

Esau: Jew, Apostate, or Gentile?

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Torah in Motion

Parsha Program

15 July 2021

Source 1

Deut. 2:5

אַל־תִּתְּגֵרוּן לָם כִּי לֹא־אֶתְּנוּ לָכֶם מֵאֲרָצָם עַד מִדְּבַר כַּף־רֶגֶל כִּי־יִרְשָׁה לַעֲשׂוֹ נְתַתִּי אֶת־הָר שְׁעִיר:

Do not to provoke them. For I will not give you of their land so much as a foot can tread on; I have given the hill country of Seir as a possession to Esau.

Source 2

B. Kuddishn 18a

<p>Rav Ḥiyya bar Avin says that Rabbi Yoḥanan says: By Torah law a gentile inherits from his father, as it is written: “Because I have given mount Seir to Esau as an inheritance” (Deuteronomy 2:5). The Gemara asks: But perhaps it is different with regard to an apostate Jew? In other words, it is possible that Esau was not considered a gentile but rather Jewish, like the Patriarchs. Consequently, he is categorized as an apostate Jew. Rather, the proof is from here: “Because I have given Ar to the children of Lot as an inheritance” (Deuteronomy 2:9), and the descendants of Lot were certainly gentiles.</p>	<p>רב חייא בר אבין א"ר יוחנן עובד כוכבים יורש את אביו דבר תורה דכתיב (דברים ב, ה) כי ירושה לעשו נתתי את הר שעיר ודלמא ישראל מומר שאני אלא מהכא (דברים ב, ט) כי לבני לוט נתתי את ער ירושה</p>
<p>The Gemara asks: And Rav Ḥiyya bar Avin, what is the reason that he did not state his opinion in accordance with the explanation of Rava, who derives the inheritance of gentiles from the verse: “And he shall reckon with his purchaser” (Leviticus 25:50)? The Gemara answers: Is it written explicitly in the Torah: And he shall reckon with his purchaser and not with the heirs of his purchaser? This proof is based on an exposition, not on an explicit source.</p>	<p>ורב חייא בר אבין מאי טעמא לא אמר כרבא מי כתיב (ויקרא כה, נ) וחשב עם קונהו ולא עם יורשי קונהו</p>
<p>The Gemara further asks: And Rava, what is the reason that he did not state his opinion in accordance with the explanation of Rav Ḥiyya bar Avin? The Gemara answers:</p>	<p>ורבא מאי טעמא לא אמר כרב חייא בר אבין משום : כבודו דאברהם שאני</p>

<p>Perhaps due to the honor of Abraham it is different. It is possible that for the sake of Abraham an inheritance was given to the members of his family. The same may not apply to gentiles in general.</p>	
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Source 3

B. Nedarim 31a

<p>Abaye said: It is teaching about those who are commanded and actually perform a mitzva, and the mishna is to be understood as follows: In the first two clauses of the mishna, which concern Shabbat observance and eating garlic, both Jews and Samaritans are included because they are commanded and actually perform the mitzva. However, with regard to gentiles, those who perform these mitzvot have the status of those who perform the mitzva but are not commanded to do so. Therefore, the one who took the vow is permitted to derive benefit from them. Concerning the case of those who ascend to Jerusalem, a Jew is commanded to keep this mitzva and performs it, while Samaritans are commanded but do not perform it, so he is permitted to derive benefit from them.</p>	<p>אמר אבאי מצווה ועושה קתני בתרתי בבי קמיתא ישראל וכותים מצווין ועושין גוים ההוא דעבדי עושין ואינם מצווין בעולי ירושלים ישראל מצווין ועושין כותים מצווין ואינם עושין</p>
<p>MISHNA: If one says: The property of the descendants of Noah is <i>konam</i> for me, and for that reason I will not benefit from it, he is permitted to derive benefit from a Jew but prohibited from deriving benefit from the nations of the world.</p>	<p>מתני' קונם שאיני נהנה לבני נח מותר בישראל ואסור באומות העולם</p>
<p>GEMARA: The Gemara asks: And is a Jew excluded from the category of the descendants of Noah? They are also descendants of Noah. The Gemara answers: Since Abraham was sanctified and designated to possess a unique role in the world, all his descendants are called by his name and are no longer termed the descendants of Noah.</p>	<p>גמ' וישראל מי נפיק מקלל בני נח כיון דאיקדש אברהם איתקרו על שמה</p>
<p>MISHNA: If one says: The property of the offspring of Abraham is forbidden to me, and for that reason I will not benefit from it, he is prohibited from deriving benefit from a Jew</p>	<p>מתני' שאיני נהנה לזרע אברהם אסור בישראל ומותר באומות העולם</p>

