



Sicha Summary

Chelek 15 | Toldos | Sichah 2

The Context:

Another famine descended upon the Land of Israel. Yitzchak intended to temporarily find refuge in Egypt, as his father, Avraham, had done before him. G-d told Yitzchak, however, “Do not descend to Egypt; dwell in the land that I shall tell you.” (*Bereishis* 26:2)

The Rationales:

Why did G-d not allow Yitzchak to leave Israel for Egypt? The *Midrash* explains: “You (Yitzchak) are like a blemish-free offering. Just as an offering having this level of sanctity becomes disqualified if it leaves the walls of the Temple Courtyard, so, too, you will become disqualified if you leave the Land of Israel.” (*Bereishis Rabbah* 64:3)

Rashi says this somewhat differently: “G-d said to him, “Do not descend to Egypt, for you are a blemish-free offering, and territory outside the Land of Israel is not worthy of you.” (*Rashi to Bereishis* 26:2)

Though both explanations seem identical, a closer reading reveals that the *Midrash’s* explanation focuses on the holiness of the Land of Israel — the “offering/Yitzchak” is so sacred that it cannot leave the “Temple Courtyard / Land of Israel.” But Rashi’s explanation is focused on the lands outside of Israel being unworthy, he does not mention the sacredness of Israel itself.

It would seem that there is a fundamental difference of perspective between the *Midrash* and Rashi regarding the status of the Land of Israel that produced this nuanced dispute concerning the reason for Yitzchak needing to remain in Israel. What is the origin of these divergent approaches?

The Explanation:

When the forefathers performed physical *mitzvos* prior to the Giving of the Torah, although they were able to achieve some level of personal enlightenment, they could not affect or transform the material object with which their *mitzvos* were performed. There was a fundamental divide between the spiritual and the material.

Similarly, whatever level of attachment existed between the forefathers and the Land of Israel, it was not an attachment that imbued the Land itself with sanctity. Sanctity would only be able to enter the material world after the Giving of the Torah, when G-d gave the Jewish people the innovative ability to fuse spirit and matter.

Sanctity of the Land, then, was not the point of disagreement between the *Midrash* and Rashi. Ownership of it, however, was.

When G-d first promised the Land of Israel to Avraham in the Covenant between the Parts, He said, “To your descendants I have given this Land.” (*Bereishis* 15:18) Commenting on the past tense (“I have given”), the *Midrash* says, “G-d’s utterance **is a deed.**” Rashi comments, “A statement of G-d is considered **as if it had been performed.**” The distinction is obvious: the *Midrash* maintains that the Land of Israel already belonged to the Avraham’s descendants, while Rashi maintains that it was only “as if” it was theirs.

The laws concerning the removal of sacrificial meat from certain boundaries are not, in essence, due to the relative sanctity of those locations. Rather, there is a “natural place” where each type of meat belongs, and meat becomes disqualified “once it leaves its designated place.” (*Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Maaseh Hakorbanos* 11:6)

Once the Land of Israel belonged to Avraham’s family, and G-d had commanded Yitzchak to be offered as a blemish-free offering in this land, Israel became Yitzchak’s “natural, designated place” from where he could

no longer leave. It was not the holiness of the land per se, but the fact that the land's identity was inseparable from Yitzchak that made it his "place."

Rashi, however, maintains that there was no concrete change in the relationship between the Land of Israel and the Jewish people. They had "theoretical" ownership, but not practical ownership. Therefore, Israel was not yet a place that was designated for Yitzchak.

Rashi previously explained, however, that Avraham preferred the Land of Israel over other lands because people there had come to recognize G-d as Creator to a greater extent than the populations of other lands. That was why Avraham had not allowed Yitzchak to marry a woman from, and settle in, any other land aside from Israel. (*Rashi to Bereishis 24:7*) Rashi applied the same reasoning in this context: "territory outside the Land of Israel is **not worthy of you.**"

A Deeper Look:

The *Midrashic* method of interpretation seeks to uncover the deeper strata of the Torah's text. Therefore, it envisions G-d's speech as having profound power, conferring ownership of the Land of Israel to the Jewish people without their tangible participation.

Rashi, however, explains the plain meaning of the text. In the "literal" world, G-d's speech only creates potential ownership. For the people to actually possess the Land they must engage in the real-world work of conquering and settling it.