

## Reflection for *Toldot* “God Chooses”

Romans 9:6-16  
Hebrews 12:14-17

By the time one arrives at *Toldot* (Genesis 25:19-28:9) in your Torah reading, many of the idiosyncrasies of the family chosen to receive the blessings of revelation from the Creator, are evident. Certainly, after the third generation from Abraham, an indiscriminate pattern is emerging as God does not necessarily choose the children born first, of the two succeeding generations, to carry forward His plan. Rather than choosing Ishmael, the first born of Abraham by the handmaiden Hagar to be his principal heir, God instead places His blessings of the promise on Isaac, the son of the aged Sarah. Coincidentally, this pattern repeats itself in the next generation, as the younger Jacob supplants the elder Esau, by not only conniving to purchase Esau’s birthright, but by stealing the blessing given by his father Isaac.

Obviously, by being so blunt in these descriptions of family rivalry, the Holy Writ is not hiding that God is ultimately in complete charge of just whom He chooses to bless. Of course, the reason why He chooses one person over another has been the subject of countless debates down through the centuries. Nevertheless, the fact that He chooses one from each generation, could be especially disconcerting—especially if you, as a born again Believer today, have siblings who do not share your belief in the salvation provided by Messiah Yeshua.

*Why, you might ask, do I believe in the Lord, and my brother/sister does not? What have I done any differently to merit God’s favor? Do we not come from the same family? Do we not have the same ancestors? What, perchance, made me believe?*

On an individual level, understanding why God chooses to reveal Himself to one person, and not to another, simply does not make sense. We find in reading the Torah that belief is not necessarily on the basis of merit, because God revealed to Rebekah that the die was cast for Esau and Jacob before they were even born. Rebekah inquired of God as to why the children were struggling in her womb during pregnancy, and she got a definitive answer:

“Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD answered him and Rebekah his wife conceived. 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. 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’” (Genesis 25:21-23).

In his letter to the Romans, Paul used aspects of the concept of indiscriminate choosing, in describing the differences between children of the flesh versus children of the promise. He reminded his audience that God’s choice is not a matter of human works, citing what happened to Esau and Jacob while they were still in the womb:

“But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel; nor are they all children because they are Abraham’s descendants, but: ‘THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED’ [Genesis 21:12]. That is, it is not the

children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants. For this is the word of promise: 'AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON' [Genesis 18:10, 14]. And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived *twins* by one man, our father Isaac; for though *the twins* were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to *His* choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, 'THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER' [Genesis 25:23]. Just as it is written, 'JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED' [Malachi 1:2-3]. What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, 'I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION' [Exodus 9:16]. So then it *does* not *depend* on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy" (Romans 9:6-16).

Not only did Paul quote from Genesis 25:23 to verify his argument, but he complimented this by quoting from Malachi 1:2—which stirs great discussion and debate among interpreters because the Prophet Malachi spoke of the descendants of Jacob and Esau, and not the two as individuals. However, the most complete explanation about how or why the Lord chooses one (or some) and not the other (or others), comes from the extended discussion that Moses received from the Almighty as he prepared to receive the second set of Ten Commandments. Here, we find that God's mercy or compassion toward an individual or a people is by His sovereign will, not because of anything that sinful people deserve:

"Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses returned to the camp, his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent. Then Moses said to the LORD, 'See, You say to me, "Bring up this people!" But You Yourself have not let me know whom You will send with me. Moreover, You have said, "I have known you by name, and you have also found favor in My sight." Now therefore, I pray You, if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You, so that I may find favor in Your sight. Consider too, that this nation is Your people.' And He said, 'My presence shall go *with you*, and I will give you rest.' Then he said to Him, 'If Your presence does not go *with us*, do not lead us up from here. For how then can it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not by Your going with us, so that we, I and Your people, may be distinguished from all the *other* people who are upon the face of the earth?' The LORD said to Moses, 'I will also do this thing of which you have spoken; for you have found favor in My sight and I have known you by name.' Then Moses said, 'I pray You, show me Your glory!' And He said, 'I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; **and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.**' But He said, 'You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!' Then the LORD said, 'Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand *there* on the rock; and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen'" (Exodus 33:11-23).

