness.

## The Issue of the Firstborn

**Read Genesis 49:3-4. See how Jacob refers to Reuben as his firstborn. What is the importance of him saying, "you cannot be foremost?"**



It means that he will not **O** \_\_\_\_\_ in the calling of the  
operate  
firstborn, even though he was the natural firstborn child of Jacob.

This story teaches us that Reuben lost his firstborn status because of his sin with Jacob's concubine, Bilhah.

**The firstborn usually had these privileges:**

1. The firstborn received a double portion of the inheritance.
2. The firstborn functioned as the family priest.
3. The firstborn inherited the leadership role.

With this in mind, we need pay close attention as we read the blessings to see how these privileges are divided between the sons.

**Simeon and Levi** Earlier, we saw that the theme of sin and punishment was a major theme of the book of Genesis. We saw a common theme connecting many of the punishments —the theme of scattering. We read in Genesis 49:5-7 about the time when Simeon and Levi killed the people of Shechem. Their punishment? Both of their tribes would be scattered within Eretz Yisrael. Neither Simeon nor Levi had their own land inheritance. There were certain cities scattered throughout Israel for the Levites. And, Simeon inherited a number of cities scattered throughout the land inheritance of Judah (see Joshua 19:1).

See how the theme of scattering or separation is connected to Genesis 49:26, we read that Joseph was separated from his brothers. The word translated "separate, set apart or exiled from your brothers," is the Hebrew word **nezir**, נזיר, which is taken from the same root as the word for **Nazirite** (nazir), נזיר. A Nazirite was someone who had taken a special vow of separation unto the Holy One.

Later, in Parashat Nasso, you will learn that the **Nazirite** vow made it possible for the average Israelite to get a degree of holiness equal to the High Priest's. The reason was so that the individual could draw closer to Adonai during a period of separation. By calling Joseph a **nezir**, the Torah has obviously connected him to the **Nazirite**, who took a vow of separation. Well, did you know that the Torah refers to Joseph as a "Nazirite" two times? Deuteronomy 33:16 says.

They shall be on the head of Joseph, And on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers (Genesis 49:26).

Let the blessing come on the head of Joseph, And on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers (Deuteronomy 33:16).

### **Compare the words above to Numbers 6:7-8, which pertains to the Nazirite:**

He shall not make himself unclean even for his father or his mother, for his brother or his sister, when they die, because his separation to God is on his head. 8 All the days of his separation he shall be holy to the LORD (Numbers 6:7-8).

We can clearly see the connection through the usage of the words on the head, and the concept of separation.

Genesis 49:5-7 is thematically and chiastically related to Genesis 49:26. Both passages stress the theme of separation. The scriptures above use the work separation with respect to Joseph's "Nazirite" status. Usually, when we think of the word separation concerning the Nazirite vow, we think of separation from something (wine, grapes, dead bodies, etc.) unto Adonai. But, in the case of Joseph, the separation is said to be from his brothers!

**Judah** Read Genesis 49:8-12. Earlier, we said that the firstborn got the leadership role. We also saw that this function was not given to Reuben, the natural-born firstborn. Now we see that the leadership role has been given to Judah. **Do you see the connection between this blessing of leadership and Judah's role in the reconciliation of the family?**

Judah is the one who offered h \_\_\_\_\_ on  
himself

Benjamin's behalf, thereby earning the leadership role.

Earlier, we saw that the double portion was given to Joseph through Ephraim and Manasseh. Remember, the double portion and leadership roles were normally given to the firstborn. We now see that these two blessings have been split between Judah and Joseph! **Read I Chronicles 5:1-2a**. This passage confirms the splitting of the blessings of the firstborn. This is the basis of a major teaching about the splitting of the Two Houses of Israel into two kingdoms.



## How is Genesis 49:8-12 chiastically related and why?

The story concerning Judah's l<sub>leadership</sub> is chiastically matched by Joseph's blessing of m<sub>manasse</sub> and being f<sub>fruitful</sub>. The chastic pairing of these two tribes is more confirmation that the blessings of the firstborn were split between the two of them.

Now we know why Joseph and Judah are chiastically connected, both of them were partakers of the blessings of the firstborn.

## Read Genesis 49:22-26a. What are these verses describing?

The abundant b<sub>blessing</sub> and f<sub>fruitfulness</sub> that Joseph will experience.

This is part of the blessing of the firstborn.

## Can you think of a passage that is thematically related to Genesis 49:25?

**Read Genesis 27:28-29.** This passage talks about the blessing that Isaac intended on giving to Esau since Esau was the firstborn. So, we can expect this passage to help us understand what the firstborn was entitled to. **What are the two main parts of this blessing?**

Genesis 27:28 is about blessings of f<sub>fruitfulness</sub>. Genesis 27:29 is about l<sub>leadership</sub> within the family and leadership over Israel's e<sub>enemies</sub>.