<p>but permitted to derive benefit from the nations of the world.</p>	
<p>GEMARA: Concerning the mishna's ruling that the one who takes such a vow is permitted to derive benefit from the nations of the world, the Gemara asks: But isn't there Ishmael and his descendants, who are also Abraham's offspring? Why isn't deriving benefit from them forbidden as well? The Gemara answers: It is written with regard to Abraham: "For in Isaac shall seed be called to you" (Genesis 21:12), which demonstrates that the descendants of Ishmael are not termed the offspring of Abraham. The Gemara asks: But isn't there Esau and his descendants; they are also offspring of Abraham, since they are descendants of Isaac? The Gemara answers that the words "in Isaac" mean that some of Isaac's descendants, i.e., the children of Jacob, are included in the offspring of Abraham, but not all the descendants of Isaac.</p>	<p>גַּמְ' וְהָאִיפָא יִשְׁמַעֵאל פִּי בִיצְחָק יִקְרָא לֵהּ זַרְעַ כְּתִיב וְהָאִיפָא עָשׂוּ בִיצְחָק וְלֹא כָּל יִצְחָק</p>

Source 4

B. Avodah Zarah 11a

<p>The Gemara mentions other Romans who converted to Judaism. It relates: Onkelos bar Kelonimos converted to Judaism. The Roman emperor sent a troop [<i>gunda</i>] of Roman soldiers after him to seize Onkelos and bring him to the emperor. Onkelos drew them toward him with verses that he cited and learned with them, and they converted. The emperor then sent another troop of Roman soldiers after him, and said to them: Do not say anything to him, so that he cannot convince you with his arguments. The troops followed this instruction, and took Onkelos with them.</p>	<p>אונקלוס בר קלונימוס איגייר שדר קיסר גונדא דרומאי אבתריה משכינהו בקראי איגיור הדר שדר גונדא דרומאי § [אחרינא] אבתריה אמר להו לא תימרו ליה ולא מידי</p>
<p>When they were walking, Onkelos said to the troop of soldiers: I will say a mere statement to you: A minor official [<i>nifyora</i>] holds a torch before a high official [<i>apifyora</i>], the high official holds a torch for a duke [<i>dukasa</i>], a duke for the governor, and the governor for the ruler [<i>koma</i>]. Does the ruler hold a torch before the common</p>	<p>כי הוו שקלו ואזלו אמר להו אימא לכו מילתא בעלמא ניפיורא נקט נורא קמי פיפיורא פיפיורא לדוכסא דוכסא להגמונא הגמונא לקומא קומא מי נקט נורא מקמי אינשי אמרי ליה לא אמר להו הקב"ה נקט נורא קמי ישראל דכתיב (שמות יג, כא) וה' הולך לפניהם יומם וגו' איגיור [[כולהו]]</p>

