

Toldot**Generations****Esau tries to steal back his blessing****Torah:**

Genesis 25:19-28:9

Haftarah:**Malachi 1:1-2:7****Brit Chadashah:**

Romans 9:1-13

This portion deals with the hostility between the twin brothers, Esau and Jacob, and for his own safety, Jacob is sent to Padan Aram. While he is there, he is expected to obtain a wife. Why didn't they send a servant like Abraham did? Jacob needed to be protected even more than he needed a wife, so sending him personally was like killing two birds with one stone.

Isaac is 60 years old when Rebecca conceives the terrible twins. When Abraham dies at 175 years old, the twins were 15 years old and their uncle Ishmael was 88 years old. Rebekah wonders why they appear to be fighting in the womb and receives a surprising answer. There are two nations in her bosom and eventually the bigger one (the eldest) will be subject to the smaller one (younger twin).

The twins have radically different temperaments and they do not really look alike. Esau is a very furry successful hunter, while Jacob, who had very little body hair, was a peaceful man who dwelt under tents. He became a shepherd farmer like his father.

Now most of the story centres around Esau selling his birth right as the oldest, to Jacob for a bowl of lentil soup with some dipping bread. This did not mean he sold his right to be blessed and inherit once his father died. It meant that he was no longer the heir or the covenant bearer. In reality, he and his younger twin switched places. It was done with a solemn oath and Esau should have told his father, but he apparently kept it a secret. It seems that he had no intention of keeping his vow. If anyone was trying to steal the blessing, it was Esau and not Jacob.

Isaac does go into the land of the Philistines during a famine drought. Gaza is one of the few places in the Middle East which has a water surplus and YHVH told Isaac to take shelter there, rather than going to Egypt. We are not told how old he was when he went into the land of the Philistines or whether his sons were alive when it happened.

He tried to pass his wife off as his sister. She is his cousin, but they neither share the same mother or the same father. The king of the Philistines (whose title was Abimelech – son of the king) sees Isaac and his wife showing physical marital affection and was concerned that if someone had taken her as a wife, that they would be guilty of a crime.

We are not told if Abimelech pays a penalty to Isaac, but during his stay in Gaza, Isaac became extremely rich. He is asked to leave Philistine territory and moves several times before they finally leave him alone at Rehoboth (26:22). He moves from there to Beer-Sheba and is paid a visit by Abimelech and some of his leaders. Before this meeting, Isaac has an encounter with YHVH. While he was in the land of the Philistines, he receives the full covenant blessing of Abraham and this was just a follow up. He and his descendants will be a great nation and his posterity will also be a blessing to all nations.

Abimelech is the title of the Philistine kings of Gerar, even after the new group took over.

There is a time gap and we see that Esau takes two Hittite wives which were a source of bitterness to his mother and father. It is likely that it goes beyond cultural differences and they may have been trying to introduce polygamy into the camp. We are not told.

There is another time gap and we are taken to a time where Isaac is very old and can no longer see clearly. He knows that his days are numbered and he wants to pass on the covenant blessing to his eldest son. He is probably unaware that Esau has sold this blessing and it rightly belongs to Jacob.

The passage goes on to describe some subterfuge (lying) and it is likely that YHVH blessed Jacob in spite of the lying and not because of it. Isaac asks his hunter son to get some wild game and prepare it the way his father likes it, so that he can be blessed after Isaac has eaten. It was kind of like a ritual meal and as Esau goes out hunting, the deal is reported to Rebekah. We are told that Esau is his father's favourite, while Rebekah preferred Jacob.

To protect his interests, Rebekah disguises him like his furry brother and prepares a meal of goat meat which Jacob is supposed to serve to his father in order to get the blessing. She uses goat because it has a strong taste like wild meet. The ruse is successful and Isaac pronounces an amazing tenfold blessing on the son to whom the blessing really belongs. Once it is given, it cannot be taken back or transferred from Jacob to Esau.

Jacob just gets out in time not to be seen by his brother, who has had a successful hunt and has prepared a ritual meal for his father. When he discovers what his younger twin has done, he pleads for another, lesser blessing. He is going to have to live by his sword in an infertile land (outside of Canaan), but he will one day break free of the yolk of his younger brother.