**Now read the blessings given to Judah, then the blessings given to Joseph. Pay attention to how each was blessed, explain what Jacob accomplished when he blessed Joseph and Judah?**

The blessings of **fruitfulness** went to J<sub>Joseph</sub>; and, the blessings of leadership went to J<sub>Judah</sub>.

Once again, we see excellent evidence to support the idea that Jacob split the blessing of the firstborn between Joseph and Judah. **This is why Genesis 27:28-29 is so important.** It describes the type of blessing given to the firstborn. So, when we see blessings of fruitfulness (Genesis 27:28) given to Joseph, and blessings of leadership (Genesis 27:29) given to Judah, we know for sure that the blessing of the firstborn has been split between them. Normally, these two parts of the one blessing would be placed upon one individual.

The chiastic structure is a literary technique that forces us to find the connection between Joseph and Judah. Thematic analysis helped us to understand why they were thematically connected in the chiastic structure. They both received a portion of the blessing of the firstborn!

## Read Genesis 49:16-17. What do you think these verses mean?

“Jacob alluded prophetically to Dan’s descendant Samson, who single-handedly fought and defeated the Philistines and, in his time, brought unity to the people... A serpent on the highway. Rashi and Ramban apply the words to Samson, whose single-handed battle tactics corresponded closely to Jacob’s description. Like a serpent leaving its lair to attack travelers and then slithering back to its hiding place Samson waged a personal guerrilla-like war against the Philistines, catching them by surprise and going into hiding before they could counterattack... So its  rider falls. The allusion is to Samson’s final victory, when —blind and in chains — he pulled down the pillars of the Philis-



tine idol's temple and caused it to collapse, killing himself and three thousand Philistines.”

**As you can see, the Rabbis make a connection to Samson (who was from the tribe of Dan) in this blessing. What other thematic connection can you make to Samson based on the blessing given to Joseph?**

The Torah uses words normally associated with a N Nazirite to describe Joseph in Genesis 49:26 (nezir and head).

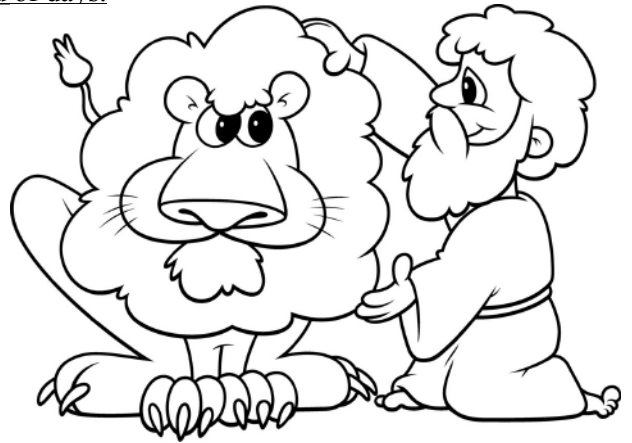
Samson was a N Nazirite.

**Of course, we should always ask, "What is the central axis?"**

**Read Genesis 49:18!** Obviously, this verse has Messianic significance, because it is the Messiah who will bring the salvation of YHVH. Remember, these are blessings for the future. Specifically, Jacob said he would tell them of things that would happen to them in the latter days (Genesis 49:1). **How is the fact that the blessings will find their ultimate fulfillment in the latter days thematically connected to the central axis?**

They are connected through the theme of † time.

You see, the latter days were a long way off when Jacob gave these prophecies and blessings. This is exactly the point in the central axis — waiting (time element) for Your salvation. So, although there may be an intermediate fulfillment of these prophecies, the ultimate fulfillment will not happen until the end of days.



## Find the hidden words for this weeks Parsha

B	L	D	E	A	T	H	S	L	N	S
B	J	O	S	E	P	H	T	E	U	B
I	S	L	B	O	C	A	J	A	A	L
R	O	O	E	Y	S	F	E	D	P	E
T	N	A	Z	A	R	I	T	E	A	S
H	W	L	U	F	T	I	U	R	F	S
R	B	I	N	J	A	M	I	S	D	I
I	R	E	F	Y	P	T	V	H	L	N
G	R	A	V	E	A	M	S	I	N	G
H	L	D	T	S	E	I	R	P	N	S
T	L	N	R	O	B	T	S	R	I	F

BLESSINGS  
FIRSTBORN  
BIRTHRIGHT  
LEADERSHIP  
FRUITFUL  
DEATH  
GRAVE  
NAZARITE  
WIFE  
SON  
JOSEPH  
JACOB  
PRIEST