

A “Parting of the Ways:” Limited Recognition of Kindred Sovereignties

Gen. 36:5-8 states that Esau took his household, livestock, and cattle and moved from Canaan to Seir because “their possessions were too great for them to dwell together. The land of their sojournings could not support them because of their livestock.” Yet we already knew that Esau lived in Seir from the preceding story. It seems Esau’s living in the area of the Seir mountains, the modern al-Sharah mountains in southwest Jordan, had little to do with the amount of cattle Jacob and Esau had. Besides, Jacob kept himself pretty far north and west, distant from any region near Esau. So this “reason” given for a parting of Esau to another territory is suspect.

“Their possessions were too great for them to dwell together” must be an expression for something else: The text is seeking a pretext for the “national” parting of the ways between Israel and Edom. “National” rivalries in terms of “national” property require “national” borders. The story told here parallels Genesis 13:5 and following, which leads to Lot’s descendant nations, Moab and Ammon, claiming separate national territories and borders. Of course, at various times Israel claimed parts of Ammon, Moab, and Edom, as Israelite, and at other times Israel claimed all three as vassal kingdoms. But the text is trying to say that each was a separate, recognized nation with its own territory, from the Bible’s perspective, although the borders were not settled.

According to our narrative, Edom/Esau had the closest kinship with Israel. And indeed, Esau’s descendant tribes did lay claim to territory on the west side of the Rift Valley, into Sinai and southern Judea. At a later time in history, the Edomites abandoned Mt. Seir and fled westward, eventually taking over Hebron, where Esau had helped to bury Isaac. Esau is said to have had marital ties with both Canaanites as well as Arabian Ishmaelites. Edomites were hardly uncivilized; they had copper mining as well as trade with Arabia. Israel, for its part, had many ties to the trans-Jordanian territories: During Israel’s wandering in the “wilderness,” much of its time was spent “circling Mt. Seir,” and Israel made its first conquests in former Moabite and Ammonite territories. It’s not surprising, against this background, that Jacob re-enters Canaan from the trans-Jordanian areas of Israel’s first conquests and tells Esau he is going to Seir, although Jacob’s destination inexplicably changes. Perhaps Isaac had been living near Seir at Beer Lahai Roi and Jacob actually went that direction, as one modern scholar suggests; if so, this “separation” from Esau would have made more sense. But the earlier passages mentioning Jacob’s stops at Gilead, Mahanaim and Penuel do underscore Israel’s trans-Jordanian claims. So both Jacob and Esau had claims on the eastern as well as the western side of the Rift Valley. The inclusion of Amalek among descendants of Esau points to western claims of Esau on the Negeb.

Perhaps the text is attempting to limit bona fide Edomite national land claims to just the mountainous Seir area, in a similar fashion as it means to limit the claims of Moab and Ammon, indeed almost “banish” them, to only the highest mountain-plateau regions. Indeed, the text implies that Esau’s and Lot’s descendants had effectively “banished” themselves: They had voluntarily accepted these limited, remote pasturelands as their territories rather than face disputes, war, or calamity if they had claimed wider, more-settled regions. Since those remote regions had fewer claimants and were relatively uninhabited, Edom and Moab took them easily and established their kingdoms much earlier. Hence Israelites respected their sovereignty, but only over those mountainous “heartlands” to which they had banished themselves. Our Parasha doesn’t specifically say that there were fights between the shepherds of Jacob and Esau the way there were between those of Abram and Lot, but a background of the twins’ rivalries and disputes with Laban implies that there would have been had they settled together. This type of limited formal recognition of a different sovereignty when cultures and territorial claims continued to overlap is likely what is indicated by such a “parting of the ways.”



