

SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



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Vayishlach, Sicha 5

The Context:

After the climactic meeting between Eisav and Yaakov, the Torah records a list of Eisav's descendants, as well as the early monarchies that issued from his family — “the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the children of Israel.” (Bereishis 36:31)

One of these kings was “Yovav, son of Zerach of Botzrah.” (Ibid 36:33)

Rashi comments on this verse:

Yovav, son of Zerach of Botzrah — Botzrah was a Moabite city, as it says: “And to Keriot and to Botzrah, etc.” (Yirmiyahu 48:24). Since it (Botzrah) appointed a king for Edom, it is destined to be punished with the Edomites, as it says: “For G-d has a slaughter in Botzrah” (Yeshayahu 34:6)

The Question:

Why does Rashi identify the city where this king came from? Why is this information necessary in order to understand the straightforward meaning of the verse? In fact, Rashi does not provide any commentary on the other cities mentioned in this passage about the Edomite kings!

The Explanation:

When Rivkah was pregnant with twins, G-d communicated a prophecy to her which said:

“Two nations are in your womb, and two kingdoms will separate from your innards, and one kingdom will become mightier than the other kingdom, and the elder will serve the younger. (Bereishis 25:23)

Commenting on the phrase, “one kingdom will become mightier than the other kingdom,” Rashi says, “they will not be equal in greatness; when one rises, the other will fall....”

However, the conclusion of the verse says, without equivocation, that “the elder will serve the younger,” implying that Eisav will always be subordinate to Yaakov. Which is it? Will power oscillate between the brothers or not?

To resolve this apparent contradiction, we must parse Rashi’s two earlier comments on this verse:

Two nations are in your womb — [The word nations, **אֲמִלִּים**] is written **אֲמִלִּים** [which is pronounced] like **אֲמִלִּים** (exalted persons). These were Antoninus and Rabbi [Rabbi Yehudah the Prince], from whose tables neither radishes nor lettuce were lacking, not in the summer nor in the winter (Avodah Zarah 11a)

And two kingdoms: **אֲרָצוֹת** always means a kingdom.

The opening of the prophecy thus speaks of two divisions between the twins: “Two nations are in your womb” alludes to the individual descendants of Yaakov and Eisav, such as Antoninus and Rabbi, and “two kings” alludes to the monarchies that will develop from them.

It follows that the two clauses of the verse’s conclusion correspond to the distinction made in the beginning of the verse:

“One kingdom will become mightier than the other kingdom” refers to the monarchies which, as Rashi says, “will not

be equal in greatness; when one rises, the other will fall.” The conclusion of the prophecy “the elder will serve the younger,” refers to the individual descendants of the twins — even in those times when Eisav’s kingdom reigns supreme, on the individual level, Yaakov’s children will always be superior to Eisav’s children.

With this explanation in hand, the verse about Eisav’s monarchies is challenging: “These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the children of Israel.” How can the Torah equate the kings of Edom with the Kings of Israel, implying that their monarchies were similar, differing only in the period of their rulership? Based on the prophecy, there should be some superior aspect in the individual Israelite kings.

Therefore, the Torah mentions the origins of each of the Edomite kings to underscore that they were not actually Eisav’s descendants, but rather, they came from other cities to rule over Edom’s kingdom.

The one exception is “Yovav, son of Zerach of Botzrah.” Zerach is identified as an Edomite chieftain, and Botzrah is often mentioned in connection with Edom. This implies that this king indeed was descended from Eisav himself. Therefore, Rashi comments that this Botzrah is actually a Moabite city, and this king was, like the others, not an actual descendant of Eisav.

And to explain why Botzrah is often mentioned alongside Edom, Rashi continues to explain that “since it (Botzrah) appointed a king for Edom, it is destined to be punished with the Edomites.”

A Deeper Question:

If Yaakov was assured that he and his descendents would never be subjugated to Eisav on an individual level, and only occasionally in matters of state, then how could he have prostrated himself before Eisav, called him “my master,” and sent him an elaborate gift?

There are two ways to transform a negative entity. You can overwhelm it with illumination and inspiration; in this way, the negativity is dispelled but it is never truly

reformed. Or, you can enter the space of negativity itself, work with it on its own terms, and teach it to desire positivity. In this way, you initially become soiled by association, but in the end, the change is true and lasting.

In order for Yaakov to truly transform Eisav’s negative energy into a force for positivity, he had to fully subject himself to Eisav’s reality; he had to “acknowledge” Eisav as stronger and superior, and then, from within, he would be able to extract Eisav’s true potential. Thus, at the end of their meeting, Eisav told Yaakov, “my brother, let what is your remain yours,” meaning that “here, he admitted that the blessings belong to Yaakov.”
