

TORAHSCOPE: Toldot (History)

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Genesis 25:19-28:9
Malachi 1:1-2:7

“Generational Choices”

“And the LORD said to her, **Two nations are in your womb; and two peoples shall be separated from your body; and one people shall be stronger than the other; and the older shall serve the younger**” (Genesis 25:23).

Over the past few weeks, the student of the Torah has witnessed the written testimony continuing to focus on the life of Abraham and his progeny. This week the saga continues as some of the trials of the “chosen seed” in Isaac are detailed. Interestingly, the title of “History” or “Generations” can give one pause to consider many of the realities, and perhaps uncertainties of family growth. While we can marvel at the nature of a relative population explosion among the physical heirs of Abraham, we can take great comfort in the choices Abraham made as he passed onto Isaac, and eventually Jacob, knowledge of his relationship with the God of Creation. Surely, as promised, the Almighty was establishing His chosen people among the nations of the world through His choice of Isaac, and later Jacob. It is instructional for us to learn that, as modeled, **how we make generational choices, even today, is critical for furthering the truths we have inherited through the blessings promised millennia ago.**

Last week, if you will recall, our Torah portion actually concluded with a brief description of Abraham’s death and his burial by what the Scriptures describe as “his sons”:

“And these are all the years of Abraham’s life that he lived, one hundred and seventy-five years. And Abraham breathed his last and died in a ripe old age, an old man and satisfied with life; and he was gathered to his people. Then his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, facing Mamre, the field which Abraham purchased from the sons of Heth; there Abraham was buried with Sarah his wife” (Genesis 25:7-10).

This is an interesting description of the burial, because if you will recall, after the death of Sarah, Abraham married Keturah and continued in his old age to produce six additional sons:

“Now Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. And she bore to him Zimran and Jokshan and Medan and Midian and Ishbak and Shuah...Now Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac; but to the sons of his concubines, Abraham gave gifts while he was still living, and sent them away from his son Isaac eastward, to the land of the east” (Genesis 25:1-2, 5-6).

Here the account describes the names of the six additional sons, but it also states that Abraham “gave all that he had to Isaac...gave gifts to his other sons...and sent them away from his son Isaac eastward” (Genesis 25:6). This was a critical decision that he was making as he was approaching his death. He knew that God had promised the inheritance of the Land of Canaan to his son through his relationship with Sarah (Genesis 17:19, 21). But he also remembered that God had also made some promises to Ishmael (Genesis 17:20):

“But God said, ‘No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year’” (Genesis 17:19-21).

There are no recorded promises made to the other six sons, so when his death was approaching, he gave them some gifts and sent them eastward. When he died, Ishmael was 88 years old. By that time, he had probably already fathered many of the twelve sons (princes), if not

all that he would sire. When you couple these grandsons with the six sons of Keturah, you can imagine that Abraham was concerned about the physical threat to Isaac and his children:

“These are the sons of Ishmael and these are their names, by their villages, and by their camps; twelve princes according to their tribes. And these are the years of the life of Ishmael, one hundred and thirty-seven years; and he breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people. **And they settled from Havilah to Shur which is east of Egypt as one goes toward Assyria; he settled in defiance of all his relatives**” (Genesis 25:16-18).

Not only did Abraham send the sons of Keturah to the east, but it is recorded that Ishmael and his family lived to the south and east of Canaan. Even though Ishmael was present at the burial of Abraham, the fact that Abraham continued to favor Isaac, and gave all that he had to him, indicates that Abraham lived his final years in close proximity to Isaac and Rebecca, so that the inheritance of livestock and goods could be completed. Even though Abraham was continuing to produce children with Keturah, so that the promises regarding him being a father of a multitude of nations could be fulfilled, preference was made toward Isaac, the son of promise:

“No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I will make you the **father of a multitude of nations**. And I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will **make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you**” (Genesis 17:5-6).

The most important thing in Abraham’s mind was to impart to Isaac and his children the special relationship that he enjoyed with the God of Creation.