One of Moses' distinctive characteristics, evidenced throughout the Torah, is that he was truly seeking after God. Moses prayed to God, sought God's favor, desired to know God's ways so that he would know Him better, and desired to find favor in God's sight. We even find that Moses wanted to see God's glory, and His very face. Because it would be

impossible for a mortal like him to see God's face and live, the consolation Moses received was being protected in a cleft of rock as God's "back" passes by. In the midst of this revealing passage, the Lord states that He will be gracious to whom He wills, and He will show compassion to whom He wills. It does seem, but is not absolutely stated, that God is moved by those who truly seek Him with all of their hearts, soul, might, and strength. It appears from this text (and various others) that *the seeker will find Him*. However, the mystery will forever remain, as to what generates the will to seek after God. Is it just innate to certain individuals, or is it something inspired by a prompting of the Holy Spirit?

Perhaps in Exodus 33:11-23 we see a glimpse of the difference between a committed person after God's heart, or even just a seeker of God—versus those who are hardened to the things of God. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, we see a reference to the incidents when Esau sold his birthright, and then later in life, lost the blessing of his father Isaac. The writer used these things to admonish his audience to live properly:

"Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; that *there be* no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a *single* meal. For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears" (Hebrews 12:14-17).

In this passage, the author exhorted his audience to "Strive for peace with everyone" (ESV). This means that Believers are not just *to be* at peace with all people, but that they are to make *an effort to create* peace with all people. Being at peace with all people comes as a result of striving for holiness. If holiness, peace, and the attendant unity among brothers and sisters is not attained, then one can instead develop what is termed a "root of bitterness"—something causes trouble to the point of becoming defiled. Esau was considered by the author of Hebrews to be a very immoral person, an example **not to follow**.

In his letter to Titus, Paul detailed what it means to be defiled:

"To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but by *their* deeds they deny *Him*, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed" (Titus 1:15-16).

Note that the defiled are not only unbelieving, but are inherently impure. The telling comment is that although they profess to "know God," they actually deny God by demonstrating detestable and disobedient activities, being immoral and godless. Perhaps despite their protests, and later tears of remorse for being haters of God—such sinners will receive exactly what they deserve in the end—because their desire was to satisfy their own flesh and never really seek or pursue the God of Creation.

Perhaps you know some people like this in your own family or among your acquaintances. If so, pray that whatever root of bitterness exists between these lost souls and God, **that it would be revealed and removed**. God is merciful and *does answer* the fervent prayers of His redeemed children! While Esau may not have been able to resolve his differences with God, and may be used as an example about how God chooses some rather than others—God nevertheless has given every human a free will, and the right to choose whom we will serve.

May He hear our prayers for the lost, using them to set the captives free! Might I suggest claiming the words of Isaiah, for those who perhaps are still trapped in the cavernous roots of bitterness and despair:

“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me **to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners;** to proclaim the favorable year of the LORD and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to grant those who mourn *in Zion*, giving them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.” (Isaiah 61:1-3).

## Reflection for *V'yeitzei* “Heaven’s Ladder”

John 1:43-51

In this week’s Torah reading, *V'yeitzei* (Genesis 28:10-32:3), the emphasis turns to Jacob. This spiritual forbearer of ours increasingly becomes known for his role in supplanting his brother Esau, as the blessed heir of Isaac. Our selection is preceded by Jacob having to flee for his life, after Esau is overheard making threats to kill Jacob, as our reading from last week, *Toldot* (Genesis 25:19-28:9), winded down:

“So Esau bore a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him; and Esau said to himself, ‘The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob.’ Now when the words of her elder son Esau were reported to Rebekah, she sent and called her younger son Jacob, and said to him, ‘Behold your brother Esau is consoling himself concerning you *by planning* to kill you. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice, and arise, flee to Haran, to my brother Laban!’” (Genesis 27:41-43).

Even though Jacob had various challenges to face in life—even some challenges of his own doing—it is apparent that He has received great favor from the Holy One. In the opening verses of *V'yeitzei*, we find this road-weary traveler at what will eventually become Bethel, as Jacob received a dream-vision which would propel him for the rest of his life. As you read some of the account of this dream, and what was communicated to Jacob by God, note how many of these promises are basically reiterations of what was previously communicated to Abraham and Isaac in their earlier encounters with Him:

“Then Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran. He came to a certain place and spent the night there, because the sun had set; and he took one of the stones of the place and put it under his head, and lay down in that place. He had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, ‘I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.’ Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, ‘Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it’” (Genesis 28:10-16).