

Toldot	Generations
Torah:	Genesis 25:19-28:9
Haftarah:	Malachi 1:1-2:7
Brit Chadashah:	Romans 9:1-13

This portion deals with four things: (1) the birth of the terrible twins. (2) Isaac in the land of the Philistines. (3) Esau selling his birthright and Jacob stealing his blessing (as the first born). (4) Jacob's departure for Paddan Aram. It also mentions Esau taking a third wife from among the daughters of Ismael, his uncle.

For the first twenty years of their marriage, Rebecca was sterile, so Isaac had to wait until he was sixty for the birth of his twin sons. It was not an easy pregnancy and Rebecca was warned that two nations were struggling in her womb, so the brothers would not grow up to be close friends.

From the beginning, we see that they had different characters. Esau is more of a macho, man's man who loved to hunt and spend time in the fields. Jacob was quieter and dwelt in tents. This meant that he was a shepherd and perhaps even a farmer, like his father. Just before the family goes to land of the Philistine during a drought, Esau returned from an unsuccessful hunt and was incredibly hungry.

He asked his twin for some lentil soup and Jacob said he could have some, if he sold his birth right. Esau reveals his lack of character by surrendering the right of the first born for a bowl of soup. He actually swears an oath, but from events which followed, it is unlikely that he told his father and if push came to shove, it would have been a he said, she said scenario, because there were no witnesses to the transaction. That did not mean that it was not a valid transaction, just that Esau would find it easier to cheat. And from the context which follows, this is precisely what Esau tried to do. He called his younger twin a thief, but he was the thief.

Just before Isaac leaves for the land of the Philistines, he receives his first recorded personal confirmation of the Abrahamic Covenant. It was given in its three aspects: I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens and they shall possess all of these lands (extended Canaan). And all nations shall be blessed in your posterity, because Abraham obeyed the voice of the voice of YHVH. If any of his descendants ceased to obey the voice of YHVH, by association, the blessing would stop until they repented and returned to obedience.

While he is there, he is afraid that the inhabitants will kill him to get at his wife – because even though she is now a senior citizen, she is still extremely beautiful. Like his father before him, he lied and told the people that she was his sister. Before anything could happen, Abimelech observes Isaac fooling around with his wife. He is horrified because if one of his people had taken her as his wife, they would have become guilty and incurred the wrath of G-d.

This time, the women are not prevented from conceiving, but as a precaution the king both issues an order that no one is to touch Rebecca and for a guilt offering, he offers Isaac extensive gifts and he becomes incredibly wealthy. Not just in livestock, but his crops produce a hundredfold. The Philistines are envious of him and more than a little afraid of him. He is not someone you want to mess with, so they ask him to leave their territory.

But each time he moves, they ask him to move farther until his camp is completely out of Philistine territory. He is finally left alone and there are no more attempts to seize the wells his servants have dug. From his camp on the border of the Philistines, he then moves back into familiar territory and he receives a second confirmation of the Abrahamic covenant.

He redigs the well his father had dug, builds an altar and begins to call upon the name of YHVH. Abimelech comes to his new camp and they make a covenant of peace between the two peoples. The new (redug) well is then called Beer-scheba (well of the oath).

There is another time gap, and when Esau turns forty, he takes two Hittite wives. His father is now 100 years old and his wives became a source of bitterness to Isaac and to Rebecca. This is not because Esau is practising polygamy, but likely because these women introduced pagan customs into the camp. Neither son had left yet to set up their own camp and from the context, it was while Jacob was in Paddan Aram that Esau took a third wife and set up his own camp.

What follows next is a double deception. Rebecca obviously knows of the sale of Esau's birth right, but Isaac is obviously not aware. Rather than correcting his deception and coming clean to his father, Esau goes out to hunt so that he can receive the blessing of the first born. This does not really belong to him any more. Isaac's vision is very bad and his overall health is likely failing.