He becomes enraged with Jacob, even though Jacob was only taking that which rightly belongs to him. He intends to kill Jacob, once Isaac is buried. Rebekah hears about his threat on Jacob's life and knows that he has to be sent away till his brother gets over his rage. She knows that Isaac does not have long to live and if Esau kills Jacob, he will be executed, so she does not want to lose both of them in a single day.

She convinces Isaac to send Jacob to Rebekah's brother to get a wife who was not Canaanite. Isaac summons Jacob, confirms his blessing and sends him on a mission to get a wife. Jacob obeys his father's request and leaves, probably with an extensive entourage. It is not mentioned, but Jacob probably also had gifts for his uncle and for his intended.

Once he leaves, Esau realizes that his two Canaanite wives do not please his parents, but instead of getting rid of them, he goes to the other uncle, Ishmael, and marries one of his daughters. His wife is called Mahalath and since we are not told any more about her, we can assume that she did not make the situation with his parents any better.

We see that Esau is quite wilful and does not seek either his parents permission or their blessing as he establishes his family. He would have known about the covenant blessing of Abraham and he did not lose it because he was polygamous. He lost it when he sold it to his brother. He does not appear to be as good human material as his brother. But all of that could have been compensated for, if he had not sold his birth right. We will be introduced to Esau's posterity in Chapter 36. As a descendant of Abraham, he will be blessed, but even for us, the full blessing of YHVH only comes to those who walk in faith and obedience.

Sermon: Living Stain Free in a Dirty World

Without forgiveness our spiritual lives will falter and fill up with anger and resentment. Holding a grudge is never a good thing and we should be set free from them as quickly as possible (Eph. 4:26). If we do not learn about dynamic forgiveness, we will have a double negative experience with the Holy Spirit. We will grieve Him by doing what we should not be doing (Eph. 4:30) and we will quench the Holy Spirit by not doing what we know we should be doing (I Thess.5:19).

We are told to forgive people 490 times a day (7x7x10 a very big symbolic number) and we want YHVH to do the same for us, because whenever we stop forgiving, we stop being forgiven (Matt. 6:14, 15). Forgiveness does not give people power over us and does not make what they did to us good or acceptable.

This morning, I want to discuss how forgiveness is really a kind of spiritual stain remover which can help us stay clean and fresh in a dirty, stale world. When we forgive someone, we are letting go, but we are not treating the injury as if it never happened, we are just making sure that it can not have any more impact in our lives and starts to heal, rather than getting worse.

Turning the other cheek means not taking the law into our own hands by doing to others what was done to us. If any form of punishment is required to resolve the situation, than we limit the punishment to the crime, which is what an eye for an eye means. Yeshua uses it to discuss the kind of dynamic forgiveness which we need, if we are going to walk with our Messiah (Matt. 5:38-42). We always want to be part of the solution and not make a bad situation worse.

We do not really let people steal from us or continue to strike us on both cheeks. We do not let people oblige us to walk a distance with them, as if they controlled our lives, and we do not indiscriminately give money to everyone who wants to borrow from us. We want to keep on doing to others what we would want them to do for us. I usually do not give money to panhandlers and I am not impressed by those guys with signs at traffic lights.

I have taken street people for a meal, but during one meal, one of them kept on asking for money over and above the food. He left in disgust and I do not think he even finished his food. We need to show support for the homeless. Please be aware that there are a number of places in our city which will feed them free of charge and there are also a number of shelters where they can get in out of the cold.

I know that there are not really enough beds for everyone, but our goal should not really be to support them as they live on the street, rather, we should be doing our best to get them off the street. Many have untreated mental health concerns, while others are victims of abuse and violence who have been kicked out of their homes. Part of the power of forgiveness we are talking about, will empower us to get on with our lives and not be stuck in anger and resentment. We do not want to become street people spiritually.

If we need help to learn to forgive and to learn how to deal with abusive people in our lives, this needs to be our focus because we want to improve the situation and not just ignore it or throw money at it.

We cannot be cleansed if we do not forgive (I Jn. 1:9), but once we have admitted our responsibility, YHVH can cleanse even the darkest stains out of our hearts and lives (Ps. 32:5).

