

פרשת
תולדות
Parashat Toldot

*Bereshit / Genesis 25:19-28:9, Malachi 1:1-2:7
Luke 3:1-18*

Two Nations Striving... How does this Relate to Us?

The Scriptures for this week may be summarized as the struggle between two brothers in which the Lord God states this is nothing less than the struggle between two nations (שְׁנֵי גֵיִם), the struggle between sin and righteousness, unfaithfulness and faithfulness. This week's Torah portion opens with the phrase *Bereshit / Genesis 25:19*, וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת יִצְחָק: *25:19 Now these are the records of the generations of Isaac... (NASB)* The description of the generations of God's people draws in the importance of remembering, which leads us to focus upon putting God's words into action. This is the truth of the gospel message and the power of God in our lives, where in His Messiah and through His Spirit, we are empowered to overcome sin, and we are brought from death unto life. These truths are important for those of us who have come to the conclusion that the Torah has not been abolished, and believe the Torah is God's will for us to live as we strive to walk in the footsteps of the Messiah. In order to more properly understand this it is important to study the Bible from a historical and grammatical interpretation which helps us to draw in the sociological and cultural

perspective. This approach is necessary in order to help discern the difference between believing in a theology, as opposed to believing in and understanding what the Scriptures truly teach us. In regards to the truth of the gospel message of which the Scriptures speak, the Apostle Paul wrote in *Romans 1:20* saying, *“Since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.” (NASB)* In chapter two, Paul writes, *Romans 2:15* *“They show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them.” (NASB)* Paul speaks of a sort of universalism of the commands of God which are written upon the hearts of all men. These truths being written upon the heart are shown forth from the works of men, in the general consensus of *“you shall not murder;”* and *“you shall not commit adultery;”* etc. These universal Laws are understood as being good and righteous, and just. *Romans 3:19* states, Οἶδαμεν δὲ ὅτι ὅσα ὁ νόμος λέγει τοῖς ἐν τῷ νόμῳ λαλεῖ, ἵνα πᾶν στόμα φραγῆ καὶ ὑπόδικος γένηται πᾶς ὁ κόσμος τῷ θεῷ *“And we know that as much as the law says, to the ones in the law it speaks; that every mouth should be shut and subject to trial should be all the world to God.” (Literal translation of Greek)*. The ones to whom the Scriptures speak are those who would join themselves to the Lord God of Israel. The Torah was given to a people for the purpose of bringing God’s message of truth and life to all the world. The point of the Torah, as Paul describes it, is to stop every mouth and make the whole world accountable before God. This seems to be the perspective of this week’s Torah portion in regards to those who are faithful (Jacob) as compared to those who are unfaithful (Esau) in relation to God’s covenant.

In this week’s study we are looking at *Bereshit / Genesis 25:19-27*.

Bereshit / Genesis 25:19-27

25:19 Now these are the records of the generations of Isaac, Abraham’s son: Abraham became the father of Isaac; 25:20 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. 25:21 Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his

wife, because she was barren; and the Lord answered him and Rebekah his wife conceived. 25:22 But the children struggled together within her; and she said, 'If it is so, why then am I this way? So she went to inquire of the Lord. 25:23 The Lord said to her, 'Two nations are in your womb; And two peoples will be separated from your body; And one people shall be stronger than the other; And the older shall serve the younger.' 25:24 When her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. 25:25 Now the first came forth red, all over like a hairy garment; and they named him Esau. 25:26 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. 25:27 When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field, but Jacob was a peaceful man, living in tents. (NASB)

יט ואלה תולדת יצחק בן-אברהם אברהם הוליד את-יצחק:
 כ ויהי יצחק בן-ארבעים שנה בקמתו את-רבקה בת-בתואל
 הארמי מפדן ארם אחות לבן הארמי לו לאשה: כא ויעתר
 יצחק ליהנה לנכח אשתו כי עקרה הוא ויעתר לו יהנה ומהר
 רבקה אשתו: כב ויתרצצו הבנים בקרבה ותאמר אם-כן
 למה זה אנכי ותלך לדרש את-יהנה: כג ויאמר יהנה לה
 שני גיים [גוים] בבטנה ושני לאמים ממעיה יפרדו ולאם
 מלאם יאמץ ורב יעבד צעיר: כד וימלאו ימיה ללדת והנה
 תומם בבטנה: כה ויצא הראשון אדמוני כלו כאדמת שער
 ויקראו שמו עשו: כו ואחריו-כן יצא אחיו וידו אחזת בעקב
 עשו ויקרא שמו יעקב ויצחק בן-ששים שנה בלדת אתם: כז
 ויגדלו הנערים ויהי עשו איש ידע ציד איש שדה ויעקב איש
 תם יושב אהלים:

It is interesting that we are told Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebecca, and then it was 20 years later (60 years old, *Bereshit* / *Genesis* 25:26, ויצחק בן-ששים שנה) when Rebecca had the twins

Jacob and Esau. Isaac was given the task of remaining faithful to the promises of God for 20 years prior to his wife conceiving and giving birth. Rebecca was quite old when she had these children which may explain why she was so sensitive to what they were doing inside of her, struggling together. The striving together of the two children are illustrated in the text saying, וְאַחֲרֵי-כֵן יָצָא אָחִיו וַיִּדּוּ אֶחְזֹת בְּעֵקֶב עֵשָׂו וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ יַעֲקֹב 25:26 *“Afterward his brother came forth with his hand holding on to Esau’s heel, so his name was called Jacob...”* The faithfulness of Jacob is found in his trusting in the God of Abraham and of Isaac, and going to Haran for his wife, whereas the unfaithfulness of Esau is illustrated in his selling his birthright for a bowl of soup (25:29-34), and taking wives from the daughters of Canaan (28:7-9). The struggle between these two brothers, as the scripture says is between two nations (שְׁנֵי גוֹיִם). What is the nature of the “*struggle*” between the siblings mentioned at the beginning of verse 25:22? As we read through the Torah portion, the struggle that becomes apparent is related to those who are faithful as opposed to those who are unfaithful to the covenant. Do you value the Word of God in your life today? The MT explains to us that there were two brothers, both having been raised in a God fearing house, however one took hold of the Word of God, whereas the other despised God’s Words. Which person are you?

Within this context of the two kingdoms, the rabbis have much to say on this topic.

Rashbam on Bereshit / Genesis 25:24, Part 3

מלכי ארץ, ושני לאומים, *kingdoms, as per Psalms 148:11* וכל לאומים, *“all kings and peoples of the earth.” We know that this interpretation is correct as otherwise the words גויים and לאומים would simply be a needless repetition. The word לאומים therefore refers to nations. Seeing that the prophet had already begun to foretell Rivkah part of the future, he continued further adding:*

The Lord provided Isaac and Rebecca a prophetic expectation of two nations struggling together. The end of the prophecy states that Esau (the firstborn twin) will serve Isaac (the “*younger*” twin). According

to the Scriptures, is there any indication why this is the case? What does it mean to serve a younger sibling? The rabbis say in *Sefer Hasi-dim* (Yehudah ben Shmuel, aka HeHasid, 12th-13th century Germany) “And the elder shall serve the younger. *Leš Jacob learn from Esau, God placed enmity in their hearts even before they were born, and the divide between them started at that time.*” The general conclusion in the rabbinic literature in regards to the older serving the younger was so Jacob would not learn from his older brother. Why would it be problematic for Jacob to learn from his twin brother, Esau? Could it be that Jacob was to remain in tents to hear the Word of the Lord from his parents and develop a deep faithfulness to the God of his fathers and to the covenant promises? What role does the Lord God play according to this interpretation of the story and what theological implications do Lord’s actions have? The role the Lord plays is in the sense that He is orchestrating the lives of men to facilitate faithfulness in Him. The implication is that all things work together for good (*Romans 8:28*) because everything is within God’s control.

Rabbi Bunim states the following in relation to the birth of Jacob and Esau:

Rabbi Bunim of Pshischa (18th century Poland)

When Rebekah would pass the doors of the Torah academies...Jacob would struggle to come out, but when she passed places of idolatry, Esau struggled to come out (Rashi). Why would Jacob want to come out considering that fact that the Talmud teaches that when a child is still in the womb, “they [the angels] teach the child Torah?” [He wanted to come out] because it is difficult for a righteous person to be in the same place as a wicked person, even if he is studying Torah from an angel.

