

Parashas Toldos

Parsha Summary

Yitzhak prayed for children and Rivka became pregnant, but had a difficult pregnancy and was told by God that she was bearing twins, who at birth were named Eisav and Yaakov. When they grew up, Eisav became a hunter and Yaakov became a 'tent-dweller.' Once, after coming home from the field, Eisav wanted the lentil soup Yaakov was cooking, and Yaakov proposed that he trade it for his "firstborn-ship," to which Eisav agreed.

There was a famine, but God told Yitzhak not to leave the land, so Yitzhak moved to Gerar. Fearing for his life, he said that his wife Rivkah was his sister, but the king Avimelech saw that this was not true, and reprimanded Yitzhak for lying, assuring him that he need not worry that he would come to harm. In Gerar, Yitzhak's servants discovered wells, but the first two were fought over, and only the third was sustained. God appeared to Yitzhak and promised to give the land to his descendants. Yitzhak made a covenant with Avimelech that their descendants would not harass each other. Eisav married two Hittite women, a source of bitterness to Yitzhak and Rivka.

When Yitzhak became elderly and blind, he asked Eisav to go hunting to bring him meat, for which he would receive a blessing. Rivkah heard this and instructed Yaakov to pretend that he was Eisav, and thus receive Yitzhak's blessing. Yaakov did so, and Yitzhak, thinking that Yaakov was Eisav, blessed this son that he be prosperous and rule over his brother. Eisav then returned from the field and asked his father for a blessing, whereupon Yitzhak realized that he had blessed Yaakov. Even though he then gave Eisav a blessing as well, Eisav planned to kill Yaakov, and so Rivka had Yitzhak send Yaakov away to Charan to find a wife from their family.

Classic Questions

What was the *bekhorah* that Eisav sold to Yaakov, and why was it worth a mere bowl of soup?

- **Rashi:** the firstborn rite was the role of serving in the Temple, and Eisav had no interest in being involved in God's service
 - **Maasei Hashem:** "firstborn" meant dedication to God, just like the first fruits, etc.
- **Rashbam, Ramak:** really there was a lot of money exchanged, and the soup (and bread) was just used to seal the deal
- **Chizkuni:** Eisav sold the role of inheriting the land, because he knew that it would not come into effect until four generations after Avraham--well after his own death
- **Some:** Eisav sold the double portion of his future inheritance, and it was cheap because-
 - **Rashbam:** Eisav assumed he's predecease his father due to his job as a hunter
 - **Ibn Ezra:** Yitzhak was poor so there was not much of an inheritance
- **Bechor Shor:** Eisav was starving on the verge of death, and was willing to forgo his inheritance to save his life. He also thought Yitzhak would keep him as firstborn anyway
- **Ramban:** the sale was not for inheritance, but rather for the special honor of the firstborn
 - **Abarbanel:** the sale was not for inheritance, but for Avraham's blessing
 - **Seforno:** Eisav recognized that he was too impulsive for a role requiring patience
- **(Radak:** Yaakov was punished for removing the firstborn status from its natural inheritor)

Why did Yitzhak love Eisav and want to bless him instead of Yaakov?

- **Rashi:** Eisav honored his father and also tricked him into thinking that he was righteous
 - **R. Hirsch:** Yaakov thus dressed up as Eisav, to get Yitzchak to realize that it is indeed possible to trick him regarding his own son's identity
- **Rashbam, Bechor Shor:** *al pi peshat*, Eisav was not a wicked person
 - **Bechor Shor:** Yitzhak even knew about Eisav selling the firstborn status
- **Ramban, Abarbanel:** Yitzhak didn't wouldn't deviate from honoring the natural firstborn
- **Radak:** the verse means only that Yitzhak loved Eisav at all, but he loved Yaakov more
 - Yitzhak thought that Eisav was spiritually weaker and more in need of blessing
- **R. Hirsh, Malbim, Netziv:** Yitzhak thought that both Eisav and Yaakov would share his legacy, and that Eisav would be materially prosperous and provide for Yaakov

Important "Chazal"s and "Rashi"s

- That day, Eisav slept with a betrothed girl, committed murder, denied the resurrection of the dead, denied God, and refused the firstborn-hood (Bava Basra 16b)
 - **R. Ahron Lopiansky:** Eisav's sale of the firstborn right for a bowl of soup shows how he lived entirely for immediate gratification and rejected long-term thinking
- "Yitzhak found that his grain produced 100-fold," he was measuring for the purpose of giving tithes (Rashi, Bereishis Rabbah 64:6)
- "Avraham kept my teachings, commands, and strictures," this means that he kept all of the commandments -- Avraham kept even the mitzvah of Eiruv Tavshilin
 - **Daas Zekainim** (46:7), **Maharal** (Gur Aryeh 37:2, Tiferes Yisrael 20), **R. Eliyahu Dessler** (MM III p. 51): the forefathers weren't obligated, but kept mitzvos as optional [**Maharal:** therefore, they only kept the positive commands]
 - **Rashba** (Shut 1:94), **Nefesh Hachayim** (1:21): the avos only kept the Torah because that is generally God's will, but they saw that God's will was sometimes to violate what would later be Torah commandments
 - **R. Avraham ben haRambam** (35:4), **Meiri** (intro to Avos): the rabbinic statement that the forefathers kept the Torah is not meant literally, but refers to Torah values
 - **Ramban** (38:2): the avos did not keep the mitzvot outside of the promised land
 - For this reason, Rachel died once the family entered the land of Canaan
- "The voice is Yaakov's voice:" only prayers of Israel's voice are heard; "the hands are the hands of Eisav," only wars including Eisav's hands are victorious (Gittin 57b)

A Short Vort

According to Seder Olam, Yitzhak prayed for twenty years before God answered his prayer to have children. This is remarkable: despite not being answered for so many years and years, Yitzhak continued to pray to God, even day after day of not seeing the results. The Chofetz Chaim notes the same is true regarding Yitzhak's well-digging efforts; despite his first attempts having been foiled, Yitzchak nevertheless goes on to dig a third well without despairing (see also Sanhedrin 111a). Ultimately, Yitzchak is successful in these endeavours, but we must not forget that this was due to his incredible perseverance in continuing to do what he knew was the right course of action, even though it was many years before those efforts bore fruits.