<p>people? The soldiers said to Onkelos: No. Onkelos said to them: Yet the Holy One, Blessed be He, holds a torch before the Jewish people, as it is written: “And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way, and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light” (Exodus 13:21). They all converted.</p>	
<p>The emperor then sent another troop of soldiers after him, to bring Onkelos, and said to them: Do not converse with him at all. The troops followed this instruction, and took Onkelos with them. While they grabbed him and were walking, Onkelos saw a <i>mezuzah</i> that was placed on the doorway. He placed his hand upon it and said to the soldiers: What is this? They said to him: You tell us.</p>	<p>הדר שדר גונדא אחרינא אבתריה אמר להו לא תשתעו מידי בהדיה כי נקטי ליה ואזלי חזא מזוזתא [דמנחא אפתחא] אותיב ידיה עלה ואמר להו מאי האי אמרו ליה אימא לן את</p>
<p>Onkelos said to them: The standard practice throughout the world is that a king of flesh and blood sits inside his palace, and his servants stand guard, protecting him outside; but with regard to the Holy One, Blessed be He, His servants, the Jewish people, sit inside their homes and He guards over them outside. As it is stated: “The Lord shall guard your going out and your coming in, from now and forever” (Psalms 121:8). Upon hearing this, those soldiers also converted to Judaism. After that, the emperor sent no more soldiers after him.</p>	<p>אמר להו מנהגו של עולם מלך בשר ודם יושב מבפנים ועבדיו משמרים אותו מבחוץ ואילו הקב"ה עבדיו מבפנים והוא משמרן מבחוץ שנאמר (תהלים קכא, ה) ה' ישמר צאתך ובואך מעתה ועד עולם איגיוור תו לא שדר בתריה</p>
<p>The Gemara returns to its discussion of Antoninus: When the matriarch Rebecca was pregnant with Jacob and Esau, “the Lord said to her: Two nations [goyim] are in your womb” (Genesis 25:23). Rav Yehuda says that Rav says: Do not read it as goyim, meaning nations; rather read it as geyim, meaning proud ones. This verse was fulfilled in two prominent individuals who descended from Rebecca, Antoninus and Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, whose tables, due to their wealth, never lacked for lettuce, nor cucumbers, nor radish, neither in the summer nor in the rainy season, despite the fact that these foods do not grow year round. The reason they ensured that these items were always present at</p>	<p>בראשית כה, כג) ויאמר ה' לה שני גוים בבטןך אמר רב יהודה אמר רב אל תקרי גוים אלא גיים זה אנטונינוס ורבי שלא פסקו מעל שולחנם לא חזרת ולא קישות ולא צנון לא בימות החמה ולא בימות הגשמים דאמר מר צנון §מחתך אוכל חזרת מהפך מאכל קישות מרחיב מעיים</p>

<p>their tables is that the Master said: A radish breaks up food, lettuce stirs up food, and cucumbers expand the intestines.</p>	
<p>The Gemara asks: But isn't it taught in the school of Rabbi Yishmael: Why are they called cucumbers [kishuin]? It is because they are as harmful [kashim] to a person's body as swords. The Gemara answers: This is not difficult. This statement, that they are harmful to the body, is referring to large cucumbers, whereas that statement, explaining why they were always present on the tables of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi and Antoninus, is referring to small ones.</p>	<p>והא תנא דבי רבי ישמעאל למה נקרא שמן קישואין מפני שקשין לגופו של אדם כחרבות לא קשיא הא ברברבי הא בזוטרי:</p>

Source 5

B. Bava Batra 16b

[The Torah states: “**And the Lord blessed Abraham with everything [bakkol]**” (Genesis 24:1), and the Sages disagree about **what bakkol** means.]

