

APOSTOLIC SCRIPTURE REFLECTION:

for *V'yishlach*

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1 Corinthians 5:1-13

2 Corinthians 6:14-18

Hebrews 12:14-17

Revelation 7:1-12

“So-Called Brethren”

This week we are examining *V'yishlach* (Genesis 32:4-36:43), and at this point in our Torah readings we arrive at Jacob's return to Canaan from laboring in Padan Haran. We have become fully acquainted with two people, who could very much be labeled the “so-called brethren of Jacob,” as represented by the fleshly Esau and Rebekah's tasking brother Laban. *It is sad to see that some of Jacob's immediate family members have sinful inclinations.* An incongruous spirit or mindset was evident in the hearts of Esau and Laban, and Bible readers often do not remember either one of them in a positive light. Those who consider the examples of Esau and Laban are given a warning of extreme caution. Believers today need to be very careful with whom they consider working—and especially partnering—be it in business, friendships, or ministry service. If one is joined with someone who has a much different approach to life, then harm may come to you.

The Apostolic Scriptures are replete with warnings about how Messiah's followers are to be careful having relationships and interactions with so-called brethren—people who claim to be brothers and sisters in the faith, but who may not be (i.e., 2 Corinthians 6:14-18). Before reviewing a selection of those passages, remember that Jacob was deathly afraid of his brother Esau, as he was planning to return to Canaan. Jacob remembered Esau's threats to kill him after Isaac died (Genesis 27:41), and even after twenty years, such fear was quite still real to the point of offering bribes to assuage his brother's feelings (Genesis 32:13-18)—*and* even after Jacob appeals to God for protection:

“The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, ‘We came to your brother Esau, and furthermore he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.’ Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and the herds and the camels, into two companies; for he said, ‘If Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the company which is left will escape.’ Jacob said, ‘O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who said to me, “Return to your country and to your relatives, and I will prosper you,” I am unworthy of all the lovingkindness and of all the faithfulness which You have shown to Your servant; for with my staff *only* I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two companies. Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, that he will come and attack me *and* the mothers with the children. For You said, “I will surely prosper you and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which is too great to be numbered”’” (Genesis 32:6-12).

There is one sure thing that Jacob did learn during his time working for the demanding Laban: make sure you are not yoked to someone who approaches life differently than you do! Recall that when Jacob finally secured his total separation from Laban, they struck a covenantal vow swearing by God to never get involved in one another's business:

“Laban said to Jacob, ‘Behold this heap and behold the pillar which I have set between you and me. This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass by this heap to you for harm, and you will not pass by this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us.’ So Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac. Then Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and called his kinsmen to the meal; and they ate the meal and spent the night on the mountain. Early in the morning Laban arose, and kissed his sons and his daughters and blessed them. Then Laban departed and returned to his place” (Genesis 31:51-55).

The life lesson to avoid unequal yoking with someone of a different spirit, is further seen after Jacob's reunion with Esau. After the bribes of animals are secured by Esau and his company of four hundred, Esau makes an offer to Jacob that they might "journey and go" together—in essence, settling together in Seir. Jacob cleverly resists the offer, mentioning to Esau that he would "see" Esau in Seir, and yet after the separation of these two brothers, Jacob heads in another direction toward Succoth and Shechem:

"Then Esau said, 'Let us take our journey and go, and I will go before you.' But he said to him, 'My lord knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds which are nursing are a care to me. And if they are driven hard one day, all the flocks will die. Please let my lord pass on before his servant, and I will proceed at my leisure, according to the pace of the cattle that are before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come to my lord at Seir.' Esau said, 'Please let me leave with you some of the people who are with me.' But he said, 'What need is there? Let me find favor in the sight of my lord.' So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built for himself a house and made booths for his livestock; therefore the place is named Succoth. Now Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Paddan-aram, and camped before the city. He bought the piece of land where he had pitched his tent from the hand of the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, for one hundred pieces of money. Then he erected there an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel" (Genesis 33:12-20).

Instead of Jacob yoking or allying his family to that of Esau's in Seir, Jacob moves to Shechem. He first builds a temporary structure near Succoth, and then purchases a piece of land near Shechem. Jacob erects an altar and settles down some distance from his "brother" Esau. *Even though the two are kin, Jacob does not trust Esau.* After having been under the stress of satisfying the demands of his conniving father-in-law Laban, Jacob demonstrates the wisdom of not being unequally yoked with those who are of a different spirit and mindset.

This foundational, Biblical understanding about avoiding entanglements with the wrong people is elaborated on in various places in the Apostolic Scriptures. Consider how while the author of Hebrews recommends that Believers pursue peace with all people, just as Jacob achieved a level of peace with Laban and Esau—Esau is also identified as an "immoral man," being one who should be avoided. Believers are to not have people like Esau in their sphere of close influence, lest such immoral people are able to replicate themselves in the character of others:

"Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; that *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 12:14-17).

In his writing to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul addresses how Believers should deal with immoral people in their midst. Great sins have erupted within the Corinthian congregation, and some resolution about what to do with them has to be enacted. Paul instructed the Corinthians that immoral people engaged in gross sexual practice were to be excised from the assembly, being turned over to Satan—with at least the chance that as one's body is ravaged by the effects of sin, the person will somehow turn in repentance toward God. Likewise, Paul also instructed the Corinthians not to eat a meal with so-called brethren, who practice immorality:

"It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst. For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. In the name of our Messiah Yeshua, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Yeshua *I have decided* to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Messiah Yeshua. Your boasting is not good. Do you not

know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are *in fact* unleavened. For Messiah our Passover also has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I *did* not at all *mean* with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. **But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders?** Do you not judge those who are within *the [assembly]*? But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES [Deuteronomy 17:7; 19:19; 22:21, 24; 24:7]" (1 Corinthians 5:1-13).

