

# WHAT MATTERS!

*by Rabbi Dovid Green*

*"Yaakov settled in the land of his father's sojournings in the land of Canaan." (Genesis 37:1)*

Rashi, the medieval Torah commentator, enlightens us to something which we would have easily skimmed over in a more cursory reading of this week's parsha. The last chapter of the previous parsha is a lineage of Eisov, Yaakov's wayward twin brother. It gives a concise, but thorough family tree of Eisov, his wives, and his descendants, as well as an account of his battles and his conquests. The Torah then returns to the events in Yaakov's life in greater detail and explanation. Here is Rashi's observation and explanation of this quick summary of Eisov's legacy.

"After the Scripture has written for you the circumstances of Eisov settling, and his offspring, in a concise manner, as they were not treasured by G-d or held in (sufficient) esteem to mandate explaining in detail how they settled, or giving an account of their battles,...(the Scriptures) explain for you (in detail) the settlings of Yaakov in a lengthy manner." (Rashi 37:1).

If we look through Eisov's chronicles, we will find that they look very similar to many subsequent civilizations. There were conquests, and then a meshing of the dominating society with the dominated society. There were cities, and kings, and important players. There were undoubtedly notable accomplishments in various fields. The civilization which Eisov fathered was a society in its fullest sense. Yet the Torah passes over the whole topic as if eager to get on with more important matters. Rashi (ibid.) compares it to someone who loses a pearl in the sand. He takes a sifter, and sifts through the sand looking for the pearl. Eisov and his descendants are the sand, and Yaakov is the pearl.

Why does Eisov merit so little importance in G-d's book? Eisov answers the question himself. (Genesis 25:32) "Behold I'm going (destined) to die, why do I need a birthright?" Eisov's total emphasis is on the present; instant gratification with no thought of repercussions for the future, even to the extent of committing terrible crimes. The decadent Roman society of two thousand years ago is said to be the descendants of Eisov. The writers of that society portray the pursuit of pleasure as the goal and ennobling force of life. This was such, to the extent that there were those who would eat their fill, and then cause themselves to vomit so they could make room for more. In other words, they totally and exclusively emphasized materialism and physicality.

On the other hand we see when Yaakov, upon awaking from his vision, when G-d promised that He would protect him and provide for his needs, he reacts with his own promise. (Genesis 28:22) "This

stone which I have made into an altar will be a house of G-d, and everything that You give me I will tithe for You." The message: materialism and physicality is meant to be uplifted and purposeful - a means to an end. This gives value to every physical act and endeavor, that it is used for an ultimately spiritual purpose. A society built for Eisov's ends has no great value to G-d. It is base and mundane. Yaakov's family and the events of his life, however, are very dear to G-d, and deserving of study in lengthy detail.

This Rashi is very revealing. It tells us what we would find in G-d's history books, so to speak. It tells us the places which would be important on G-d's maps. What are the things in our own lives which would fit this standard of notoriety? How can we uplift our own lives in such a manner that they could be so dear to G-d?

Good Shabbos!

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