The concepts put forth here are that these two children, from before they were born, were given to faithfulness and unfaithfulness, righteousness and unrighteousness. The rabbis continue to interpret these two children as a struggle between two nations (שְׁנֵי גֵוִים). The point is that regardless of whether one was given to unrighteousness from birth, he remains accountable before God as is described in *Ezekiel 14:13-15*

which speaks of the nations being accountable to the Law and the covenant of God with respect to faithfulness.

Ezekiel 14:12-14

14:12 Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, 14:13 ‘Son of man, if a country sins against Me by committing unfaithfulness, and I stretch out My hand against it, destroy its supply of bread, send famine against it and cut off from it both man and beast, 14:14 even though these three men, Noah, Daniel and Job were in its midst, by their own righteousness they could only deliver themselves,’ declares the Lord God. (NASB, וַיְהִי יב דְּבַר-יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר: יג בֶּן-אָדָם אֲרֹץ כִּי תִחַטָּא-לִי לְמַעַל-מֵעַל וְנִטִּיתִי יָדִי עָלֶיהָ וְשִׁבַרְתִּי לָהּ מִטֶּה-לֶחֶם וְהִשְׁלַחְתִּי-בָהּ רָעָב וְהִכַרְתִּי מִמֶּנָּה אָדָם וּבְהֵמָה: יד וְהָיוּ שְׁלֹשֶׁת הָאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵלֶּה בְּתוֹכָהּ נֹחַ דָּנְיָאֵל [דָּנְיָאֵל] וְאִיּוֹב הֵמָּה בְּצַדִּיקְתָּם יִנָּצְלוּ) (נִפְשָׁם נָאֻם אֲדַנִּי יְהוָה:

The concepts put forward here by the prophet Ezekiel are related to a nation that sins against the Lord in unfaithfulness. If the Law was given only to Israel, why would the nations be held accountable to God’s Law and to faithfulness? This may be related to what is written in the *Mishnah Pirkei Avot 6:7*.

Mishnah Pirkei Avot 6:7

Great is Torah, for it gives life to those who do it in this world and in the next world, as it says: “For they are life to those that find them, and healing to all his flesh” (Proverbs 4:22); and it says, “It will be healing for your navel, and tonic to your bones” (Proverbs 3:8). And it says, “It is a tree of life to those who hold it, and those who grasp it are happy” (Proverbs 3:18). And it says, “For they are an accompaniment of grace for your head, and a necklace for your throat” (Proverbs 1:9). And it says, “She will give your head an accompaniment of grace; with a crown of glory she will protect you”

(Proverbs 4:9). And it says, “For by me your days will be multiplied, and you will be given additional years of life” (Proverbs 9:11). And it says, “Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left is wealth and honor” (Proverbs 3:16); and it says, “For length of days and years of life and peace will be added to you” (Proverbs 3:2); and it says, “her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace” (Proverbs 3:17).

Based upon what we read here in the Mishnah Pirkei Avot, all normative statements assume values. In economics and philosophy, a “*normative statement*” expresses a value judgment about whether a situation is desirable or undesirable. For example in the phrase, “*It looks at the world as it ‘should’ be.*” In other words, laws and norms are in many ways the concrete expression of value and belief systems. What are some of the values or beliefs that you believe stand behind the normative statements made in the *Mishnah Pirkei Avot 6:7*? The mitzvah of being good to your neighbor, morality, and justice which is coupled to righteousness, these are the normative and desirable things. These are the things the Lord is looking for in addition to being recognized as the creator, and through whom we receive forgiveness and salvation from sin (i.e. in the Messiah Yeshua). This is what the Apostle James was writing in his book when he mentions in *James 1:23-25* speaking of “*The Royal Law of Liberty,*” and where he clarifies saying in *James 2:8-13* “*The Royal Law*” speaking of the Torah. He writes in *James 2:12-13* speaking of mercy which is coupled to the Torah, similar to our previous study.

James 1:23-25

1:23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; 1:24 for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. 1:25 But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does. (NASB)

James 2:8-14

2:8 If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing well. 2:9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 2:10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. 2:11 For He who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not commit murder.' Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 2:12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. 2:13 For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment. 2:14 What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? (NASB)

Again note all the normative statements expressing a value judgment about whether a situation is desirable or undesirable. The desirable thing is to serve the Lord by the way we love our neighbor, this is taught to us in the Torah. Though we fall short of keeping all of the commands, the Torah has the function of leading us to repentance and to the Lord God of Israel, and His Messiah Yeshua seeking for forgiveness and help to turn from sin. The Torah is coupled to mercy, therefore found within the Mitzvot (commandments) are opportunities of grace (mercy) that we are called to show unto each other. This is something that Jacob and Esau should have shown to one another. However, the Torah portion details how Rebecca sent Jacob away out of fear that Esau will kill him as a result of the nature of sin and unfaithfulness.

