

The Founding of the Rome, Esav's Legacy

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Rome, the present-day capitol of Italy, has a long history dating back over two and a half millennia as an imperial city. Having once been the capitol of the mighty Roman Empire, legends abound in many cultures of its founding. Ancient poets, among them Tabillus and Ovid, referred to Rome as the 'eternal city.'

Rome is built on the banks of the Tiber River in the Lazio Region of Italy. In 2007 it was said to be the most visited city in the world and the biggest tourist attraction in all of Italy. Being the seat of the Vatican, it receives many pilgrims as well as a wide variety of tourists who come to see its relics of ancient history. The city enjoys a serene Mediterranean climate with mild, humid winters and mild, dry summers.

Perhaps the most well-known legend of the city of Rome's founding is the folktale of Romulus and Raemus. Romulus and Raemus were two twin boys born from Mars, the deity of war and Rhea Shea, the vestal virgin. Vestal virgins were priestesses to the goddess Vesta and were expected to guard their virginity at all costs. Rhea Shea, after giving birth to the twins was thrown into the river and caught by the river god who married her. The twins were placed in a reed basket and set afloat in the river and were caught onto a fig tree. The twins were then found by a female wolf who nursed them until a shepherd found the boys and raised them as his own. When the boys grew older, they were told of their origins. They decided to found a new city near the place where they were found by the shepherd but got into a dispute over which hill the city should be built on. Raemus saw on his hill six birds and Romulus saw twelve on his hill. They took the larger number of birds as an omen to build the city on Romulus's hill. Romulus marked his city by plowing around its intended borders with a white ox and white cow. Raemus jumped over the furrows. This was taken as a bad omen as it meant the city would be easily captured in future history. Raemus was then killed by Romulus or one of his followers. While there are many versions of this tale, the essence of the story remains one of the main folk stories of how the city was founded.

Another account of the city's founding is given to us from the celebrated Roman Poet Virgil. As is well known, there was a major war in ancient times between the two Greek city-states, Sparta and Troy which was in Asia Minor. Troy was utterly demolished in this war and supposedly all of its inhabitants were massacred. However, one of the few survivors of Troy, Aneaus who was born from union between the goddess Venus and a human, made his way to the Tiber River to found the city of Rome. Rome was seen the Trojans coming back to take revenge on Greece. Of course, like almost all accounts from the ancient idolatrous world, these

tales are filled with misguided passion, cruelty, jealousy and bloodshed, all of which are terrible traits and are totally antithetical to our Torah way of life.

According to our Mesorah, Rome was founded by a descendent of Esav. Rashi and Ramban point out in Bereishis 36:43 that Magdiel is Rome. In Pirkai D' Rabbi Eliezer 38 it states that since this city has Hashem's name in it, this is an indicator that it was part of Hashem's great master plan that this city should play a very prominent role in world history. The Gur Aryeh also states this idea. Also, in the Brachos that Yitzchak ended up giving to Esav in Berishis 27:39 Yitzchak gave Esav the fatness of the land for his dwelling and the dew of the heavens above. Rashi over there states that this Bracha is referring to 'Italia of Yavan, Greece'. In Megillah 6b it is referred to as the great city of Greece which actually in Italy but colonized by the Greeks.

The Gemara in Shabbos 56b tells us the following. Rav Yehuda said in the Name of Shmuel when Shlomo Hamelech married Paroh's daughter the angel Gavriel placed a reed in the sea and a sand bank grew around it. As the sand bank grew and solidified the great city of Rome was built. The Gemara then brings a Braisa stating that when Yeravam placed the two golden calves in Bais-El and Dan, a fisherman's hut of mud and reeds was built and soon more houses were built around it. This municipality grew to be Italia of Yavan. The Maharsha explains that this was the beginning of Galus Edom. Even though it was the second exile that Esav prevailed over us, the groundwork for it was laid in the beginning of our history because the second exile was the longer exile and made the most impact on us a people.

From all of the above we see that Esav was there to remind us that our job was to serve Hashem. He will never have the privilege of total dedication to Hashem. True, he has certain brachos in the material world. The region of Italy, populated by Esav's descendents, gave the world great food, wine and other material commodities. But Esav receives it unconditionally, whether or not he deserves it because of his lower status. On the other hand, we, the descendents of Yaakov get our bountiful rewards in this world and in the next, only when we deserve them. We are the 'older child', capable of understanding total service to Hashem and deserved rewards. We see Shlomo Hamelech, great as he was, not doing the ideal thing to serve Hashem. Marrying Paroh's daughter, even if justified, was not looked on as a good thing and overall, no good came out of it. The one power Esav has over us is that when we do not follow Hashem's word as we are supposed to, Esav has the right to ask why we deserve brachos. And Hashem will answer him as Yitzchak stated that when Esav raises his voice he breaks our yoke from his neck. It was laid down by Yitzchak Avinu that Esav and his descendents are there to remind us that our job is to totally follow the Torah and Hashem's way and only then will we be worthy of Hashem's bountiful brachos.