



Shabbat Table Talk Page



Overview

- **Parashah: Toldot (תולדות, “generations”)**
- **Chapters: Gen. 25:19-28:9**

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְעִסוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה

– Torah Study Blessing –

Synopsis

Last week’s Torah portion (Chayei Sarah) related how the faithful servant Eliezer helped find a bride for Yitzchak (Isaac) from among Abraham’s relatives living back in Mesopotamia. In response to his earnest prayer to the LORD, Eliezer was shown that Abraham’s nephew’s daughter Rebekah was designated to be one of the great matriarchs of Israel.

This week’s parashah is about Isaac and Rebekah’s family and how the promised seed would descend through Isaac’s son Jacob rather than through his older twin brother Esau.

Isaac and Rebekah had been married for twenty years but were still without an heir to carry on the family line. Finally their prayers were answered and Rebekah conceived, though not without complications. When she inquired of the LORD about her travail, He told her that she was carrying twins that would be heads of two rival nations, but the younger child would in fact become the promised heir of the chosen people. When the day came for Rebekah to give birth, the first child came out “red and covered with hair,” so they called his name Esau (“hairy”); then his brother came out with his hand grasping Esau’s heel, so they named him Ya’akov (“supplanter,” from the Hebrew root meaning “heel”).

Esau grew up to be “a skillful hunter, a man of the field,” while Jacob was *ish tam yoshev ohalim*, “a wholesome man, who lived in tents.” Isaac favored Esau; but Rebekah, believing the promise of the LORD, favored Jacob...

The portion then gives us a look at the spiritual life of the two boys. According to Jewish tradition, on the day of the funeral of their grandfather Abraham, Jacob was cooking lentil soup for Isaac, the traditional mourner’s meal. Esau rushed in from a hunting expedition, exhausted and hungry. He then begged Jacob to give him some of “that red stuff” (*ha’dom hazeh*), but Jacob answered that he would give him some only if he would sell him his birthright. Esau agreed to the terms and discounted his birthright as being worth only a bowl of beans (on account of this incident, Esau was given the additional name of Edom (“red”). In this manner the Torah describes how Esau “spurned the birthright.”

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Next we read how Isaac followed in the footsteps of his father Abraham. A famine occurred in the land of Canaan, and Isaac and Rebekah moved to the town of Gerar (under the jurisdiction of Abimelech of the Philistines). The LORD then told him not to go, but to remain in the promised land, where He would bless him and make his descendants number as the stars in heaven. Isaac obeyed, but presented Rebekah as his sister (as Abraham had done with Sarah) out of fear that he would be killed by someone coveting her beauty. However, like Abraham, Isaac's ruse was exposed, and he was scolded by Abimelech for his duplicity.

Isaac and his family then settled in the town of Gerar and became so wealthy and powerful that the Philistines began to envy him. Abimelech finally asked him to settle elsewhere, so Isaac moved to a nearby valley. After a series of contentions with the Gerarites regarding water rights, he finally found room to settle down.

Later Isaac relocated to Be'er Sheva (the place where Hagar heard from the Angel and was later regarded as sacred ground) where the LORD appeared to him and renewed the covenant of Abraham with him. There he built an altar and offered sacrifices to the LORD. Abimelech then sent a delegation to make terms of peace. This section ends with the news that Esau, at the age of forty, married two Hittite women (Judith and Basemath, respectively), described as being a "source of bitterness to Isaac and Rebekah."

The story jumps ahead to when Isaac had grown old and was nearly blind. Thinking that his end was near, he wanted to bless Esau as the family heir before he died (it seems that Isaac wasn't the best family communicator, since doubtlessly Rebekah had long believed Jacob to be the appointed heir, and Jacob had earlier obtained the rights of the bechor (firstborn) by means of the agreement he had made with Esau). Nonetheless, Isaac instructed Esau to go off to hunt for his favorite food, after which he would then give him the formal blessing as the head of the family.

Rebekah overheard the plan and sprang into action. She instructed Jacob to prepare a similar dish, dress in Esau's cloths, and cover his arms and neck with a goatskin costume to simulate the smell and feel of his more hirsute brother. Then he would pass himself off as Esau and thereby foist the blessing from his father.

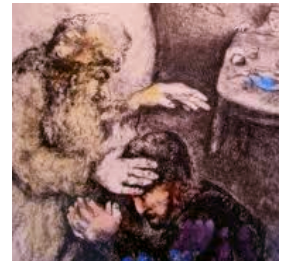
Everything went according to Rebekah's scheme, and Jacob received Isaac's blessing (if even under such deceptive circumstances). To Jacob would be "the dew of the heaven and the fat of the land" and mastery over his brother. However, scarcely after having given the blessing of the *bechor* to Jacob, Esau returned from his hunt with a meal for his father. The ruse was then exposed, but Isaac refused to revoke the blessing he had given to Jacob. All that was left for inconsolable Esau was the promise that though he would serve his brother Jacob, eventually he would break his yoke from his neck. At this point, Esau began plotting to murder his brother for his deception.