<p>Alternatively, what is the blessing of <i>bakkol</i>? That Esau did not rebel in Abraham's lifetime, that is to say, as long as Abraham lived Esau did not sin. Alternatively, the blessing of <i>bakkol</i> is that Ishmael repented in Abraham's lifetime. The Gemara explains: From where do we derive that Esau did not rebel in Abraham's lifetime? As it is written: “And Jacob was cooking a stew and Esau came in from the field and he was faint” (Genesis 25:29), and a baraita taught: On that day Abraham our forefather passed away, and Jacob our forefather prepared a lentil stew to comfort Isaac, his father, as it was customary to serve mourners lentil stew.</p>	<p>דָּבָר אַחֵר שֶׁלֹּא מֵרַד עָשׂוּ בְּיָמָיו דָּבָר אַחֵר שֶׁעָשָׂה יִשְׁמַעֲאֵל תְּשׁוּבָה בְּיָמָיו שֶׁלֹּא מֵרַד עָשׂוּ בְּיָמָיו מְנַלְן דְּכַתִּיב וַיָּבֵא עֲשׂוּ מִן הַשָּׂדֶה וְהוּא עָיִף וְתָנָא אוֹתוֹ הַיּוֹם נִפְטָר אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ וְעָשָׂה יַעֲקֹב אָבִינוּ תַּבְּשִׁיל שֶׁל עֲדָשִׁים לְנַחֵם אֶת יַצְחָק אָבִיו</p>
<p>The Gemara explains: And what is different about lentils that they in particular are the fare customarily offered to mourners? They say in the West, Eretz Yisrael, in the name of Rabba bar Mari: Just as this lentil has no mouth, i.e., it does not have a crack like other legumes, so too a mourner has no mouth, that is, his anguish prevents him from speaking. Alternatively, just as this lentil is completely round, so too mourning comes around to the inhabitants of the world. The</p>	<p>וּמֵאֵי שָׁנָא שֶׁל עֲדָשִׁים] אָמְרֵי בְּמַעְרְבָא מִשְׁמִיהָ דְּרַבָּה בְּרַ מְרִי מָה עֲדָשָׁה זֹו אֵין לָהּ פֶּה אִף אָבֵל אֵין לוֹ פֶּה דְּבָר אַחֵר מָה עֲדָשָׁה זֹו מְגוּלְגֵלֶת אִף אָבִילוֹת מְגוּלְגֵלֶת וּמְחַזְרֵת עַל בְּאֵי הָעוֹלָם מֵאֵי בִּינְיָהוּ אֵיכָא בִּינְיָהוּ לְנַחוּמֵי בְּבִיעֵי</p>

<p>Gemara asks: What is the practical difference between the two explanations? The Gemara answers: There is a practical difference between them with regard to whether it is appropriate to console a mourner with eggs, which have no opening but are not completely round.</p>	
<p>Rabbi Yoḥanan says: That wicked Esau committed five transgressions on that day that Abraham died: He engaged in sexual intercourse with a betrothed maiden, he killed a person, he denied the principle of God’s existence, he denied resurrection of the dead, and he despised the birthright.</p>	<p>אמר רבי יוחנן חמש עבירות עבר אותו רשע באותו היום בא על נערה מאורסה והרג את הנפש וכפר בעיקר וכפר בתחיית המתים וקטל את הבכורה</p>
<p>The Gemara cites proofs to support these charges. He engaged in sexual intercourse with a betrothed maiden, as it is written here: “And Esau came in from the field”; and it is written there with regard to rape of a betrothed maiden: “For he found her in a field” (Deuteronomy 22:27). He killed a person, as it is written here: “And he was faint”; and it is written there: “Woe is me, for my soul faints before the slayers” (Jeremiah 4:31). And he denied the principle of God’s existence, as it is written here: “What profit is this to me” (Genesis 25:32); and it is written there: “This is my God and I will glorify Him” (Exodus 15:2). When he questioned the profit of “this,” he was challenging the assertion that “this is my God.” And he denied resurrection of the dead, as it is written: “Behold, I am at the point of death” (Genesis 25:32), indicating that he did not believe in resurrection after death. And he despised the birthright, as it is written: “And Esau despised the birthright” (Genesis 25:34).</p>	<p>בא על נערה מאורסה פתיב הקא ויבא עשו מן השדה וכתיב התם כי בשדה מצאה הרג את הנפש פתיב הקא ענה וכתיב התם אוי נא לי כי עיפה נפשי להרגים וכפר בעיקר פתיב הקא למה זה לי וכתיב התם זה אלי ואנוהו וכפר בתחיית המתים דכתיב הנה אנכי הולך למות וקטל את הבכורה דכתיב ויבז עשו את הבכורה</p>