The Next Generation

As we discover in this text, Isaac and Rebecca had to wait twenty years before she became pregnant with the twins Esau and Jacob. Isaac was forty when the marriage to Rebecca was consummated:

“Now these are the records of the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham became the father of Isaac; **and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah**, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, to be his wife” (Genesis 25:19-20).

A few verses later we learn that Isaac was sixty years old when they were born:

“And afterward his brother came forth with his hand holding on to Esau's heel, so his name was called Jacob; **and Isaac was sixty years old when she gave birth to them**” (Genesis 25:26).

For twenty years after their marriage, Isaac and Rebecca lived childless together. They also got to experience the stigma and disappointment of being childless. In many ways, this was repeating some of the pain endured by Abraham and Sarah as they waited a seemingly interminable amount of time before the birth of Isaac. Perhaps Abraham comforted them with stories about his wait for the pregnancy of Sarah. Maybe they were cautioned not to make the mistake of getting ahead of God’s timing, as was the case with the pregnancy of Hagar that produced Ishmael.

The Scriptures do not give us any great detail about this time, but we do know that in God’s time, Isaac’s entreaties for a pregnancy were answered as Rebecca became pregnant with twins. But after a twenty-year wait for children, the pregnancy appeared to have complications. From the very womb, the twins were struggling for dominance and Rebecca’s pleas with God were answered when He spoke to her about the situation:

“And the LORD said to her, **“Two nations are in your womb; and two peoples shall be separated from your body; and one people shall be stronger than the other; and the older shall serve the younger”**” (Genesis 25:23).

Here in a very concise statement, that Rebecca obviously knows is from the Almighty, the actions of her future life, and indeed, the lives of the followers of the God of Abraham are determined. **If you have ever heard the voice of the Creator and knew it was Him, you will be able to continually replay that voice whenever you need to. It is like He has indelibly imprinted in your mind a statement that, like genetic coding, will help determine your course in life.**

In a moment of great stress, the Holy One told Rebecca that within her womb were two nations that were already struggling with one another. Then she is told **“that one will be stronger than the other, but that the older will serve the younger.”** You can imagine what she was thinking when she delivered her two boys and the first one came out ruddy and hairy with his younger brother grabbing the first-born child’s heel. Certainly as a follower of Abraham and Isaac’s God, she had been told about the curses that were first uttered to the serpent, Eve, and Adam in the Garden of Eden. Do you remember God’s first declaration of the Messiah to come that would overcome the sins committed by the first humans?

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; **He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.** To the woman He said, ‘I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, in pain you shall bring forth children; yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you’” (Genesis 3:15-16).

What was God communicating to His followers when He said that the seed of the woman would “bruise him on the heel”? Here is the younger son being born who is holding on to the heel of his older brother. Possibly resonating in Rebecca’s mind is God’s specific declaration to her pleas that the “older will serve the younger.” She had just experienced the pain of childbirth and one can only imagine what she was thinking. Could she have possibly thought that Jacob was the promised Seed who would crush the head of the enemy? Of course, we will never know the answer to that question, but we do know that Rebecca definitely favored her son Jacob for the rest of her life.

A little later in this week’s Torah narrative, the twins are described in contrasting tones:

“When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field; **but Jacob was a peaceful man, living in tents.** Now Isaac loved Esau, because he had a taste for game; **but Rebekah loved Jacob**” (Genesis 25:27-28).

Clearly, we are seeing an interesting picture of the distinctions between these two children of Isaac and Rebecca, and how their parents treated them. In these two verses, it is declared that Esau was a “skillful hunter and a man of the field.” On the other hand, Jacob was a man of peace who “lived in tents.” From this description you can conclude that Esau was obviously the “stronger” of the two or at least more outgoing and the warrior/gatherer, while Jacob spent time in the tents.

