

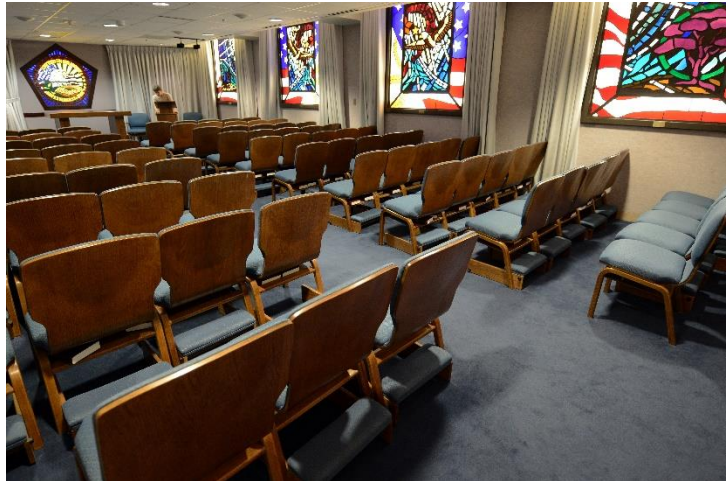
THE REAL DEAL

A Devotional Meditation on Toldot (Generations)

Genesis 25:19-28:9; Malachi 1:1-2:7; 2 Samuel 11:1-27; Jeremiah 9:23-26;
Matthew 23:1-7, 23; John 8:39; Romans 9:10-13; 1 Corinthians 1:30-31

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The Pentagon Chapel became an important part of my life during my years on the Army Staff. It was the site of weekly prayer meetings, and a favorite stop on tours I gave to friends and family. On one occasion, my guests were two men who had served the Lord as pastors and teachers in many places around the world. At the chapel, they asked me to pray over them. I don't remember what I prayed, although I'm sure I asked that God continue to bless their ministries and make them more effective servants of His Kingdom. When the prayer was finished, one of the men looked up at me with tear-filled eyes and said, "Al, you're the real deal."



Pentagon Memorial Chapel, September 2013 (Photo: US Army).

His compliment surprised me. I had prayed from my heart what I understood the Holy Spirit to be saying, but something had caused him to consider me a man of honor and integrity. That is the kind of man I try to be with everyone. Perhaps my efforts to be honest and upright stood out because he had rarely encountered honest and upright people, even in ministry circles.

I imagine my friend had met pretenders among religious leaders and congregants. I have met such people, and have suffered hurt from some of them. They are not the real deal because the faith they profess is one of convenience or habit, not a faith born of genuine transformation. Whether they are in it for wealth and power, or to fit in with or stand out from the crowd, there is something missing in their relationship with the Almighty.

I've kept this story to myself because I don't want to boast. God gets the credit for any qualities of righteousness He has developed in me, but His work is not yet finished. That's why I take Paul's counsel seriously:

But because of Him [God] you are in Messiah *Yeshua*, who became to us wisdom from God and righteousness and holiness and redemption—so that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in *ADONAI*."

1 Corinthians 1:30-31 TLV

Paul took this advice from something God explained to Jeremiah:

Thus says *ADONAI*: “Let not the wise boast in his wisdom nor the mighty boast in his might nor the rich glory in his riches. But let one who boasts boast in this: that he understands and knows Me. For I am *ADONAI* who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth. For in these things I delight.”

Jeremiah 9:22-23 (23-24) TLV

Those who identify as God’s people should want to do the things that delight Him. Why, then, do we so often do the opposite? That’s why Yeshua reprimanded the spiritual leaders of His day, saying,

Woe to you, *Torah* scholars and Pharisees, hypocrites! You tithe mint and dill and cumin, yet you have neglected the weightier matters of *Torah*—justice and mercy and faithfulness. It is necessary to do these things without neglecting the others.

Matthew 23:23 TLV

This is why Yeshua cautioned the people to do what the religious leaders taught from the scriptures, but not do what they did because they were not the real deal. They taught one thing, but did another, just as hypocrites have done in every age.

Realizing this has helped me understand the many failings of our spiritual ancestors. Quite often, they teach us how to live righteous, godly lives by showing us what not to do. It’s easy to grasp those lessons when they do obviously wrong things, such as when Isaac lied to the Philistines about Rebekah, saying she was his sister, not his wife. I understand why Isaac feared for his life, anticipating that some Philistine would be attracted to Rebekah, and might kill him if he knew she was his wife.

We blame Isaac and Rebekah for lack of faith. They demonstrated a greater trust in deception and manipulation than in Almighty God. How many times, though, have we made the same mistake? That’s the point of the story: it’s supposed to make us question ourselves and seek correction, so our lives better reflect God’s definitions of righteousness, justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

It’s more difficult to understand the lessons when we see our ancestors pursuing righteous ends by unrighteous means. That’s why the story of Jacob and Esau makes me uncomfortable. It’s difficult enough to relate to what the Bible says about God loving Jacob and hating Esau even before the twins were born. The best way I can deal with that is by understanding our Creator is the only one Who sees the hearts of human beings, and Who knows the end from the beginning. Somehow, He knew Esau would be the bad seed of Isaac’s family, and therefore He designated Jacob as the rightful heir to the birthright of the covenant He had established with Abraham.

But what do we do with the way Jacob acquired the birthright, by persuading Esau to sell it to him for a bowl of stew? Jewish teaching says that the boys were 15 at the time, and the stew Jacob prepared was for the ritual meal of mourning at the death of their Grandfather Abraham. It’s unlikely the transaction happened without anyone’s notice, so why didn’t Isaac and Rebekah do something, either to nullify the deal, or to confirm it? Why did something done by a hungry and shortsighted adolescent determine the course of his life? When the time came for Isaac to pass on the birthright blessing, why did Rebekah and Jacob deceive both him and Esau to ensure that the birthright came to Jacob? For that matter, was Isaac that gullible to believe Jacob was really Esau, or was

he playing along with the scheme in a passive-aggressive effort to name Jacob as his heir without confronting Esau? None of that seems very righteous or just.

As the story goes on, we see Esau in a lifestyle of willful disobedience and disregard for the holy things of God. By the time Rebekah and Jacob went through the deceptive theater with Isaac, the twins were old enough to be grandfathers, and Esau had married into the wicked Canaanite culture instead of taking a wife from within the family, as Isaac had done, and Jacob would do. Jacob was clearly more worthy than Esau to receive the birthright, but why would God allow His people to pursue the right thing by unjust means? Maybe because the stakes were that high for the future of humanity, or maybe to help us understand how God will have His way even though He is working through corrupted vessels.

We don't like this story because we see that same corruption in ourselves. However carefully we try to do the right thing, we still make mistakes, and sometimes those mistakes are grievous to ourselves and others. That's the sad reality of human beings who have both wheat and tares growing in our hearts. Sometimes we can't tell which is which until much later, just as with Jacob and Esau. Esau held on to his anger and never changed, but Jacob tried to make things right with his brother, demonstrating by his actions that he had become a righteous man.

It comes down to what kind of relationship we have with our Creator. Abraham opened himself to a transforming relationship with the Almighty, and taught his children to do the same. That's how Abraham's family has become a blessing to all the families of the earth, even though he and his descendants made many mistakes. The course of his life demonstrated that he was the real deal, just as we will be when, like Jacob, we learn to do the works of Abraham.