

פרשת
תולדות
Parashat Toldot

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

A Community being Punished for an Individual's Sin

“The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the one!” This is a famous quote from *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*. In light of this week's Torah portion this phrase speaks to us in a significant way. In the movie and the phrase we find a very Messianic Principle where one lays down his life for another. The giving of ourselves leads us to consider the responsibility we have as individuals in the midst of the communities, households, families, and marriage relationships in which we live. The reason this is so significant is the connection that we find in the Torah based upon how Abimelech responds to catching Isaac in a lie about his wife being his sister, Abimelech says, *26:10 Abimelech said, ‘What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us.’* (ויאמר אבימלך מה-זאת עשית לנו כמעט שכב, *(אחד העם את-אשתך והבאת עלינו אשם:* Notice the context in which he speaks, he says *“One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us.”* He speaks of either himself or one of his people sinning causing guilt to come upon all of them. This is a reference to collective punishment, a form or punishment that effects all of the community due to the perpetrator's family member, friend, acquaintance, sect, or neighbor causing the

punishment of a group of people who often have no direct association with the individual or control over their actions. This is understood historically where collective punishment is used to deter attacks by resistance movements, *i.e. destroying entire towns and villages which were believed to have harboured or aided the resistance movement.* The concept here is of the sin of one person bringing guilt upon an entire community. Is this a valid concept that applies to us today? This is a significant question because it is related to the individual who sins and its effect on the entire community, congregation, family, or marriage. This ultimately comes down to how the Lord God deals with peoples, families, and nations, on a corporate basis due to an individual's behavior. Collectivism and individualism and its relationship to punishment due to sin is a very complex topic. The adjective "*collective*" reflects the structure and role of the society in ancient Israel and her surrounding nations. The nature and function of the community, the clan, the family, and the self or individual and how this is described in the Hebrew bible are important to pay attention to when trying to understand collective punishment. Rashi states the following on this verse:

Rashi on Bereshit / Genesis 26:10 Part 2

וְהִבֵּאתָ עָלֵינוּ אָשָׁם means had he really lain with her you would have now brought guiltiness upon us (i. e. the verb is not in the future but in the conditional past tense).

Rashi points out the verb tense of Abimelech's statement to Isaac, if he or someone else would have lain with Isaac's wife, this would have brought guiltiness upon his people, written in a conditional past tense. Does this statement contradict the Scripture that states the child will not share the guilt of the parent, and where the parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents; each will die for their own sin? (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 24:16, Ezekiel 18:20*) Elsewhere we also read in *Bamidbar / Numbers 14:18* *The LORD is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the*

fourth generations. (NASB) There seems to be a contradiction here. This is what is known as Hebraic tension in the text. For example, in *Mishley / Proverbs 26:4-5*, we read in verse four which states “*Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself.*” The following verse five then states “*Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes.*” These verses follow directly one after the other. The conclusion is if a fool is trying to use his foolishness to engage in a debate, we should either simply walk away, because any answer will only add fuel to his fire. Or, on the other hand, we could also give an answer which clearly demonstrates to him the foolishness of what he has said. Notice how this applies to the question of collectivism on how the Lord God deals with people (*i.e. groups of people*) versus the individual. The point of these verses from *Devarim / Deuteronomy 24:16*, *Bamidbar / Numbers 14:18*, *Ezekiel 18:20*, and *Bereshit / Genesis 26:10* is to provide tension in the sense that we should always be weary of the consequences of sin having the effect on both the individual and the corporate life. We need to live repentant, turning from sin, and trusting in God for help.

Bereshit / Genesis 26:1-17

26:1 Now there was a famine in the land, besides the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham. So Isaac went to Gerar, to Abimelech king of the Philistines. 26:2 The Lord appeared to him and said, ‘Do not go down to Egypt; stay in the land of which I shall tell you. 26:3 ‘Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham. 26:4 ‘I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; 26:5 because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws.’ 26:6 So Isaac lived in Gerar. 26:7 When the men of the place asked about his wife, he said, ‘She is my sister,’ for he was afraid to say, ‘my wife,’ thinking, ‘the