Radak has the following to say concerning this week's Torah portion:

Radak on Bereshit / Genesis 25:23 Part 5

ממעריך יפרדו, as soon as they come out of your womb they will each develop in a different way, even physically. One would be hairy, his skin reddish looking, where-

as the other would have smooth skin like normal babies. They would be different in their deeds and choice of occupations as soon as they would be old enough to make such choices. The Torah testifies to this by describing Esau as כִּי צִיד בְּפִיו, being a hunter, whereas Yaakov is described as יוֹשֵׁב אֹהֳלִים, a dweller of tents, i.e. studious bookish type. They would also hate one another as a matter of course.

What image of family life does this portray? How about the relationship between communities or nations? The rabbis say that holiness is at home and unholiness is away which is contrasted to Jacob and Esau, and Israel and the nations. *Rashi on Bereshit / Genesis 25:23* states “*One nation will struggle against the other. They will never be equal. When one rises the other will fall and vice versa.*” This is a significant issue that seems to perpetuate the issue of competition in relation to faithfulness and unfaithfulness. What can we do to escape the Esau-Jacob relationship paradigm as this is related to us and the nations, or to being a faithful or an unfaithful people? It is important to note the prophetic texts which state according to *Isaiah 2*:

Isaiah 2:1-5

2:1 The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. 2:2 Now it will come about that In the last days The mountain of the house of the Lord Will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it. 2:3 And many peoples will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, To the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways And that we may walk in His paths.’ For the law will go forth from Zion And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. 2:4 And He will judge between the nations, And will render decisions for many peoples; And they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will

they learn war. 2:5 Come, house of Jacob, and let us walk in the light of the Lord. (NASB)

Isaiah speaks of a future time when Jerusalem will be a place of worship where all the nations will come together to seek the Lord and His ways of righteousness, justice, and truth, and to serve and worship Him! He speaks of a time when the Torah (instruction) of God will go forth to the nations, meaning that God's people will take His words to the nations. This is taken in contrast to what most people understand the Torah to be according to Yeshua words in *Matthew 5:38-48*:

Matthew 5:38-48

5:38 'You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' 5:39 'But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. 5:40 'If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. 5:41 'Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. 5:42 'Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you. 5:43 'You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 5:44 'But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 5:45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 5:46 'For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 5:47 'If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 5:48 'Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (NASB)

The point Yeshua was making is that we are to suffer any injury for the sake of peace, and commit your concerns to the Lord and overlook a sin that is committed against you for the sake of the glory of God. In the Messiah, by faith, we are to forgive, seek peace, and speak of

God's Words to others, avoiding disputations and striving with one another as Jacob and Esau did. The "*eye for an eye*" command is found in *Shemot / Exodus 21:24*, *Vayikra / Leviticus 24:20*, and *Devarim / Deuteronomy 19:21*. This command was given as a rule to regulate the decisions of judges. They were commanded to take an eye for eye, and tooth for tooth, in order to limit the judicial rule for the purpose of maintaining justice. Yeshua finds no fault with the rule as it is applied to magistrates, and does not take it upon himself to repeal or overrule this command. The halakhic approach in the First Century however was that this command was extended into one's private conduct, which enabled one to take revenge. It was considered a justification by this rule to inflict the same injury on others that they had received. Yeshua however reconstructs this interpretation and states that this rule is not in reference to private revenge, it was given to regulate magistrates, and to place limits upon their rulings for justice and righteousness sake. Our private conduct is to be governed by different principles. The principle of forgiveness and mercy! It is under these principles that we are able to escape the Esau-Jacob relationship paradigm as it is related to us and the nations and to one another (our brothers). It is by our faith in Yeshua the Messiah, the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit, and our faithfulness to His commands that we are called to walk, and to break this struggle between nations. Let's take the Word of God, the Message of God, His Messiah, and His Ways of Life to the nations! This is what the Lord is looking for in our lives!

