

Igbo Torah Thoughts

Parashah #6 Toldot "History"

Gen. 25:19-28:9, I Sam. 20:18-42

Rabbi Yehudah "Tochukwu" ben Shomeyr

And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents. – Gen. 25:27

Recall in the Torah when Jacob fled from Esau's wrath. Where did he go? To his mother's relatives house, his uncle Laban. In Igboland a child has a right if he feels ill-treated by his father's family, to go and live with his mother's kin, where he is welcomed and enjoys a type of sanctuary where he/she is immune from ill-treatment of molestation.

Igbo's can adopt non-blood relatives into their family such as from the Nri and Aros clan who are the priests among the Igbo and are thought to be descendants of Levi the priests of Israel.

Levites had no allotment in the Promised Land and likewise these Nri priests are permitted to settle anywhere due to their priestly position. For priests are needed in all corners of Igboland to oversee purification rituals and supervise other priestly duties. This reminds me of the man in the book of judges that "adopted" if you will, a Levite into his family to be his personal family priest (Judges 17:17-13).

As far as living conditions are concerned a man and his wives, each have their own obi (house) within the family compound or camp, and the child lives with the mother until they are of age to build their own obi. We see this family dynamic in Gen. 25, 27 regarding Isaac, Rebecca and their son Jacob and Esau.

And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents. – Gen. 25:27

Notice “tents” plural, implying many tents in one compound; a tent for the man and his wife.

And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint: And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom. And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright. – Gen. 25:29-34

This tells the reader that at this time Jacob and Esau still lived with their mother Rebecca in her tent.

And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called Esau his eldest son, and said unto him, My son: and he said unto him, Behold, here am I. – Gen. 27:1

Here Isaac calls Esau to his personal tent where he live separate from his wife and children.

And Rebekah heard when Isaac spake to Esau his son. And Esau went to the field to hunt for venison, and to bring it. – Gen. 27:5

The implication here is that Rebecca was outside Isaac's tent, eavesdropping.

And Rebekah took goodly raiment of her eldest son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them upon Jacob her younger son – Gen. 27:15

By this time Esau was married (26:34-35) and on his own and Rebecca still had clothes from Esau when he still lived with her.

Deut. 1:9-13, Lev. 19:32

The elder is given a revered place of leadership and recognition in the Igbo family and society. The young, especially those who are young and in a public leadership role often consult the elder for guidance and advice.

I have personally witnessed myself this respect for elders and so have other Westerners.

Anglican Missionary to the Igbos G.T. Basden said in his book "Niger Ibos" that, "Among the Igbos reverence for old age was a very marked feature. Education and contact with civilization have weakened this ancient and honorable custom, which is much to be regretted."

The elder is given almost a priestly type of role which is how it was in Israel prior to the establishment of the Levitical Priesthood and how it was in the time of the Judges, which is the precise time many believe a new wave of Gadiites and Israelites came to Nigeria. The elder's obi (house) is considered almost as a shrine, and a meeting place for the family. It should also be mentioned that the obi (tent or home) is seen as a sacred place and in Judaism the home is seen as more important than even the synagogue. That faith is practiced first at home and then at the synagogue and we find this same sentiment among the Igbo.

In Exodus 20:12, 21:15, 17 and Deut. 5:16 we read that it is forbidden upon pains of death to hit or strike a parent. As in Israel, so in Igboland, parents are seen as an extension of God's rule and influence and to physically hit a parent is an abominable thing. It is like unto the sin of cursing or blaspheming God.

As in Israel, so in Igboland.

Then Jonathan said to David, Tomorrow is the new moon: and thou shalt be missed, because thy seat will be empty. – I Sam. 20:18-42

Num. 10:10, 28:11, I Sam. 20:5, II Kings 4:22-23, Psalm 81:3, Ezek. 46:1, Isa. 66:23, Col. 2:16

Igbos has kept a Lunar Calendar much like that of Israel with set days for feasts and celebrations which mirror one another as the reader will soon see. However, due to the Influence of the Christian West observing the Lunar Calendar is not practiced as it once was.

Exd. 12:1, 16:1, 19:1

Along with the New moon is the sanctification of the new month as well. Just as pre-Babylonian Jews had no names for the months, so too Igbos count and not name their months. This testifies to the fact that a wave of Israelites came to Nigeria prior to the Babylonian and Assyrian captivities.

As in Israel, so in Igboland.

And Saul cast a javelin at him to smite him: whereby Jonathan knew that it was determined of his father to slay David. – I Sam. 20:18

The Javelin (Throwing Spear) was also, as with the short sword a weapon Igbos and Israelites share.

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. – Col. 2:8

This verse encourages us of Hebraic origins of those of us who choose to walk the path of Torah in Messiah Yeshua to not forsake the command and heritage of recognizing and celebrating the New Moon.

SHABBAT SHALOM! IGBO KWENU!

Rabbi Yehudah “Tochukwu” ben Shomeyr