Showing mercy is not a weakness and forgiving does not open the door for us to get beaten up all over again.

When we are hurt, lied to, or are stolen from, we want to repair the damage and not allow it to sink our whole life. Sometimes people who have hurt us do not want our forgiveness and are not ready to make good on what they stole or the damage they caused. That needs to be their problem and not ours. We can forgive people in absentia (while they are not present) and keep the forgiveness until they want it. Possibly, forgiving people who do not want it or do not ask for it and do not let us give it to them, may mean that this forgiveness is part of the treasures we take with us into the next life.

Not forgiving is our problem, people not asking or receiving forgiveness is their problem. If we get mad again when they do not want forgiveness or do not see the need to ask for it (because, apparently, they have done nothing wrong) we are caught in the same trap, all over again. There is always the danger of becoming horrible when horrible things are done to us.

Horrible things were done to the indigenous peoples of both North and South America. Unspeakable horrors were done to our Jewish people under the Nazis. Over a million innocent Armenians were slaughtered by the Turks, supposedly to protect Turkey if these people should support their enemies. No one knows how many millions of innocent people died in the killing fields of Cambodia. But fighting fire with fire just burns down the whole forest and that is how generational vendettas start.

Because you uncle's second cousin on his wife's side killed my grandfather's next door cousin, it becomes my job to kill him and to keep on killing until there are no more enemies left. Any kind of generational vendetta just pays forward all the pain and damage to the next generation, so it can also be passed on to new generations who are not even born yet.

You will never meet a Holocaust terrorist and none of the survivors are targeting German people and others who participated in Hitler's horrible Final Solution. There are some radical indigenous groups who use violent protest as a means to point out the many abuses which indigenous people suffered at the bloody hands of the pale faces. But they do not encourage or participate in slaughtering white folk. They want justice and are not out there to see how many white men they can kill in revenge for all the people the white men killed.

The Armenians are also out for justice because Turkey has not yet taken responsibility for the slaughter. They have sometimes resorted to violence, but never to slaughter on the scale which they suffered. Cambodians want the killing fields to become a thing of the past as they heal and move on.

Now with the Palestinians it is different. While there is a growing number of them who want to make peace with Israel, the majority still wants to drive Israel into the sea as they kill as many Jewish people as they can. They use untrue propaganda to demonize Israel and want the nations of the world to join them in both hating and shunning the Zionist entity. Nearly double the number of Jews were forced out of their home countries than those Palestinians who fled from the advancing Jewish army and left the holy land. I agree with Golda Meir that we will only have peace when they love their children more than they hate us.

Israel has expressed the desire to forgive all the horrible things the Palestinians have done since Jews first started coming home in large numbers. I do not want to minimize the suffering

of the Palestinians. Four times, they were invited to return to their homes and four times they refused. They even refused the cash indemnity which Israel wanted to pay them because of all they had lost. They cannot move on until they have forgiven the people who promised them an easy victory over Israel if they got out of the way.

Wallowing in bitterness and anger leaves a dark stain on our hearts and actually stands in the way of any healing which YHVH wants to bring into our lives. Justice needs to be served wherever it is possible, but when it is not possible, we do not have to be stuck in permanent anger and resentment.

There have been many horrible things done to people over the ages and there have also been many horrible things which have been done to us in our short lives. I want to work through my anger and not be stuck in that prison, chained to my bitterness as I grind my teeth. I am still mad at the Turks for conquering Constantinople and turning the biggest church in Europe into a mosque. I am still angry at the Mongols for slaughtering half of the people in the Middle East, most of whom were Christians. And don't get me started on the Crusades and all the pogroms which have repeatedly tried to wipe out our Jewish people.

Should I deal with it by killing modern Turks and the descendants of the Mongols who savagely killed hundreds of millions of people? Should I kill as many Catholic clergy as I can and kill the children of all the Russians and Ukrainians who slaughtered our people over so many generations? I think not. This history needs to be told and reparations need to be made wherever possible, but the use of violence just makes things worse.