Upon learning of Esau's intention, Rebekah instructed Jacob to flee back to Haran to stay with her brother Laban until Esau cooled off. She then cajoled Isaac by insisting that she wanted Jacob to marry a woman from the old country - and not one of the Hittite women of Canaan. To his credit, Isaac finally listened to his wife and told Jacob to go to Haran and find a wife from among his cousins living there.



Parashah Questions

1. What does *toldot* (תּוֹלְדוֹת) mean? (Gen. 25:19) ¹
2. How long did Isaac and Rebekah have to wait before they had children? ²
3. Why do you think God made them wait so long? ³
4. What was strange about Rebekah's pregnancy? ⁴
5. To whom did Rebekah inquire regarding her pregnancy? (25:22) ⁵
6. What were the names of the twins, and who was the firstborn? ⁶
7. What does the word "Esau" (עֵשָׂו) mean? ⁷
8. What does the word "Jacob" (יַעֲקֹב) mean? ⁸
9. What did Esau grow up to be? ⁹
10. What did Jacob grow up to be? ¹⁰
11. Whom did Isaac prefer and why? ¹¹
12. Whom did Rebekah prefer and why? ¹²



¹ The word *toldot* means "generations," from the verb *yalad* (יָלַד), to give birth.

² Twenty years. Since Isaac was 60 years old when the twins were born (Gen. 25:26) and he had married Rebekah at age 40 (Gen 25:20), we know that they had waited 20 years for the birth of their first descendants.

³ Jewish tradition: God wanted to hear their prayers...

⁴ Rebekah conceived twins, but the children "struggled together within her," which was described as "warfare between two divided nations" (Gen. 25:22-23).

⁵ She inquired "of the LORD," which is thought to refer to Shem (Malki-Tzedek) who was the high priest of Salem at this time.

⁶ The firstborn was named Esau and the second born was named Jacob.

⁷ Esau is thought to mean "hairy," from a wordplay in 25:25, though his name can also mean "completely made," from *asah* [עָשָׂה], "to make." In this sense, Esau represents the "man of flesh" without conscious need of God.

⁸ The name Jacob (Ya'akov) means "grappler of the heel [עָקַב]" of Esau.

⁹ Esau grew up to be a hunter (צַיֵּד) who lived in fields.

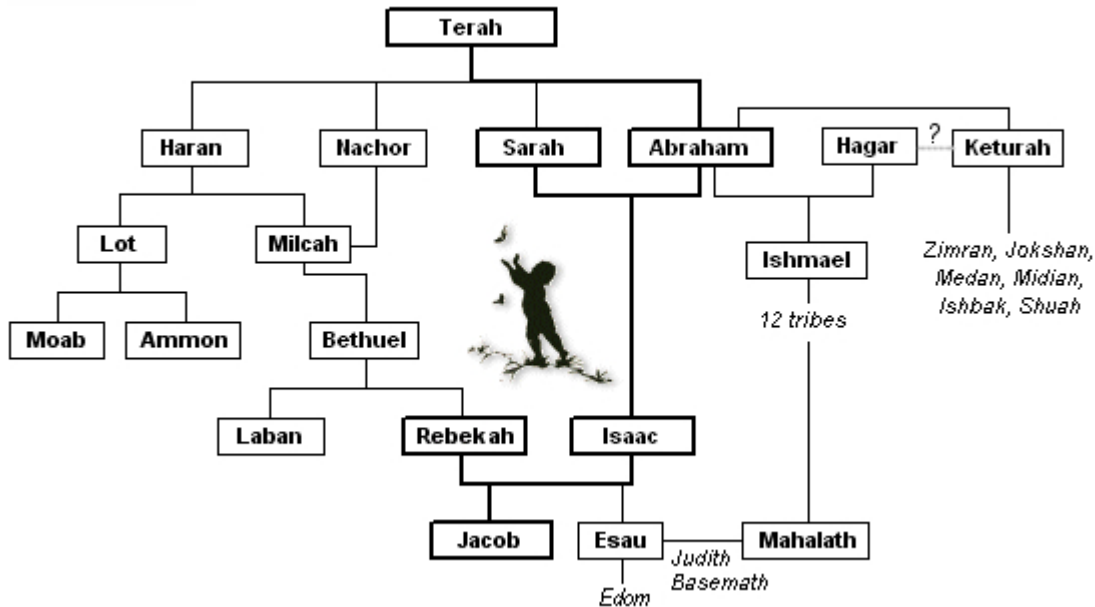
¹⁰ Jacob grew up to be a man who studied Torah in tents of learning [אִישׁ תָּם יֹשֵׁב אֹהֲלִים].

¹¹ Isaac preferred Esau, because he was the first born (bechor).

¹² Rebekah preferred Jacob, because he was the child God prophesied would become chosen.



