

Though we are not meeting this Wednesday evening (November 3<sup>rd</sup>), I thought I would send you a note to help you to think about Rabbi Sack's Essay for Parashat Toldot which he entitles: "Why Isaac? Why Jacob?"

Parashat Toldot is full of intrigue. You probably remember much of the story. I will summarize it below, but I recommend that you read it yourself. It is, at once, epic, tense, funny, scary, and sad. The family is among the most dysfunctional in the whole of the Torah.

After their wedding (last week), Rebecca is unable to have a child and Isaac prays on her behalf. She gets pregnant and feels such struggling inside her that she called out to God. God told her that she was pregnant with twins and that the elder would serve the younger. When she gave birth, the first son, Esav, was hairy. The second son, Jacob, was born holding on to Esav's heel.

Esau grew to become a hunter and, apparently, a brute of a man. Jacob was quiet and dwelled in tents (Not much of a description I will admit). For some reason, the parents admitted to playing favorites. Isaac loved Esav, while Rebecca loved Jacob.

One day, Esav returned home from hunting and was hungry. As luck would have it, Jacob was preparing a lentil stew. (Jacob was known all over Canaan for his culinary prowess) Esav asked for some of the food and Jacob said that he would give it to Esav in exchange for Esav's birthright. Not a great negotiator, Esav agrees to sell his birthright for a bowl of stew. (In history, the next time such a lopsided deal would occur was when Peter Minuet purchased Manhattan for \$24.00 worth of beads and trinkets).

There was, yet, another famine in the land and Isaac sought refuge with Abimelech, the king of the Philistines. Isaac pulled a trick out of his father's playbook and told the Abimelech that Rebecca was his sister.

Sometime later, Isaac apparently looked in a mirror and saw an old man staring back. He decided, then and there, that he needed to bless his oldest son, Esav, as quickly as possible. He called Esav and told him to go hunt for some meat and to prepare a meal so that Isaac could enjoy it and then bless Esav.

Rebecca, wanting Jacob to receive the blessing, sprung into action. She instructed Jacob to immediately get her a lamb for her to cook in order to bring it to Isaac

before Esav's return from his hunt. She further instructed Jacob to impersonate Esav in order to (dupliciously) receive Isaac's blessing that was intended for Esav.

The plan works. When Esav learns that Jacob stole his blessing he threatens to kill Jacob. Rebecca then arranges for Jacob to "get out of Dodge". Jacob is sent to live with Rebecca's brother, Lavan.

There is much for Rabbi Sacks to talk about here. He chooses to focus on why God wanted Jacob to be the heir through which the Jewish people would ultimately grow. (He writes about the choice of Isaac and Jacob, but I will leave my brief remarks about Jacob.)

Rabbi Sacks posits that for the rest of the world, Esav, as a prodigious hunter and warrior, would have been the first choice. He ultimately makes, in my estimation, a bit of a stretch. While Esav could survive because of his human strength and skill, Jacob needed God's spirit in order to succeed. Apparently the argument is that, while the human traits of strength and skill are good for survival, this is not God's prime focus for God's chosen leader(s). God, instead, wants thoughtful and spiritual leaders who will see to it that the less fortunate are cared for.

While physical attributes are important, Rabbi Sacks argues that God is more interested in the spiritual part of humanity. God's goal for the Jews (and ultimately for all of humanity) is not that we raise vast armies and conquer. Rather God seeks them to rise above nature and to care for the world around them.

That is my take. How do you interpret his Life Changing Idea for Parashat Toldot?

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