The same is true when we try and resolve some of the horrible things which were done to us. I was bullied into oblivion and badly abused in Junior High school. Should I track these perpetrators down and do to them what they did to me? I do not want to keep this ugliness alive or give it any space in my heart and life. Happily, the memories are fading and I am forgetting many of the names of my perpetrators. I do not want to make them experience the years of terror at my hands as payback for what was done to me. I want to forgive.

They were stupid, cruel adolescents who got foul pleasure out of tormenting someone who could not fight back and I was not their only victim. I hope they have changed, but if they have not, I have changed. I am no longer that little boy hiding in the corners trying not to get noticed or running away when they came after me. I have forgiven them and bear them no ill will. I have moved on and wish the same for them.

The Day of Judgment is coming and so many unrepentant perpetrators and other criminals will receive punishment for what they have done, but I do not waste my time fantasizing over it. They have not been able to make me like them and I want to fill my life with forgiveness so that I can live a stain free life in the midst of this dirty, darkening world.

I have always wanted the pain to stop and the damage to heal but I know that even if I am not healed in everything which happened to me, G-d will teach me how to compensate so there is room in my heart for the pain to drain away, as I am filled with joy and peace and love. Do not hang on to pain and anger and do not let the enemy of your souls fill your minds with voodoo dolls of your enemies. Let it and them stay gone, because I do not want them to have any more power in my life. I have no more space for them. I have no more time for them.

I want my focus to be both on the imminent goodness of G-d in the land of the living and upon what part YHVH wants me to play in the process. I agree with David that I would have perished

if I was not sure to see the goodness of G-d in the land of the living (P)s. 27:13). I have not seen the last of the pain which life may still bring my way. The enemy has not stopped scheming against my soul. And this old world has not backed off from trying to drag me back into its darkness.

I still cry out in rage at all the pain and suffering too many innocent people are subjected to, but I never want to participate in causing anyone any pain and suffering. I want to work through my anger and my sadness and especially through my pain. I am a heaven bound pilgrim and I do not want to take any of the ugly stains of this life with me, when it is my turn to sleep in the dust before that great day when we will all stand before the Judge of the Ages. Forgiving 7 times 70 times a day keeps our hearts stain free, no matter how many horrible things keep happening to us.

I will never take up arms against those who do not share my beliefs or my morality. Ending the lives of the unborn is murder, whether it is made legal or goes back to being illegal. I cannot stop the slaughter in the womb by slaughtering those who are doing the killing. I would never attack an abortion clinic and if I saw an abortionist being beaten or hurt in any way, I would not stand back and enjoy the sight. I would intervene to stop the violence.

Recently there was a bombing of a gay club in Colorado and one of the two brave souls who took down the shooter was interviewed on the news. He was a gay former soldier who leapt into action to save the lives of innocent people. We have to forgive abortionists and those trapped in the LGBT lifestyle. Authentic spiritual maturity requires that we harbour no evil desires towards anyone. If I slip into anger and even if I slip into violence against anyone for any reason, I need to learn to forgive myself and those whom I am trying to hurt.

You remember once, I got punched in the face twice at our local Super Store by a man who wrongly accused me of trying to run him over. I really wanted to punch him or hit him with my metal club and it was a close thing. My brother in law was with me and watched as I decided what to do. I reported the incident and hope that he is brought to justice. Even if he is not held accountable for what he did, YHVH will hold us accountable for how we respond and forgiveness needs to be a major ingredient in our response.

As I wade through the dirty darkness of this world, I do not want any of the stain of sin to take up residence in my heart and life. I want to stay clean and have Him cleanse me from all unrighteousness, again and again (I John 1:9). I want this to happen both when I am the one who needs to be forgiven and also when I am the one who needs to learn to forgive.

There are some pretty awful, cruel people in this world who wallow in the darkness as they cause as much damage as they can. Our place is never among them and we should never respond to them in the same way as they are treating us. I will uphold the Law and take all the necessary steps to protect my family and my community, but I will never violate either the Law or my own conscience in the process. If someone was in danger of falling off the roof after they robbed my grandfather, I would not let them fall (as much as I would want to). I would still want to see them arrested, but not because I bear them any ill will. All of our actions and reactions need to be steeped in forgiveness if we want to appear before our King without any of the dirty, dark stains of this fading world. Shabbat Shalom. Shavua Tov.