As Esau and Jacob were growing up, Rebecca certainly witnessed the obvious differences between her two sons. The older was a man of the flesh and the younger inclined to remain in the tents. Within a period of time, a challenging dichotomy developed in the marriage of Isaac and Rebecca. It is stated that Isaac loved Esau, because he had a “taste for game.” On the other hand, it is stated that Rebecca loved Jacob. Remember, Rebecca had been given a very strong word from the Lord during her pregnancy that the **“older would serve the younger.”** Now, she was beginning to witness this. She knew that Jacob was definitely more inclined to spiritual matters. No doubt, she understood that Cain preceded Abel—and yet it was Abel who had the favor of God. She was living in the reality that Ishmael was the firstborn son of Abraham, but it was Isaac, the firstborn son of Abraham and Sarah, who was to receive the promises of God. Surely, she could have thought that the promises to Abraham and Isaac were ultimately going to be bestowed upon Jacob, the younger of the twins. **After all, she had imbedded in her memory: “was not the older to serve the younger”?**

Birthright Transfer

As we begin to learn more about these two men who will eventually be the prophesied fathers of two nations, a very unique event takes place that further confirms that Esau is a man of the flesh with little concern for spiritual matters:

“And when Jacob had cooked stew, Esau came in from the field and he was famished; and Esau said to Jacob, **‘Please let me have a swallow of that red stuff there, for I am famished.’** Therefore his name was called Edom. But Jacob said, **‘First sell me your birthright.’** And Esau said, **‘Behold, I am about to die; so of what use then is the birthright to me?’** And Jacob said, **‘First**

swear to me'; so he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew; and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way. **Thus Esau despised his birthright**" (Genesis 25:29-34).

Some Jewish Rabbis believe that this event took place at the time of Abraham's burial. But, there is no stated Biblical evidence that indicates that this is the timing of the incident when Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of lentil stew. However, in securing the birthright of the firstborn for a meal, Jacob was simply treating Esau in a manner consistent with a second meaning derived from his given name that also means "supplanter." Here at this propitious moment, Jacob sells a bowl of soup for the birthright usually reserved for the firstborn.

Apparently, this transaction is considered by God to be valid, because Esau verbally "swore to Jacob" that the birthright was to be Jacob's. How powerful are the words that are spoken that reveal what is truly in our hearts? Is it possible that Rebecca had revealed to her beloved Jacob that as the younger his older brother would serve him? Or is it possible that while Jacob hung out around the tents that he decided that he wanted to inherit the birthright blessings that were going to be passed down through Isaac? He certainly knew the inclinations of his twin brother Esau. And yet, from the description, it does not appear that Jacob had a premeditated plan to supplant his brother from his birthright. It seems that the opportunity presented itself and Jacob just adroitly made the offer to a hungry outdoorsman. The amazing thing is that Esau readily accepted the proposal for the exchange.

Further revelation by the author of Hebrews confirms why Esau could accept the exchange without any immediate reservations:

"[T]hat there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears" (Hebrews 12:16-17).

Apparently, Esau is considered to be an immoral or godless person. Because Esau did not have a spiritual inclination, he despised his birthright and was willing to sell it to satisfy the momentary hunger that he was experiencing.

The Blessing of Isaac

A number of years later, with Esau and Jacob well past middle age, it appears that Esau does have an interest in securing Isaac's blessing. But as the text describes, he had already followed his flesh into intermarriage with some of the local women and was indeed already a polygamist:

"And when Esau was forty years old he married Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite; and they brought grief to Isaac and Rebekah" (Genesis 26:34-35).

As the text indicates, the marriages to Judith and Basemath were grievous events for Isaac and Rebecca to witness. They both understood how important it was to marry someone who has a similar belief system, and if possible a similar background and family. They knew that they had inherited the blessings of the marriage of Abraham to Sarah, and in their hearts they wanted the same blessings for their sons. But Esau, a man of the flesh, had married local women who were undoubtedly involved in the worship of other gods. With this in mind, it is interesting that as Isaac was growing old, he was still inclined to give Esau a chance to receive his blessings:

"Now it came about, when Isaac was old, and his eyes were too dim to see, that he called his older son Esau and said to him, 'My son.' And he said to him, 'Here I am.' And Isaac said, 'Behold now, I am old and I do not know the day of my death. Now then, please take your gear, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me; and prepare a savory dish for me such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat, so that my soul may bless you before I die'" (Genesis 27:1-4).

