

our parents, and training our children up in the ways of the Lord so that they respect our departure. Or, by choosing to do nothing when it comes to honoring our parents or training our children, we can expect the results of our neglect to be accompanied by tragic consequences by ourselves or by our descendants.

When the end comes is not a choice, but how it comes is a choice. **Choose now and expect a triumph like Abraham rather than tragedy like David.**

## ***Haftarah Toldot*** **“Twin Decisions”**

Malachi 1:1-2:7

Each time *Toldot* (Genesis 25:19-28:9) is reviewed, we are once again reminded of God’s sovereign choices for who will serve Him and who will not. In previous weeks the preferential distinctions between Ishmael and Isaac are far more obvious than other distinctions that will be seen. After all, Ishmael was Abraham’s firstborn son of the handmaiden Hagar as a result of impatience on the part of Sarah and Abraham. For well over a decade, Ishmael captured the adoring love of the aging Abraham, until God specifically declared to Abraham that his union with Sarah would produce offspring which would inherit the blessings earlier promised to him:

“Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, ‘Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?’ And Abraham said to God, ‘Oh that Ishmael might live before You!’ **But God said, ‘No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.** As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him, and will make him fruitful and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. **But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year.**’ When He finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham” (Genesis 17:17-22).

After absorbing the reality and peculiarity of God’s choice for receiving His blessing, the offspring of Isaac and Rebekah were considered. However, rather than the obvious difference of two different mothers, the twins Esau and Jacob were born to the one couple which had received the promise after another extended wait for a viable pregnancy. Following nearly twenty years of barrenness, Rebekah was not only pregnant with twins, but during her pregnancy, she also received a declaration from the Lord which essentially foretold the future for not only the next generation—but perhaps for certain segments of humanity down through the ages:

“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.’ When her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb” (Genesis 25:23-24).

In the Torah’s descriptions of how Esau and Jacob conducted their respective lives, we are given an overview about how two different people, no matter how close they might be genetically or culturally, approach the Creator God. The contrast can be reduced to one who

follows after the dictates of the flesh, and another who pursues life from a spiritual perspective. Much of the balance of the Scriptures describe different aspects of this constant struggle between the flesh and the Spirit, as it manifests itself throughout the history of God's chosen people and the other nations of the world.

By the time one considers the words of the Prophet Malachi, delivered about four centuries before the ministry of Yeshua, many of his statements simply summarize the problems inherent in a group of imperfect people who attempt to worship the Almighty. Malachi points out some of the very hypocrisies that one might observe today in the modern era.

**As you reflect on some of Malachi's terse statements, try looking into your own heart and ascertain whether you are approaching God as a result of your fleshly wants and desires, or whether you are being led by the Spirit of the Most High.** Remember that just as God omnisciently chose Isaac and Jacob to be the recipients of His blessings, His infinite wisdom and knowledge pierce right through to the motivations of our hearts. He knows whether it is our flesh seeking His blessings, or whether it is our heartfelt love for Him which brings us into obedience to Him. Imagine what happens in your own heart when your offerings to Him are sincerely given to Him to gain His pleasure, or whether they are just mechanical so that He can be appeased. Is He not greater than a parent or master?

“‘A son honors *his* father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?’ says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests who despise My name. But you say, ‘How have we despised Your name?’ You are presenting defiled food upon My altar. But you say, ‘How have we defiled You?’ In that you say, ‘The table of the LORD is to be despised.’ **But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame and sick, is it not evil?** Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Or would he receive you kindly?’ says the LORD of hosts. ‘But now will you not entreat God's favor, that He may be gracious to us? With such an offering on your part, will He receive any of you kindly?’ says the LORD of hosts” (Malachi 1:6-9).

Here, we see that God was not pleased with just token obedience and the appearance of compliance to His ways. Listen to how Malachi describes His desire for just one who would stand up for truth, and stop the charade of presenting offerings that are an abomination:

**“Oh that there were one among you who would shut the gates,** that you might not uselessly kindle *fire on* My altar! I am not pleased with you,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘nor will I accept an offering from you. For from the rising of the sun even to its setting, My name *will be* great among the nations, and in every place incense is going to be offered to My name, and a grain offering *that is* pure; for My name *will be* great among the nations,’ says the LORD of hosts. **But you are profaning it, in that you say, “The table of the Lord is defiled, and as for its fruit, its food is to be despised”**” (Malachi 1:10-12).

This pleading should naturally remind us of faithful figures like Phinehas, Elijah, or John the Immerser who in their respective generations had an unquenched zeal for God—a zeal which resulted in feats and declarations that pointed their peers to righteousness. On the other hand, Malachi points out that even in the nations there will be those who have sincere heartfelt praise for God, perhaps even without knowledge of the specifics described in His Word (cf. Romans 2:14-15). God will receive His praise even if those chosen to bring it to the nations succumb to fleshly actions that ultimately result in curses upon them and their progeny:

“But cursed be the swindler who has a male in his flock and vows it, but sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord, for I am a great King,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘and My name is feared among the nations’” (Malachi 1:14).

Thankfully, the Prophet Malachi declares that God does have a faithful remnant, here described as the priestly Levites, who will faithfully continue to preserve knowledge and teach those who are seeking instruction:

“Then you will know that I have sent this commandment to you, that My covenant may continue with Levi,’ says the LORD of hosts. ‘My covenant with him was *one of* life and peace, and I gave them to him *as an object of* reverence; so he revered Me and stood in awe of My name. True instruction was in his mouth and unrighteousness was not found on his lips; he walked with Me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many back from iniquity. For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts’” (Malachi 2:4-7).

As you consider the lives of Esau and Jacob, concurrent with the perspective of Malachi who analyzed the realities of his day, **perhaps some self reflection would be appropriate.** Esau despised his birthright. He was not concerned about the blessing of his father Isaac until it was too late.

What about your birthright as a child of the Creator God? What about the blessings He has promised for a thousand generations to those who love Him (Exodus 20:6; 34:7; Deuteronomy 5:10)? Are you thankful for those inherited blessings?

Have you thought about your approach to the Holy One and His ways lately? Are you seeking Him and His Instruction out of fleshly motives, or do you really love Him so much because of what He has done for you—that you are pursuing Him with a passion to be like Him in all of His ways (Ephesians 5:1)? **Search your heart and be absolutely honest with yourself.**

If you find yourself in some sort of religious rut or routine for the sake of appearance, or because it has become comfortable—then wake up, shake off the dust, *and beg* the Lord to have mercy on you as He changes your heart (Isaiah 52)! Consider the destiny of Esau and his progeny (cf. Hebrews 12:16), versus those who cling to the God of Jacob. Who do you choose to serve: your flesh or the Spirit of the Most High?

We each have the capacity to choose one *or* the other as the twins have displayed. The decision is yours. As always: *choose wisely!*

## ***Haftarah V'yeitzei*** **“Return, Restoration, Resurrection”**

Hosea 12:12-14:10 (A); 11:7-12:12 (S)

The story of Jacob leaving Beersheba and heading to Haran to find a wife, after he and his mother Rebekah had conspired to steal the blessing of Isaac from Esau, continues a pattern in Scripture of sibling rivalry that goes all the way back to Cain and Abel. In that previous case, Cain's anger toward his brother erupted in murder. Many generations later, the half-brothers, Ishmael and Isaac had similar rivalry issues, but their wise father Abraham handled their problems with great aplomb. When Abraham's time to die arrived, whatever differences