men of the place might kill me on account of Rebekah, for she is beautiful.’ 26:8 It came about, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out through a window, and saw, and behold, Isaac was caressing his wife Rebekah. 26:9 Then Abimelech called Isaac and said, ‘Behold, certainly she is your wife! How then did you say, ‘She is my sister’?’ And Isaac said to him, ‘Because I said, ‘I might die on account of her.’’ 26:10 Abimelech said, ‘What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us.’ 26:11 So Abimelech charged all the people, saying, ‘He who touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.’ 26:12 Now Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. And the Lord blessed him, 26:13 and the man became rich, and continued to grow richer until he became very wealthy; 26:14 for he had possessions of flocks and herds and a great household, so that the Philistines envied him. 26:15 Now all the wells which his father’s servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines stopped up by filling them with earth. 26:16 Then Abimelech said to Isaac, ‘Go away from us, for you are too powerful for us.’ 26:17 And Isaac departed from there and camped in the valley of Gerar, and settled there. (NASB)

א וַיְהִי רָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ מִלְכָּד הָרָעַב הָרִאשׁוֹן אֲשֶׁר הָיָה בְיַמֵּי
אֲבִרְהָם וַיֵּלֶךְ יִצְחָק אֶל-אֲבִימֶלֶךְ מֶלֶךְ-פְּלִשְׁתִּים גְּרָרָה: ב
וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר אֵל-תִּרְדּוּ מִצְרַיִמָּה שָׁכֵן בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר
אָמַר אֱלֹהֶיךָ: ג גּוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת וְאֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ וְאֲבָרְכְךָ כִּי-
לֹךְ וּלְזָרְעֶךָ אֶתֵּן אֶת-כָּל-הָאֲרָצוֹת הָאֵל וְהִקְמַתִי אֶת-הַשְּׂבָעָה
אֲשֶׁר נִשְׂבַּעְתִּי לְאֲבִרְהָם אָבִיךָ: ד וְהִרְבִּיתִי אֶת-זָרְעֶךָ
כְּכֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְנָתַתִּי לְזָרְעֶךָ אֶת כָּל-הָאֲרָצוֹת הָאֵל וְהָתַ-
בְּרָכוּ בְזָרְעֶךָ כֹּל גּוֹיֵי הָאֲרֶץ: ה יַעֲקֹב אֲשֶׁר-שָׁמַע אֲבִרְהָם
בְּקֹלִי וַיִּשְׁמַר מִשְׁמֵרֵתִי מִצֹּתִי חֲקוֹתַי וְתוֹרֹתַי: [שְׁנִי] ו

וַיִּשָׁב יִצְחָק בְּגֵר: ז וַיִּשְׁאַל אֲנָשֵׁי הַמָּקוֹם לְאִשְׁתּוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר
 אַחֲתִי הוּא כִּי יֵרָא לְאִמֵּר אִשְׁתִּי פֶן-יִהְיֶה אֲנִשֵּׁי הַמָּקוֹם
 עַל-רִבְקָה כִּי-טוֹבַת מְרָאָה הוּא: ח וַיְהִי כִּי-אָרְכוּ-לוֹ שָׁם
 הַיָּמִים וַיִּשְׁקֹף אָבִימֶלֶךְ מֶלֶךְ פְּלִשְׁתִּים בְּעֵד הַחֲלוֹן וַיֵּרָא
 וַהֲנִה יִצְחָק מְצַחֵק אֶת רִבְקָה אִשְׁתּוֹ: ט וַיִּקְרָא אָבִימֶלֶךְ
 לְיִצְחָק וַיֹּאמֶר אֵיךְ הִנֵּה אִשְׁתְּךָ הוּא וְאֵיךְ אָמַרְתְּ אַחֲתִי הוּא
 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו יִצְחָק כִּי אָמַרְתִּי פֶן-אָמוּת עָלַי: י וַיֹּאמֶר
 אָבִימֶלֶךְ מַה-זֹּאת עָשִׂיתָ לָנוּ כִּמְעַט שָׁכַב אֶחָד הָעָם אֶת-
 אִשְׁתְּךָ וַהֲבֵאתָ עָלֵינוּ אֲשָׁם: יא וַיֵּצֵו אָבִימֶלֶךְ אֶת-כָּל-הָעָם
 לֵאמֹר הַנִּגַּע בְּאִישׁ הַזֶּה וּבְאִשְׁתּוֹ מוֹת יוּמַת: יב וַיִּזְרַע
 יִצְחָק בְּאֶרֶץ הַהוּא וַיִּמְצָא בְּשָׁנָה הַהוּא מֵאָה שְׁעָרִים וַיְבָרֶ-
 כְּהוּ יְהוָה: [שלישי] יג וַיִּגְדַּל הָאִישׁ וַיֵּלֶךְ הָלוֹךְ וַיִּגְדַּל עַד
 כִּי-גָדַל מְאֹד: יד וַיְהִי-לוֹ מְקַנְיָה-צֹאן וּמְקַנְיָה בָּקָר וְעֶבְדָּה
 רַבָּה וַיִּקְנְאוּ אֹתוֹ פְּלִשְׁתִּים: טו וְכָל-הַבְּאֵרֹת אֲשֶׁר חָפְרוּ
 עֲבָדֵי אָבִיו בְּיַמֵּי אַבְרָהָם אָבִיו סָתְמוּם פְּלִשְׁתִּים וַיִּמְלְאוּם
 עָפָר: טז וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִימֶלֶךְ אֶל-יִצְחָק לֵךְ מֵעַמְּנוּ כִּי-עֲצַמְתָּ
 מִמֶּנּוּ מְאֹד: יז וַיֵּלֶךְ מִשָּׁם יִצְחָק וַיִּחַן בְּנַחַל-גֵּרָר וַיִּשָּׁב
 שָׁם:

Abimelech caught Isaac in a lie about his wife being his sister and says, *“What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us.”* (NASB, מַה-זֹּאת עָשִׂיתָ לָנוּ כִּמְעַט שָׁכַב אֶחָד הָעָם אֶת-אִשְׁתְּךָ וַהֲבֵאתָ עָלֵינוּ אֲשָׁם:) The Lord God says in *Bamidbar / Numbers 14:18*, *“The Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.”* What we learn from these passes from the Torah is when people or groups of people (a community), or even a single family, when they rebel against God, the punishment is visited upon them, even multi-generationally. The proof text for this is in the Babylonian exile. The Lord used the Assyrian army to discipline the people due to their sins. The children, even the grandchildren suffered due to the sins of their parents. The bottom line is that sin effects all of those around us.

Abimelech recognized this and was upset with Isaac because he had lied. Those who we love the most are those closest to us and they will suffer the consequences the most. This is why it is so important that we take sin very seriously. Sin brings down God's wrath and may also fall upon those around us if we are unrepentant. There are times when the Lord God is required to deal with an entire people due to sin. The question is whether an individual's sin may cause harm to come upon a family member by the Lord calling one back to repentance from that sin?

Siftei Chakhamim commentary states the following:

Siftei Chakhamim, Bereshit / Genesis 26:10 Part 1

The one singled out amongst the people, meaning, the king. Rashi knows this because it is written, "You would have brought guilt upon us." It is understandable if it refers to the king, as a king is referred to in the plural form, as is a prominent man. [Another approach:] It seems to me that Rashi knows this because otherwise it should say אָחָד rather than אַחָד. And similarly Rashi explains the verse דן ידין עמו כאָחָד (49:16). (Nachalas Yaakov)

Siftei Chakhamim, Bereshit / Genesis 26:10 Part 2

Had he had relations, you already would have brought guilt upon us. וְהִבְאֵת cannot be future tense because it says שכב which is [clearly] past tense. A further reason [it cannot be future tense]: Avimelech had them announce that she is Yitzchok's wife [and that whoever touches her shall die]. As a result, no one would sleep with her. (Nachalas Yaakov)

Abimelech as the leader of the community, his sins would have brought disaster down upon the people. This goes back to the question of the community that looks past or ignores the sins of others. Like in the case of Achan, in *Joshua 7* we see Achan and all his family executed for a sin which only Achan was responsible for. The family was complicit with Achan's sin, they buried the garment in the center

of the tent, they all knew about it, none of them spoke up, finding out had to come by divine appointment, and they were selected and they all bore the guilt of the sin of one man. Is this what was going to take place in Abimelech's words to Isaac about bringing sin to all of the community? What about a hidden sin that a family member may have? Would this bring guilt upon a family leading to destruction?