Apparently, as Isaac's eyes were failing him, he thought he was going to die. So in a last minute appeal to his son Esau, he makes a request for one final savory meal before his death. He even tells Esau that before he dies, he wants to bless Esau. Of course, as the record indicates,

Rebecca overhears this request and she goes into high gear to circumvent the bestowing of Isaac's blessing on Esau. She remembered the clear words from God, **"that the older will serve the younger,"** so now in a very premeditated way, Rebecca decides that she will intervene and instead work her favorite, Jacob, into a position to receive the blessing of Isaac.

Without going into great detail, we should all know that the deception is successful and Isaac blesses Jacob as he would a firstborn son. In essence, the successful trade of the birthright status years earlier, has now come full circle as the blessings, usually designated for the firstborn, are bestowed upon Jacob rather than Esau.

Interestingly, after Jacob has stolen the blessing, Esau finally cried out for justice with a gut-wrenching plea:

"Then he [Esau] said, 'Is he not rightly named Jacob, for he has supplanted me these two times? He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing.' And he said, 'Have you not reserved a blessing for me?' But Isaac answered and said to Esau, 'Behold, I have made him your master, and all his relatives I have given to him as servants; and with grain and new wine I have sustained him. Now as for you then, what can I do, my son?' And Esau said to his father, 'Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father.' So Esau lifted his voice and wept" (Genesis 27:36-38).

Esau is crushed. He realizes that he has not only lost the birthright to Jacob, but now the blessing of Isaac has also been supplanted. His weeping is an indication of great human sorrow. In his mercy, Isaac does bestow a blessing upon Esau, but only after he realizes that the blessing of Abraham, which he had inherited, was already passed on verbally to his son Jacob. Isaac was not about to change what had already been stated over Jacob and his descendants:

"Then Isaac his father answered and said to him, 'Behold, away from the fertility of the earth shall be your dwelling, and away from the dew of heaven from above. And by your sword you shall live, and your brother you shall serve; but it shall come about when you become restless, that you shall break his yoke from your neck.' So Esau bore a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him; and Esau said to himself, **"The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob"** (Genesis 27:39-41).

As we read further, we again discover that Rebecca has heard the threat that Esau declares about killing his brother Jacob after Isaac has expired. Little did Esau or Rebecca or anyone, for that matter, realize that Isaac was going to live to be 180 years old before he died.

Generational Blessing

Rebecca again decides that she knows best and she decides that the best thing for Jacob is for him to repeat the pattern that was established by Abraham and Sarah, and then Isaac and herself. Rebecca implores Isaac, blaming her frustration with Esau's wives from the daughters of Heth, to send Jacob back to the old country to secure a wife from their relatives:

"And Rebekah said to Isaac, 'I am tired of living because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife from the daughters of Heth, like these, from the daughters of the land, what good will my life be to me?' So Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and charged him, and said to him, **"You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother's father; and from there take to yourself a wife from the daughters of Laban your mother's brother. And may God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. May He also give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your descendants with you; that you may possess the land of your sojournings, which God gave to Abraham"** (Genesis 27:46-28:4).

Finally, the blessing of Abraham is bestowed upon Jacob. Isaac himself does not know when he will again see Jacob, so he passes on the final blessing before Jacob departs. Of course, no one at that time realized that Isaac would live to a ripe old age, and his two sons would bury him, just like Isaac and Ishmael buried Abraham years earlier:

“Now the days of Isaac were one hundred and eighty years. And Isaac breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people, an old man of ripe age; and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him” (Genesis 35:28-29).

Conclusion

What have we learned as we are reading about the early generations of the family that has been chosen to be our example of faithful families?