When Rebecca overhears Isaac's request for a meal, so that he can bless his first born, she disguises Jacob with Esau's clothing and with some lamb skin, because Esau was so hairy. She prepares a meal of young goats, because goat meat taste like wild meat and Jacob serves it to his father. He did not disguise his voice, but Isaac was put at ease because of how his son felt and how he smelt.

After he has eaten, Isaac recites a tenfold blessing on Jacob which ends with part of the original Abrahamic blessing – I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. Jacob barely makes his exit, when Esau comes in with a meal he has prepared for his father (or which his wives have prepared).

Esau makes a whiny admission of the sale of his birth right and asks his father to bless him as well. He receives a diminished fivefold blessing and plots to murder his brother after the death of their father. When Rebecca hears of it, she does not want to be deprived of both of her sons in a single day – Esau would have been executed for murder if he killed his twin. Instead she complains about Esau's wives to her husband and asks him to send Jacob to Paddan Aram in order to get a wife.

Sara had Isaac all to herself for 37 years and Rebecca has had both of her sons to herself for forty years. The parents each have a favourite, but Isaac bows to the inevitable and sends Jacob to the house of Rebecca's brother (her father is living with her brother).

Isaac summons his younger son and places the Abrahamic blessing on him, even though he has already effectively received it. When Esau hears of this initiative, he tries to fix his bad marriages by getting a third wife from the camp of Ismael. This is an indication that there was some contact between two of Abraham's sons, even after they got together to bury their father, when Isaac was 75 and Ishmael was 88. The twins were fifteen years old.

Sermon: First Winter Series: The Hidden Mystery of the Grace of G-d.

Our passage for today is Ephesians 3:1-13. Throughout his epistle, Paul is trying to build a bridge between the wonder of the Torah and the splendour of the Gospel. Both Testaments tell the same basic story and speak of the same wonderful G-d; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Over the centuries between when Paul wrote these words and our modern world, there have been many unfortunate misunderstandings about the relationship of Judaism to the Gospel.

For us, perhaps the biggest and most damaging is the role of Judaism and Jews in the Gospel. The New Testament never says that Jews are saved out of Judaism and it never teaches Gentiles that they have to become Jews in order to receive everlasting life. Both Judaism and Gentile Christianity have wandered far from the actual teachings of the Scriptures and part of the ministry of our shul is to help set people free from the lies and legends which have grown up around the Gospel, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

Our portion talks about the great hidden mystery and it was one that stunned the Jewish world of the New Testament. In the first century and before the destruction of the second temple, Judaism was the fastest growing religion in the ancient world and was a generation away from becoming the official religion of the Roman world.

When Rome first brought real peace to the ancient world, three things began to happen at the same time. First, members of any number of religions began to travel the empire in search of new converts. At the same time, older, more established religions began to lose members in their thousands to the more aggressive newer religions. As well, religions began to develop that adopted features of various religions and these "clones" became quite popular.

While this was going on, all of this activity generated the potential for a lot of civil strife, both between the groups themselves and with the authorities of the Roman government. In order not to lose control over what was happening in religions all over the empire, the Romans established a law that any religion which wanted to function in Roman held territory, had to worship the emperor as one of their gods. There were already temples to several emperors of the past and to people who worshipped more than one god, what was one more, if it meant that the government did not hassle them?

While this was going on, Jews were making incredible headway into all levels of Roman society, and even had converts in Caesar's palace and among his soldiers. They would not have been able to practice openly because they would not have been willing to worship the emperor as a god. A solution had to be found, but in most cases, various groups just claimed that their particular collection of gods was superior to everyone else's. If Jews developed too high a public profile, they suffered persecution.

Then something happened that improved the way Jews were treated. By the time of King Herod's death, Jews already made up about ten percent of the population of the empire. But Jews in the Holy Land were not full Roman Citizens and functioned as members of a client kingdom, which was closely allied to Rome, without being under its direct supervision. At this time, the Holy Land was one of the richest and most prosperous regions of the ancient world.

Herod divided up his kingdom between his sons and Judea fell under the control of Archelaus, who was a cruel, corrupt leader who was very unpopular with the people.

