

Parshat Vayishlach concludes with an extensive listing of Esau's progeny, culminating with an accounting of the various kings that ruled Edom before there was a king in Israel. This comparison between Israel and Esau is fascinating in that, at this point, the Jewish people were only beginning their journey. No king would be appointed for several generations stretching over the period of exile in Egypt, 40 years wandering the desert and the period of the Judges until Saul would be anointed by Samuel. Why was it necessary to mention at length the children of Esau and the kings that ruled over Edom, let alone the comparison to the appointment of a king in Israel?

At the start of Jacob's journey to Charan to find a wife in the house of Laban and start his family, Jacob encounters Gd in Beth El. Jacob is fleeing for his life, having just taken the blessings that were intended for Esau, and in the process enraging Esau who openly plotted Jacob's demise. Gd promised to protect Jacob and return him to the land of his forefathers, the very land that would be inherited by his children. Rashi (28:14) mentions that Gd informed Jacob that he, Jacob, would be the one to fulfill the promise made to Abraham, that through Isaac he will attain children and a legacy that will endure, **כי ביצחק יקרא** **לך זרע ולא כל יצחק**. Why was it necessary at this point to mention that Jacob will be the one to fulfill that promise?

When Gd entered into the **ברית בין הבתרים** with Abraham, Abraham had no children. After an additional 11 or 16 years (depending on whether Abraham was 75 or 70 years of age at the time of the covenant), Hagar bore Ishmael to Abraham. Abraham himself was willing to have Ishmael succeed him and assume his place and destiny. Gd informs Abraham 13 years later, when he enters into a subsequent eternal covenant with Abraham regarding **ברית מילה**, the child that succeeds him will be born to Sarah. After the birth of Isaac, Sarah orders Abraham to expel Ishmael, stating that he will never inherit together with her son, with Isaac. Abraham, who only a few years earlier was willing to proceed with Ishmael as his successor, is distressed at the prospect of expelling Ishmael. Gd reassures Abraham to follow Sarah's advice, as **כי ביצחק יקרא לך**. Ishmael will not be part of the equation. At that point, Isaac is clearly identified as the intended inheritor of the covenants between Abraham and Gd.

When it came to Isaac's children, Gd did not clearly identify which of his twin sons would be his heir and the next link in the chain to perpetuate the covenants between Gd and Abraham. For many years Isaac thought that Esau was not only the first born but was also the intended heir. He is so convinced of this that he suffers through Esau's marriage to local Hittite women who become a source of anguish to Isaac and Rebecca. He commands Esau to hunt and bring him a special meal after which he will confer special blessings upon Esau. We should note that the blessings Isaac conferred upon Jacob, whom he assumed was Esau, were material in nature, not spiritual. After all the trouble Esau caused him and Rebecca, Isaac was no longer convinced that Esau deserved to inherit and perpetuate the covenants between Gd and Abraham. His blessings include subservience of his brothers which is common for an older brother to demand, and for younger brothers to comply with. The covenant with Abraham was based on spiritual matters, not on the productivity of the land. Indeed, the Jewish People are warned several times that the productivity of the land of Israel depends on our adherence to the laws and covenant that bind us to Gd.

After Isaac discovers that Jacob had acquired the birthright from Esau and was the appropriate firstborn, he breathes a sigh of relief at avoiding the miscarriage of giving the blessing intended for the first born to the wrong child. Isaac now realizes that Jacob is the intended heir of the covenants. He subsequently commands him to seek his wife among the daughters of Laban and specifically not from the local Hittite women as his brother did. For just as he, Isaac, the inheritor of the covenant from Abraham had to take a wife from the house of Terach, the next link in the chain would have to do the same. The Torah informs us that Hagar took a wife for Ishmael from the land of Egypt. Why mention anything about the origins of Ishmael's wife? Because the inheritor of Abraham's covenant must form a union with another member of Terach's family, just as Abraham and Isaac did. Ishmael and Esau, whose wives came from prohibited stock, are disqualified. Isaac now confers the covenant, ברכת אברהם, upon Jacob.

It is interesting to note that Parshat Tolot concludes with the story of Esau recognizing that the local Canaanite women were repugnant to Isaac and Rebecca, as Jacob is commanded to seek his wife in Charan in the house of Laban. Esau reacts to this by marrying the daughter of Ishmael. Why mention Esau's deduction and his choice in a new wife? Esau reacted to the blessings and mission presented to Jacob and wanted to demonstrate that he is also deserving of consideration as the heir to Abraham's covenant. He too can marry a wife from the house of Terach that will bear him children worthy of Abraham's covenant. Not only is he worthy of Abraham's covenants, he will also demonstrate that he is worthy of inheriting the land promised to Abraham and the blessings of ויתן לך that Isaac gave Jacob.