First, we witness that the Lord challenges each generation with trials that are designed to test our faith. Whether it is waiting upon God’s blessing for opening the womb, or being sent into hostile territory to deal with the ravages of famine, the ability to trust in God for His plan and provision is imperative. As we have seen in recent weeks, both Abraham and Sarah—and now Isaac and Rebecca—have dealt with these challenges in different and yet similar ways.

Next, we can see that each generation has some critical choices to make in order to help insure that the blessings of the Holy One are passed down to future generations. We are modeled the concept of encouraging our children to marry spouses from people with the same faith and familiar backgrounds. Abraham did this for Isaac in retrieving Rebecca to be his wife. In a like manner, Jacob is sent to the land of Abraham and Rebecca’s family to secure a wife. By following this pattern, each successive generation made choices for their children that increased the probability that their descendants perpetuated the truths regarding the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Millennia later, as progressive revelation comes forth, the Apostle Paul explains the significant differences between the children of the flesh and the children of promise to the Romans:

“For this is the word of promise: ‘AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON.’ And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived *twins* by one man, our father Isaac; for though *the twins* were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God’s purpose according to *His* choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, ‘THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER.’ Just as it is written, ‘JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED.’ What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, ‘I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION.’ So then it *does not depend* on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy” (Romans 9:6-16).

We need to be reminded over and over again that it is not the children of Ishmael, or the children of the sons of Keturah, or the children of Esau, who are the heirs of Abraham that are blessed with the word of promise. And as we have read and will continue to read, the numbers of heirs according to the flesh are almost impossible to count. As we read further, we will realize that a multitude of nations has indeed come from the loins of Abraham. We will see that the physical heirs will be like the stars of the sky and the sand of the sea.

But it is most important to understand that it is the spiritual heirs who live life by faith in the Messiah that are the ones who inherit the blessings promised to Abraham. It is these descendants who are the ones who will inherit the eternal life and relationship that is promised to Abraham’s *faithful seed*. And as Paul puts it in this passage when he quotes the words of Moses, “God will have mercy and compassion upon whom He chooses”:

“And He said, ‘I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion’” (Exodus 33:19).

For those of us alive today, it is our responsibility to evidence that same faith that was modeled by our spiritual forefathers. However, we have more revelation than Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, or Sarah and Rebecca. We, like Paul and those who have followed after the death, burial, and resurrection of Yeshua the Messiah, have been shown that our faith now resides in believing in His atoning work, whose heel was bruised as He crushed the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15).

But since we understand those truths by faith, we, like our ancestors before us, should continue to make generational choices as we are given responsibility over future generations, who, we pray, have been chosen by God to receive His mercy and compassion. Hopefully like Rebecca, who received a distinct word of knowledge from God about her children (“the older will serve the younger”), modern-day followers of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob should be influencing the future choices of their offspring. Is there anyone better equipped to advise and encourage the next generation about marital choices than the parents who raised them? This can be especially true because they have received far more specific revelation and spiritual knowledge than the Patriarchs and Matriarchs. Of course, in order to assist in this process, the one commandment that deals specifically with the direct relationship between children and parents should be inculcated into each successive generation:

“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you” (Exodus 20:12).

Obviously, Isaac and Jacob understood this commandment, and when their parents got actively involved in the search for a spouse, there were no recorded acts of rebellion. Isaac and Jacob honored and obeyed the generational choices that were advised by their parents, and the blessings have followed as their days were definitely prolonged. Further amplification is given to us in Deuteronomy 5:16, when this same commandment has this additional clause stated: **“that it may go well with you.”**

If we want the lives of our children to “go well,” it is recommended that we get directly involved in the critical generational choices that are made for their future spouses. More importantly, we also must personally exemplify a relationship with the God of Israel through acknowledging the atoning work of Yeshua at Golgotha (Calvary) to them. Hopefully by so doing, the generations that follow us will choose Yeshua, who is life eternal. They will recognize that it is His example of faithfulness that is to guide us in all that we do.

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