מדרש

Midrash

ON GENESIS 26:34

Why Esav's marriage at forty was not a fresh start

Bereshit Rabbah 65:1

Drawing on the Midrash, Bereshit Rabbah 65:1 reads the phrase "Esau was forty years old" through Psalms 80:14, where Asaf calls the enemy "the swine from the forest." Just as a pig spreads its hooves while lying down to appear pure, Esav spent his first forty years preying on married women and presenting himself as respectable, and only at forty did he marry, imitating his father Yitzchak's marriage at that age. The midrash thus portrays Esav's marriage not as a fresh start but as the culmination of a long pattern of deception and violation, with the pig image standing for an evil power that robs while appearing lawful. AI SUMMARY

“Esau was forty years old, and he took as a wife Yehudit, daughter of Be'eri the Hitite, and Basmat, daughter of Elon the Hitite” (Genesis 26:34). “Esau was forty years old” – that is what is written: “The swine from the forest gnaws at it” (Psalms 80:14).

Rabbi Pinḥas in the name of Rabbi Simon: Of all the prophets, only two of them publicized it – Moses and Asaf. Moses said: “The pig because it has a split hoof” (Deuteronomy 14:8). Asaf said: “The swine from the forest gnaws at it.” Why does he analogize it to a pig? Just as this pig, when it lies, it extends its hooves, saying: ‘I am pure,’ so, this evil empire robs and takes forcibly, [yet] it appears as though it is arranging the courtroom.

So, Esau, all forty years, would ensnare married women and violate them. When he reached forty years of age, he likened himself to his father. He said: ‘Just as Father took a wife at forty years of age, I, too, will take a wife at forty years of age.’

That is what is written: “Esau was forty years old.”