Jacob is uneasy about leaving his parents' home. He is concerned that perhaps something will go awry and he will be stripped of the blessings that he acquired at great personal cost and sacrifice. Perhaps Esau will find a way to convince his father that he is worthy of the blessings and the covenant, and in the end, he, Jacob, will lose everything. Gd appears to him and reassures him of the promise to perpetuate through him His covenant with Abraham and Isaac. He is told that indeed he, Jacob, is the son that Gd referred to when He promised Abraham ויקרא לך זרע. He must fulfill his mission to marry from the house of Terach so the story of the Jewish people can commence. Upon his return to the land of Canaan, Gd will continue the covenant with him and his children.

When Jacob returns from Charan he discovers that Esau is approaching with 400 men intent on killing him and extinguishing his family and legacy. Jacob becomes fearful and prepares to confront Esau through battle, prayer and bribery. Why is Jacob fearful of Esau? After all, he had been promised by Gd Himself that He would protect Jacob from his brother Esau. What better guarantee of protection could there be? Our Rabbis tell us that Jacob was fearful that perhaps he committed some sin that would nullify the promise made to him by Gd. If that was the case, not only would the promise of protection be gone, but he stood to forfeit the covenant inherited from Abraham and passed on by Isaac. He encounters and battles the angel to a standstill on that fateful long night. The angel informs him that he cannot be defeated by anyone and that Gd himself will change his name to Yisrael to demonstrate His eternal covenant and connection. In short, Jacob is relieved that the covenant will remain with him.

After Jacob's encounter with Esau, the Torah tells us of the abduction and rape of Deena followed by Simeon and Levi executing the inhabitants of Shchem in retribution for their actions. Jacob confronts them and ultimately curses their anger. Our Rabbis tell us that Jacob waited many years before rebuking them formally because he was afraid that they would desert him and join his brother Esau against Jacob. Why was Jacob fearful of such a seemingly preposterous eventuality? Jacob knew that in order for him to fulfill his mission, all his children would have to follow in his footsteps and walk with Gd. Unlike Abraham and Isaac who had offspring that were not worthy of the covenant, Jacob could not merit his place in the patriarchal order and as the founder of the Jewish People unless all his children were righteous. Upon observing Simeon and Levi dealing with Deena's situation in a way that was more reminiscent of Esau than Jacob, through arms and not prayer, Jacob confronts them. Were they abandoning the path of Jacob in favor of the brutality of Esau? They responded that they could not sit idly by while their sister is abused in such a manner. Jacob was afraid again of the possibility his destiny would be denied. He laments that he is small in number and the local people could unite against his family and defeat them in battle, abruptly terminating the covenant he inherited. Gd appears to him and tells him that his position is safe and that he should tarry no more and proceed immediately to Beth El to redeem his pledge. Jacob complies and he is blessed by Gd and his name Israel is enshrined forever.

In the final episode of the Parsha involving Jacob and his children, Reuben decides to upend the relationship between Jacob and Bilha. Our Rabbis have various opinions as to what Reuben actually did, but the Torah concludes the episode saying that the sons of Jacob were 12. Our Rabbis derive from here that whatever his action was, Reuben did not sin. Why was it important to inform us of Reuben's purity from sin at this juncture? Jacob again was fearful that the impetuous actions of one of his sons, who acted in a way that was more reminiscent of Esau than Jacob, would shed a negative light on his family and disqualify Jacob and his sons from the covenant. The Torah informs us that despite all that transpired, the sons of Jacob were still an integral unit dedicated to Gd. Despite their flaws or actions, they did not cross any lines that would have called into question their fitness, along with Jacob, to be the next links in the chain of transmitting the covenant.

The Parsha concludes with the genealogy of Esau and the kings that ruled their homeland, Edom, before the Jewish people appointed their first king. Why was it important to tell us all about them and their kings? Why was it necessary to repeat that Esau married Ishmael's daughter after we were informed of this at the end of Parshat Toldot? Because first the Torah disqualifies Esau and his offspring by telling about the forbidden relationships that resulted in rendering Esau's children illegitimate, ממזרים. The links in the chain to Abraham's covenant could not be ממזרים. Even though he married someone from Terach's family, Ishmael's daughter, the result was still illegitimate offspring that were rejected from the covenant.

The hallmark of the ברית בין הבתרים was that its participants would be sojourners in exile and servitude for 400 years. Someone who has a land and a king is not considered to be in exile. Perhaps at some

future date, Esau's descendants would claim that they deserve the rewards associated with keeping Abraham's covenant for they also endured exile and servitude, The Torah rejects their disingenuous claim out of hand by informing us that Esau had a people, a land and kings. They were never considered exiles or enslaved in a foreign land. They rejected the covenant and had no claims whatsoever to the reward promised Abraham's descendants who adhered to the covenant. The children of Jacob, who had no land and no king for many years were the rightful heirs to Abraham's covenant, to the exclusion of Esau, his father-in-law Ishmael and their descendants.

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