

March 19, 2017 - Gen. 25:19 – 26:11 - Jacob and Esau, Isaac and Abimelek

Torah Readings: Gen. 25:19 – 26:11 - Jacob and Esau, Isaac and Abimelek

Psalm 19

Haftarah - Isaiah 65:23 – 66:2 + 9-13

Barrenness

Rebekah was barren for 19 years.

First Sarah, now Rebekah and later Rachel (Genesis 29:31) were initially unable to conceive. Also the mother of Samson (Judges 13:2) and Hannah, mother of Samuel (1 Samuel 1:2) Why? Some scholars say the Chosen People are the children of God's gift. And in each generation patience is made the test of faith, i.e. a reminder that the children of the promise were to be not simply the fruit of nature, or born by "the will of the flesh," but reflect the gift of grace. "Children are the heritage of the Lord" (Psalm 127:3) and this points to our spiritual birth:

John 1:12-13 - "But to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God — children born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but born of God."

Genesis 25:21 - "And Isaac intreated the LORD for (beside) his wife, because she was barren: and the LORD was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived."

"entreated" is from a root signifying "to burn incense" (which is why incense is type of prayer throughout the Bible)

Isaac prayed that the Lord would give them children, and so Jacob and Esau were born, the fruit of prayer.

Isaac's character

"Born when his mother was ninety, and his father a hundred years of age, he is of a sedate, contemplative and yielding disposition. Consenting to be laid on the altar as a sacrifice to God, he had the stamp of submission early and deeply impressed on his soul. His life corresponds with these antecedents. Hence, in the spiritual aspect of his character he was the man of patience, of acquiescence, of susceptibility, of obedience. His qualities were those of the son, as Abraham's were those of the father. He carried out, but did not initiate; he followed, but did not lead; he continued, but did not commence. Accordingly, the docile and patient side of the saintly character is now to be presented to our view." — Barnes' Notes

And, he never left the Promised Land.

Jacob and Esau

Genesis 25:22 - “And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to inquire of the LORD.”

Rashi says that when Rebekah walked by a yeshiva study hall, one of the fetuses kicked and tried to come out. And when she walked by a house of idol worship, the same thing happened.

Rebekah, who may have been in fear for her life or the life of the babies, “went” to enquire of God - perhaps to an altar: Abraham had planted a Tamarisk tree in Beersheba and “called on the name of the Lord there.”

Or possibly she enquired through her husband Isaac, or by consulting Shem, Abraham or Melchizedek, as the Targums and the Rabbis suggest. But more probably, this just means she directly took her question to God in prayer.

Like Rebekah, we can take any fear, pain, worry or burden directly to the Lord and “roll it” onto him.

Psalm 34:4 - “I sought the LORD, and He answered me, And delivered me from all my fears.”

Genesis 25:23 - “And the LORD said to her, Two nations are in your womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from your bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.”

The future hostility between Israel and Edom was prefigured her womb before their birth.

“the elder shall serve the younger.” - fulfilled in King David’s time:

2 Samuel 8:14 - “And he put garrisons in Edom; throughout all Edom put he garrisons, and all they of Edom became David's servants.”

Later, (circa 100 B.C.), John Hyrcanus forced the Edomites or Idumeans to become one people with the Jews. They embraced their religion (Joseph. Antiqu. I. 13. c. 9. sect. 1.), rather than be dispossessed of their country. King Herod was both a Jew and an Edomite.

Spiritual meaning of Jacob and Esau

Paul expands on the Jacob/Esau story in Romans.

Romans 9:10-13 - “And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is

written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated."

Genesis 25:25-26 - "And the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau. And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob: and Isaac was three score years old when she bore them."

Esau come from 'Esaw, "hairy, or rough" (from `asah, "do" or "make") indicating "work" (and thus, self-effort)

'ědōm, Edom, "red."

Jacob's Name

ya'ăqōb, Ja'aqob, "he shall take the heel" from the Heb. word 'âkēb, "a heel"

Hosea 12:2–6 records the prophet's observations on God's condemnation of Israel's deceitful political policies (11:12–12:1). He points out that his people have a history of deceit stretching back to their forefather Jacob.

Hosea 12:2-3 - "The LORD also has a dispute with Judah, And will punish Jacob according to his ways; He will repay him according to his deeds. In the womb he took his brother by the heel, And in his maturity he contended with God."

The Hebrew clause could also be understood as "in the womb he deceived his brother." The following phrase, "in his maturity" or manhood contains a play on words. The three Hebrew letters (awn) of the word "manhood" form a play on a noun for deception or iniquity (aven = self-effort). In fact, Hosea used it as a byword for the shrine at Bethel, Beth Aven. The implied accusation is: Jacob as a man struggled with God near Bethel; the nation has rebelled against God at Beth Aven.

The Hebrew has, he "Jacobed," literally, "heeled" — that is, overreached, got the better by cunning of — his brother in the womb. To be at a person's heel is to be his determined pursuer, and one who on overtaking throws him down. One that takes hold of or trips up his brother's heels. It represents Jacob's pursuit of the birthright and blessing.

An alternative view: Some see the source of the name Jacob (Ya'aqov) not as Jacob's holding Esau's heel (aqev), but the word aqov, meaning "deceit." Thus, for example, we find in II Kings 10:19: "But Jehu did it with cunning (ve-aqba) in order to destroy the worshippers of Baal." In other words, Jehu acted deceitfully in order to destroy the worshippers of Baal.