It is in this passage where the concept of “anyone who bears the name of brother or sister” (NRSV), or “any who claim to be fellow believers” (TNIV), is addressed. *There are people who claim to be of the Body of Messiah, but by their grossly sinful behavior are obviously not.* Paul was clear to instruct the Corinthians that he not only wanted to see the sexually immoral gone from their assembly, but also any: coveters, idolaters, revilers, drunkards, and swindlers. Paul was very concerned that a little sinful leaven in the assembly, would have a damaging impact on the whole lump of dough of the entire assembly. His stern admonition was to not only discontinue eating with these charlatans—who pretend to be Believers—but to see these wicked people removed from the assembly.

In additional instruction to the Corinthians, Paul amplifies these concepts when speaking about what is commonly labeled as unequal yoking. The Believer is warned to not be bound with those who are of a different spirit, mindset, or ideology. While this can obviously apply to people who get married—and how potential couples need to be compatible on a wide variety of factors (far more than just the feeling that one is “in love”)—it can also be applied to business dealings and partnerships on multiple levels, with those who might influence a Believer negatively. Paul's warnings about not being bound with non-Believers is pretty serious, substantiated with multiple references from the Tanakh:

“Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Messiah with Belial or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, ‘I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE [Leviticus 26:12; Jeremiah 32:28; Ezekiel 37:27]. Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE,’ says the Lord. ‘AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN [Isaiah 52:11; Ezekiel 20:34, 41]; and I will welcome you. And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me,’ says the Lord Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

In our Torah portion this week, we see how Jacob learned some lessons the hard way through his trials with Laban. But, by the time his estrangement with Esau came to a head, Jacob chose to relocate to an area where the negative influences of Esau and his company would not impact Jacob.

Understandably, the Apostles would have endorsed Jacob's approach. *But what about you?* Have you ever been in a situation, or are you even currently in a situation, where you are unequally yoked with another? Can you remember how stressful you were, as various circumstances presented themselves? How are you handling the difficulties of some unequal yoking? What are you going to do?

Naturally, when one thinks of unequal yoking, the institution of marriage is what most frequently comes to mind. In this case, there are some very specific instructions from the Apostle Paul to both the men and women of Corinth, about maintaining a proper marriage relationship, despite the undue stress:

“But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her

husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife. But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy. Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such *cases*, but God has called us to peace. For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife? Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And so I direct in all the [assemblies]" (1 Corinthians 7:10-17).

Clearly, God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16), **and it is not something that should ever be desired** as entire families—and not just a former husband or wife—will be affected by it. Paul does state in this passage, that if an unbelieving marriage partner leaves, the faithful one should let the person leave and not remain in bondage. God has called us to peace, and being released from one who walks away should allow peace to return to the one abandoned.

If marriage relationships should not be unequally yoked, what can we also deduce about having friendships or business arrangements? Should we not avoid inappropriate friendships with sinful people, or business partnerships with those who are unethical? The 1 Corinthians 5 passage quoted above perhaps states it best by advising Believers **to avoid even having meals** with people who view life with an obvious disdain for the Messiah. This does not mean that you will always avoid eating with an unbeliever, but rather you will avoid the regularity of these types of settings—because of the potential to be stained by the unsavory lifestyle these people choose.

Personally speaking, I can vividly remember a time years ago when I was in a business arrangement with a man who claimed to be a Believer, but whose walk was obviously inconsistent with his statements. Even though we went to the same Bible Church, there was something extremely unsettling about his business ethics and personal life. One day while at a Bible study, I happened to be seated right behind him as the teacher was actually discussing the 1 Corinthians 5 passage referenced above. As the teaching proceeded, I had to keep looking on either side of my business partner's head in order to catch the eyes of the teacher. When the teacher got to the passages describing the characteristics of an immoral person (1 Corinthians 5:11), it dawned on me that my business associate manifested each one of the negative characteristics on the list (the only exception being that he was not a drunk). Upon realizing this reality and given the interesting juxtaposition of the line of sight, I heard the still quiet voice of the Spirit caution me to separate from this businessman and our entanglements in business. Even though my disassociation from this man had a cost in terms of dollars made, I felt it was more important to obey the Lord's promptings.

To this day, I have been extremely cautious about who and how relationships are solidified. While this has had its affect in various business relationships, it also has an undeniable affect on ministry relationships. In both evangelical Christianity and the Messianic movement, our family has encountered people who claim to serve the Lord, but are more out to serve themselves. While charlatans and frauds litter much of the Christian world, and offer populist teachings on Christian television that often do not help Believers—some of the same can sadly be seen in sectors of the Messianic world as well. These kinds of things require our ministry to function independently of others, because the Messianic movement is too young and un-established at present—to at least offer some of the accountability, structure, *and discipline* that various conservative, evangelical Protestant denominations offer when problems arise. We certainly believe that in time, though, such structure will come to the Messianic world.

And what do we do about so-called brethren—people who claim to be brothers and sisters in the faith—but who may not be? **Should we not feel sorry for such people, and pray for them to truly turn to the Lord in repentance?** Even though we might not like some of the things they do or stand for, should we not pray that they come to salvation? If you have been hurt by such people, recognize that *only God can judge them*—but we can all intercede for them.

Until the restoration of all things...

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