The Sanhedrin petitioned the Romans to turn Judea into a Roman province, but first they had to solve the problem of being required to worship the emperor. They came up with a creative and a dangerous compromise. They swore an oath to make the emperor their sovereign overlord and they promised never to rebel. They also promised to pray for the emperor every day and these conditions were accepted by the Roman authorities.

This new status helped Judaism to grow at an even faster rate. About the same time, Messianic Judaism was developing as a distinct kind of Judaism which acknowledged Yeshua of Nazareth as the Messiah. A problem arose when thousands of Gentiles came to faith, without becoming Jews.

Elements within Messianic Judaism wanted to require Gentiles to become full Jews as part of what it meant to come to faith. Judaism was the most dominant religion in the Roman world, and it would do Gentiles no harm to join with other Gentiles who were converting to Judaism in their thousands. But the blessing of Father Abraham was both to become a great nation and also to be a blessing to all nations, without absorbing these nations into Israel.

Most Messianic synagogues had a growing Gentile minority and the council of Jerusalem appeared to settle the issue once and for all. Gentiles who came to faith, had to avoid the two besetting sins of Israel: fornication and idolatry, as they based their lives on the Scriptures and accepted the growing authority of the apostles.

They considered themselves Torah observant Gentiles, because righteous Gentiles had always sojourned in Israel, without converting to Judaism. They had to observe the same laws as their Jewish neighbours and groups of Messianic Gentiles began to sprout up all over the ancient world.

This development was initially quite confusing to Messianic Jews because they understood that Judaism was the only way back to G-d. The reality that Gentiles could remain Gentiles and become full fellow citizens of Israel with their Jewish brethren, was a hard reality to accept. There was never any question of allowing any pagan practices to take root in Messianic communities and for all intents and purposes, Messianic Jews and their Gentile converts were considered to be legally Jews by the Roman authorities.

So you had two groups of Jews reaching out to their Gentile Neighbours: Messianic Judaism and traditional Judaism. It is also worth noting that for many centuries after the destruction of the second temple, there was not much consensus among Jews as to which version of traditional Judaism was correct. Messianic Gentiles would have been considered equivalent to Messianic Jews, at least in the eyes of the Roman authorities.

Several decades into the first century, a great disaster befell Judaism when they were goaded into breaking their solemn covenant oath and they rebelled against Rome. Over a three year period, millions of Jews were slaughtered as they fought back bravely. Before Jerusalem fell, they even succeeded in destroying two Roman armies, something which to that point, had never happened before. If Rome did not succeed in subduing Judea, the entire eastern part of their empire may have risen up against them.

The Jewish population of the empire was decimated and after the second rebellion, it is doubtful that even a million Jews survived.

Judaism was declared illegal and those who practised it had to pay hefty fines and they were carefully scrutinized for any signs of resistance to Roman authority. It was no longer an advantage to be a Jew and when the Romans were also going to outlaw Messianic Gentiles, they performed an act of great spiritual cowardice and turned on their Jewish brothers and sisters.

They violated sabbath worship and switched to Sunday and wrongly declared the Gentile church to be the true people of G-d. Messianic Jews were then given a choice, by their Gentile counterparts. They could either stop being Jews or be excluded from Messianic congregations. Many may have complied because it must have seemed that Judaism was doomed.

However, about 300 Messianic Synagogues across the eastern Mediterranean refused to comply and remained full Jews – that is Sabbath keeping, festival observing, kosher eating students of the Torah who circumcised their sons and who also followed the basic teaching of the apostles before it became infected with all the nonsense which now prowls around most Gentile churches.

These Jewish heroes were called dirty names and falsely accused of being secret judaizers who wanted to impose full Judaism on all believers in the Messiah from Nazareth as a prerequisite to salvation. All formal contact was broken between the two groups and any Jews who wanted to have anything more to do with Judaism, faced being declared apostates who were excommunicated by the Gentile church.

This situation persisted until the 7th century, when the Sassanid Persians overran the Eastern Roman Empire and their armies stood at the gates of Constantinople. Throughout the East, Jews of all stripes rose up and declared the Persians their liberators and actually joined the ranks of their soldiers.