13. Why was Jacob cooking soup? ¹³
14. What did Esau give in exchange for a bowl of bean soup? ¹⁴
15. What did Rebekah tell Jacob to do in order to get the blessing from Isaac? ¹⁵
16. To whose house did Rebekah send Jacob after he fled from Esau? ¹⁶



Discuss:

- Why couldn't Isaac see the true character of his sons?
- Was Rebekah justified in deceiving Isaac?

For Next Week:

- Read Parashat **Vayetzei** (i.e., Genesis 28:10-32:3)
- Read the Haftarah (Hosea 12:13-14:10)
- Read the New Testament (John 1:19-51)



¹³ Abraham had died that day and was preparing a meal for his bereaved father Isaac, while Esau had been out hunting as usual.

¹⁴ Esau gave up his birthright – the status of being bechor of the chosen family.

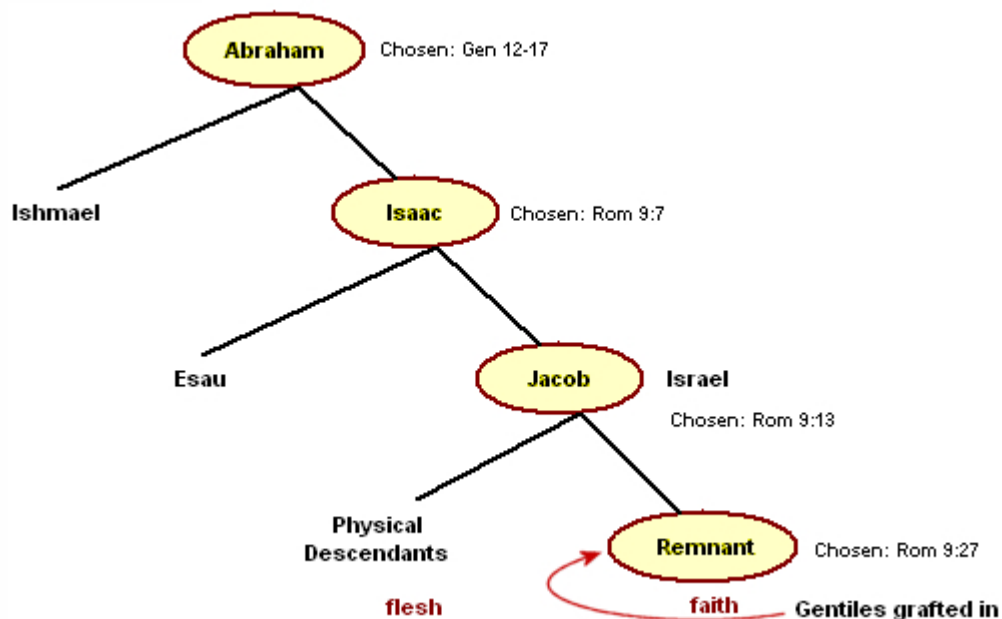
¹⁵ She instructed him to disguise himself as Esau in order to trick Isaac into blessing him as the firstborn and heir of the family.

¹⁶ To her evil brother Laban, who lived in the City of Nachor in Mesopotamia (Rebekah's hometown).



New Testament Reading

The reading from the New Testament (Rom. 9:1-31) reveals Paul’s desire to see all of Israel come to understand the truth of salvation as given through the Promised Seed of Abraham, Yeshua the Messiah. Nevertheless, since it is true that many of the Jewish people have rejected Him, Paul consoles himself by reflecting that not all physical descendants of Abraham are made the inheritors of the covenantal blessings from the LORD. No, Abraham had two sons, but it was Isaac (not Ishmael) who was chosen; and Isaac also had two sons, but it was Jacob (not Esau) who was chosen. In other words, even though Ishmael and Esau were physical descendants of Abraham, they were not chosen to be inheritors of the blessing of God.



Indeed, regarding the case of Jacob and Esau, Paul goes further by saying that “though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad -- in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call -- Rebekah was told, “The older will serve the younger.” He then quotes from the haftarah (Malachi 1:3): “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

Paul then asks the rhetorical question of whether all this might be unfair. After all, was it Esau’s fault that he was rejected when God had Himself foreordained that the blessing should not be his? Paul answers this by flatly saying that the LORD God of Israel is sovereign and can choose to show mercy and grace to whomsoever He wills - man’s objections notwithstanding. In other words, God has the complete right to predestine outcomes to suit His good pleasure and purposes, and mankind must simply accept His rule and reign in the universe.



Being a physical descendant of Abraham is not enough to be a part of God's family, since only the children of the promise are counted as God's offspring. And that even includes "goyim," or Gentiles, as the prophet Hosea revealed: "those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call children of the Living God" (Hosea 1:10). And did not the prophet Isaiah also cry out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved"?

Paul ends this line of thinking by saying that those who trust in the promise of God's salvation through the Mashiach have attained righteousness by faith; but those who pursue their own righteousness based on the law will never succeed in reaching that goal, since Yeshua alone is the "end of the law for righteousness" to all who believe:

"For by works of the law no one will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it - the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith" (Rom. 3:20-4).