After Jacob tricks Isaac, Esau says (Genesis 27:36): "Isn't he rightly named Jacob? He has deceived me (va-yaqeveni) these two times." Then, when God changes Jacob's

name to Israel, he's changing him from a deceiver to Israel, a name that symbolizes honesty, with "yashar" (straight/honest) as the root of both Israel (Yisrael) and Jeshurun (Yeshurun), a poetic name for Israel used in Deuteronomy and Isaiah 44:2.

Rashi says that 'Yaakov' refers to a person who waits in ambush.

[Compare this birth with the birth of Perez and Zarah in **Genesis 38:27-30**. Zerah was about to be born, got the scarlet thread tied to his wrist to indicate he was the firstborn, but Perez "supplanted" him by being born first. The Book of Ruth lists Perez as ending up being part of the ancestral genealogy of King David, and both Matthew and Luke include him when specifying the genealogy of Jesus.]

Genesis 25:27 - "And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents."

Jacob was *tām*, "perfect, upright, peaceful, plain." The same word is used by God to describe Job (Job 1:8)

Esau - a type of the world system, the flesh, opposition to God

The Midrash says that when Esau was getting old, he called in his grandson Amalek and said: "I tried to kill Jacob but was unable. Now I am entrusting you and your descendants with the important mission of annihilating Jacob's descendants – the Jewish people. Carry out this deed for me. Be relentless and do not show mercy."

The Talmud explains this based on the biblical verse that describes how Amalek "happened (karcha) upon" the Jews. The Hebrew word "karcha" literally means happenstance. Throughout the generations, Amalek has championed the idea of chance, or random coincidence as the operative force in world events, according to the Talmud.

Thus **Deuteronomy 25:17-18** continues: "And [Amalek] did not fear God." By contrast, the Jews have always firmly believed in Divine Providence – i.e. all that takes place is the direct hand of God. These two worldviews stand in direct contradiction and cannot coexist. This creates not just rivalry, but enmity.

The Edomites joined with Nebuchadnezzar in the destruction of Jerusalem:

"Remember, O LORD, against the sons of Edom, the day of Jerusalem, who said, "Raze it, raze it, to its very foundation!" (**Psalm 137:7**)

Herod was an Edomite and sought to kill Christ after his birth. His son Herod Antipas interrogated Jesus before his crucifixion.

In the Apocryphal Books

"And he said to me, 'From Abraham to Abraham, for from him sprang Jacob and Esau, but Jacob's hand held Esau's heel from the beginning. For ESAU IS THE END OF THIS AGE, AND JACOB IS THE BEGINNING OF THE ONE THAT FOLLOWS. For the beginning of a man is his hand, and the end of a man is his heel" (II Esdras 6:7-10).

Jacob and Genesis 3:15

As a story within a story...

Jacob actually starts out as depicting for us the serpent of Eden in the verse "he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel." Jacob is portrayed as one who grabs at/ attacks the heel. This is most often the description of a serpent (See on Dan in **Genesis 49:17**)

Not only that, but he uses food to entice Esau out of his birthright, just as the serpent uses the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to entice Adam and Eve from their own birthrights.

Later, in his wrestling with the Angel (**Genesis 32**), Jacob's name is changed. That change of name represents Jacob's death. The deceitful Jacob "bruising the heel" is abandoned, and Israel emerges from the struggle as the one crushing the head of the serpent (himself). After that he limps as a reminder of his death to self.

Esau was attracted the Jacob's lentil stew.

"Let me feed now on that red, red broth." Esau, whose nickname was "red," wants to satisfy himself with "red, red broth." A perfect picture of self-focused appetite.

Genesis 25:31 - "And Jacob said, Sell me this day your birthright."

The firstborn was regarded as entitled to a more honorable position and to a larger share of the inheritance than his brethren. Firstborn were the family priests (Ex 4:22) and had a double portion of the inheritance (De 21:17).

More importantly, the birthright meant that the blessing of the Coming One, the lineage of the Messiah, would pass through Esau. Esau considered this lightly, "What profit shall this birthright do to me?" and so traded it for a momentary pleasure. That's an example of the tyranny of the urgent.

The Jerusalem Targum adds, "and he despised his part in the world to come, and denied the resurrection of the dead;" and the Targum of Jonathan on Genesis 25:29 says, that "on that day he committed five transgressions; he performed strange worship (or committed idolatry), he shed innocent blood, he lay with a virgin betrothed, he denied the life of the world to come (or a future state), and despised the birthright;" which confirms the character the apostle gives of him, that he was a fornicator and a profane person, (Hebrews 12:16).

Hebrews 12:15-17 - “Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.”

In short, Jacob, the quiet shepherd, had out-maneuvered the skilled hunter in getting what he wanted.

Isaac and Abimelech

This is almost the same story we read earlier about Abraham and Abimelech.

This is not the same Abimelech mentioned in Genesis 20:2 about 70 years previously, but is probably his son and successor.

Genesis 26:2 - “And the LORD appeared to him, and said, Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell you of”

Isaiah 31:1 - “Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the LORD!”

Recourse to the world system of thought - cause and effect, randomness, self-effort - are never legal resources. Wait on God!