Sadly, the Persians were defeated in a major battle and chased back out of the empire by the victorious Eastern Roman armies. In vengeance for their part in supporting the Persians, the Romans destroyed every Messianic synagogue in the empire and slaughtered all the Jews they came across.

It has always been the stated purpose of YHVH that the Gospel exist with two groups: the great nation and those among all the nations who are being blessed by it. Jews are not Christ killers who are cursed of G-d. Yeshua came to die and His death and resurrection is the whole point of His earthly ministry.

It was not until the time of Napoleon that restrictions against Jews began to be lifted and we were allowed to become full citizens of the countries where we lived. The ghettos emptied and we were once again allowed to live among our Gentile brethren and to practice any profession we qualified for.

While this was going on, the Devil's hatred for Judaism never diminished and new lies developed, claiming that Jews were secretly running the economies of the world and wanted to destroy Christianity. This new, modern form of antisemitism even became socially acceptable and Jews faced all kinds of limitations and hostilities for the crime of being Jewish. This culminated in the horror of the Holocaust and it has sadly not really gone away.

I personally know of too many well meaning Gentile Christians who still feel hostility towards Messianic Judaism and wrongly teach that we are preaching a Gospel of salvation by good works. The marvellous Torah is even often considered a curse and synagogues are considered to be places where evil lurks.

This is not what the Bible teaches. Instead, a Messianic Jewish rabbi by the name of Paul revealed a great mystery that had been hidden for so long. Gentiles could still remain Gentiles and be full citizens of the commonwealth and promises of Israel. The Gospel is the power of G-d for salvation to whomever believes, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

In fact, we could say that there are two, complimentary equally valid spiritual genders. As Messianic Jews, we are the older brothers and Messianic Gentiles are the younger brothers. No single part of biblical Judaism was abolished. The rituals and sacrifices have been fulfilled, but the Torah remains the Word of G-d and the Ten Commandments are still in effect.

Biblical kosher is not a form of dietary legalism. We still have the right and the privilege of circumcising our sons and the annual festival cycle has not been demolished or even diminished. The only day of the L-rd is the Sabbath and Jews and Gentiles stand together as equals around the L-rd's Table and in the waters of baptism (immersion).

Messianic Gentiles are full citizens who participate in the same promises as Messianic Jews and all the Jewish prophets of the Bible speak equally to Jews and Gentiles. And even though all of the apostles were Jewish, their words and their teachings also apply equally to both Jewish and Gentile believers. This may be a hard concept to get your head around and many misunderstandings still exist.

There are Messianic Jews who are trying to turn all Gentile believers into Jews. We are not among them. Gentiles in our midst who wish to become Jewish are as welcome in our midst as any Gentile converts in traditional Judaism. We are fully Jewish. We are completely Jewish and we stand fully and firmly on the mighty Word of G-d as both Jews and Gentiles.

Sadly, there are also Gentile believers who are trying to stop Jews from practising the faith of our fathers. Judaism does not preach legalism and salvation by works, though I am aware of several churches who wrongly hold this position. We are saved by grace alone for the practise of good works. Our faith is the lungs, our good works are the breath. In the Bible, they are never in competition with one another.

The mystery of full Gentile participation in the promises of Israel is still a mystery, but it is the clear teaching of the Scriptures from Genesis to the Revelation. And no matter what sufferings and tribulations we have to endure by firmly holding on to the truths of G-d's Word, it is always worth it to stand on this unshakable rock.

Hatred of the Jews is diabolical. Hatred of the Gentiles is also diabolical. As a matter of fact, hatred of anyone is diabolical. We should hate lies and false ideologies like Nazism, and other forms of fascism, but we should pity their adherents and pray for them to come to the great mystery and discover the amazing Grace of G-d and the unstoppable power of the Gospel, which is found fully in both the Torah and in the New Testament. If you do not see this, you are really blind and can never really understand the will of G-d, either for this world or for your own life. Shabbat Shalom and Shavua Tov.