Sforno states the following on *Bereshit / Genesis 26:10*.

Sforno on Bereshit / Genesis 26:10 Part 2

וְהִבֵּאתָ עָלֵינוּ אָשָׁם, by misrepresenting who Rivkah was, you, Yitzchok, almost made us guilty of a sin, for if the outstanding citizen of this land would have taken her, this would have caused also his subjects to be punished. This is the reason why he said: עָלֵינוּ, "upon us," instead of עָלָיו, "upon himself."

Sforno understood Abimelech's words to say the guilt of one man may cause others to come under punishment. In the context of Abimelech, his subjects, his kingdom, would suffer the consequences. We read the following from the Torah that provides us with some understanding of God's attitude towards His people.

Shemot / Exodus 20:4-6

20:4 'You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. 20:5 'You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, 20:6 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. (NASB)

Bamidbar / Numbers 14:17-19

14:17 'But now, I pray, let the power of the Lord be great, just as You have declared, 14:18 'The Lord is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, for-

giving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations. 14:19 'Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness, just as You also have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.' (NASB)

Devarim / Deuteronomy 7:8-10

7:8 but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the Lord brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. 7:9 'Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments; 7:10 but repays those who hate Him to their faces, to destroy them; He will not delay with him who hates Him, He will repay him to his face.

Jeremiah 32:18-19

32:18 who shows lovingkindness to thousands, but repays the iniquity of fathers into the bosom of their children after them, O great and mighty God. The Lord of hosts is His name; 32:19 great in counsel and mighty in deed, whose eyes are open to all the ways of the sons of men, giving to everyone according to his ways and according to the fruit of his deeds; (NASB)

The similarity in form of these Scriptures provides us with a fixed (solid, foundational) understanding of God's attitude towards His people. What we find here is the tension of the Hebraic mind-set with two aspects of the divine activity of God in our lives which represents the promise and the threat. The emphasis on either the promises or the threat of destruction is based upon the particular circumstances. It is difficult to sort out the reasons for corporate punishment. The

collective punishment on the one hand is used by God on occasion under special circumstances. On the other hand, there are Torah commands that we are not to make the sons responsible for their father's sin while other statements have the Lord God visiting the sins of their fathers to the third and fourth generation. The point is that children, even families are victims of the natural consequences of their father's guilt. The tension that we see in the Scriptures is for the purpose of always keeping us on our toes, to be aware of the consequences of our sins and not to disregard them as non-consequential. For example, Paul wrote of the attitude towards immorality in *1 Corinthians 5* "*It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is intolerable even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been stricken with grief and removed from your fellowship the man who did this?*" The tragedy today is that so-called progressive churches boast about their liberalism or of their LGBT lifestyles committing the same grievous sin and leading many astray from the truth where the community is accepting and approving of the behavior.

God is just, both in how he deals with us as a nation, as a people, as a family or even as a church, congregation, or synagogue. How he deals with communities due to the sin of the individual in its midst may be part of the way in which the Lord God Almighty deals with His people to draw them back in repentance to Himself. The message of the Tanach and the Apostolic Writings is clear, each of us is accountable before the Lord God for "*what we have done as recorded in the books.*" (*Revelation 20:12*). Understanding this principle helps us to further recognize that the sins of those around us and our own personal sins may have horrible consequences. The Lord God Almighty will deliver judgement in this life in the form of discipline for our sins, even to the second and the third generation. We should take this very seriously. We should be very thankful of what it says in *Bamidbar / Numbers 14:18*, "*The Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion.*" The Lord God allows a period of time for us to repent, to turn from our sinful ways, and to seek Him in His Word, and His Messiah Yeshua.

Let us not take God's grace in vain!

The Major point we can take away from this week's Torah study is from *1 John 1:9* "*If we confess our sin He is faithful and just to forgive our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" We are to live with a clear conscience by repenting and turning from our sins. The tension we see in the scriptures reminds us of the promise of God as opposed to the threat of sin. We are not to live in a deceptive way by considering the Lord God sees all and we are to be aware of the consequences of our sins remembering to live repentant lives in the Messiah Yeshua!