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Vayishlah

November 19-20, 2021

SCHEDULE

Candle Lighting | 4:17 pm

Friday Evening Services | 4:15 pm

Friday Night Lights | following services | *2021-22 season sponsored by the Julis-Rabinowitz family*

Zemirot | 8:30 am

Shahrit | 9:00 am

Jr. Congregation | 10:30 am | Led by Teen Leaders & Mrs. Lisa Rohde

Outdoor Kiddush | following services

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 3:30 pm | Rabbi Meir Soloveichik | *open to fully vaccinated individuals only*

Shabbat Afternoon Services | 4:15 pm

Shabbat Ends | 5:02 pm

Virtual Habdala Service | Rev. Z. Edinger | 5:20 pm

Weekday Service Times

Morning Services

Sunday: 8:05 am | Monday-Wednesday, & Friday: 7:05 am

Thursday (Thanksgiving Day): 7:45 am

Evening Services

Sunday (Minha/Arbit): 4:15 pm

Monday & Tuesday (Arbit only): 6:30 pm

Wednesday & Thursday (Minha/Arbit): 4:15 pm

Reminder: If you choose not to wear a mask when permissible, you represent and warrant that you are fully vaccinated. If requested, you must wear a well-fitted mask wherever and whenever required.

If you’re eligible for the vaccine booster, we encourage it, and if your child is eligible to be vaccinated, we encourage that too. Once you’ve been boosted/vaccinated, please send vaccination proof to info@shearithisrael.org.

THIS SHABBAT

Friday Night Lights

IN PERSON, Fridays | Following Evening Services

2021-22 season sponsored by the Julis-Rabinowitz family

To sponsor a future session, visit shearithisrael.org/fnl5782.

THANKSGIVING AT SHEARITH ISRAEL

Annual Thanksgiving Pack-A-Thon

A Hunger Alleviation Event in Support of MASBLA

Thursday, November 25 | 9:30 am | IN PERSON, on Paved Paradise

Register & Donate at shearithisrael.org/packathon2021

We are proud to once again join with our community faith partners, The Jewish Center, West End Church, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, to celebrate Thanksgiving in the true spirit of the day - by giving to others.

More than ever, we need volunteers so we can secure a safe and smooth event. **Please consider joining our team of captains! Together, we can reach our goal of \$18,000!**

Thanksgiving Parade Viewing for Youth ONLY

Thanksgiving Day, November 25

Our Portico provides one of the best Thanksgiving Parade views in the city.

To register your child, visit shearithisrael.org/parade2021.

THANKSGIVING SCHEDULE | November 25

7:45 am | Morning Services with our Special Thanksgiving Hallel | Main Sanctuary

8:30 am | Rabbi Soloveichik's Address | Main Sanctuary

Children's Hessed Craft Activity (during the Rabbi's Address & Pack-a-thon) | Paved Paradise Pavilion

9:00-11:00 am | Parade Viewing for School-Age Children ONLY | Portico

9:00- 11:00 am | Hunger Alleviation Pack-a-thon | Paved Paradise Pavilion

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mazal tob to **Rabbi Joel Schreiber**, who was recently awarded the *Eitz Chaim Award* at YU's Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) Chag HaSemikhah.

PRESERVING PAVED PARADISE

A successful second phase of fundraising will enable us to preserve and maintain this wonderful outdoor space for years to come.

Our Phase 2 Fundraising Goal: \$150,000

To donate, visit shearithisrael.org/preserving-paved-paradise.

HANUKKAH

FINALE: The Temple: A Hanukkah Tour Through Time

Rabbi Meir Soloveichik

This Tuesday | 7:30 pm | via conference call

New Dial-In Number: 667-770-1689

Participant code: 124005#

To register or sponsor, visit shearithisrael.org/hanukkah-series5782.

Youth Hanukkah Lighting & Celebration

8th Night of Hanukkah, Sunday, December 5 | 4:15pm - 5:15pm

Families are invited to a Hanukkah get-together in the Paved Paradise pavilion!

4:15 - 4:20 pm: Hanukkah greetings by Rivka Wiznia

4:20 - 4:45 pm: "Glow in the Dark" art projects

4:45 - 5:15 pm: Rev. Z Edinger and Rabbi Rohde leading a spirited sing-along and Hanukkah lighting with treats

Refer to our emails for the registration link.

Shearith Israel is a proud co-sponsor of the Menemsha

2021 Virtual Hanukkah Film Festival

Begins on the first night of Hanukkah, November 28

Use our code "CSINYC" to get a 25% discount!

(\$36 instead of \$48 for the entire festival!)

Celebrate the Hanukkah season with 8 nights of award-winning new films, available to view from the comfort of your home! A new film will be released each night of Hanukkah for registered participants to view, and all films will remain available for the rest of the holiday in case you miss them.

Visit hanukkahfilmfestival.com to register and view details on all the films, and don't forget to sign up with our CSINYC discount code!