Source 6

B. Sanhedrin 59b

<p>If you wish, say that there is another explanation for the fact that the mitzva of circumcision does not apply to the descendants of Noah despite the fact that it was repeated for the Jewish people: From the</p>	<p>אי בעית אימא מילה מעיקר' לאברהם הוא דקא מזהר ליה רחמנא ואתה את בריתי תשמור אתה וזרעך אחריו לדורותם אתה וזרעך אין איניש אחרינא לא</p>
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<p>outset, it was Abraham, and not all the descendants of Noah, that the Merciful One commanded to perform this mitzva; as He said to him: “And as for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your offspring after you, throughout their generations” (Genesis 17:9). The Gemara infers: “You and your offspring,” yes; another person, no.</p>	
<p>The Gemara challenges: If that is so, the descendants of Ishmael should also be obligated to observe circumcision, as they are also the offspring of Abraham. The Gemara explains: The verse states: “For through Isaac, offspring shall be called yours” (Genesis 21:12), which means that Ishmael’s descendants are not called the offspring of Abraham.</p>	<p>אלא מעתה בני ישמעאל לחייבו (בראשית כא, יב) כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע</p>
<p>The Gemara challenges: Granted, Ishmael’s descendants are not considered the offspring of Abraham, but at least the descendants of Esau, Isaac’s son, should be obligated to observe circumcision. The Gemara explains: Since the term: “Through Isaac [<i>beYitzhak</i>],” also means: Of Isaac, it is derived that the mitzva applies to only some of Isaac’s offspring, but not all the descendants of Isaac. This serves to exclude the descendants of Esau.</p>	<p>בני עשו לחייבו ביצחק ולא כל יצחק</p>

APPENDIX: Related Sugyot of Interest

Source 1

B. Avodah Zarah 10b

<p>On another occasion, Antoninus said to Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi: Will I enter the World-to-Come? Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi said to him: Yes. Antoninus said to him: But isn’t it written: “And there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau” (Obadiah 1:18)? Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi answered: The verse is stated with regard to those who perform actions similar to those of the wicked Esau, not to people like you.</p>	<p>א"ל אתיבא לעלמא דאתי א"ל אין א"ל והכתיב (עובדיה א, יח) לא יהיה שריד לבית עשו בעושה מעשה עשו</p>
<p>This is also taught in a <i>baraita</i>: From the verse: “And there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau,” one might have thought that this applies to everyone</p>	<p>תניא נמי הכי לא יהיה שריד לבית עשו יכול לכל ת"ל לבית עשו בעושה מעשה עשו</p>

<p>descended from Esau, irrespective of an individual's actions. Therefore, the verse states: "Of the house of Esau," to indicate that the verse is stated only with regard to those who continue in the way of Esau, and perform actions similar to those of Esau.</p>	
<p>Antoninus said to Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi: But isn't it written in the description of the netherworld: "There is Edom, her kings and all her leaders" (Ezekiel 32:29)? Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi said to him: The verse states: "Her kings," but not: All of her kings, and likewise it states: "All her leaders," but not: All of her officers. Some of them will merit the World-to-Come.</p>	<p>א"ל והכתיב (יחזקאל לב, כט) שמה אדום מלכיה וכל נשיאיה א"ל מלכיה ולא כל מלכיה כל נשיאיה ולא כל שריה</p>
<p>This is also taught in a <i>baraita</i>: The verse states: "Her kings," but not: All of her kings, and: "All her leaders," but not: All of her officers. The inference learned from the wording of the verse: "Her kings," but not: All of her kings, serves to exclude Antoninus the son of Asveirus; and the inference from the wording: "All her leaders," but not: All of her officers, serves to exclude the Roman officer Ketia, son of Shalom.</p>	<p>תניא נמי הכי מלכיה ולא כל מלכיה כל נשיאיה ולא כל שריה מלכיה ולא כל מלכיה פרט לאנטונינוס בן אסוירוס כל נשיאיה ולא כל שריה פרט לקטיעה בר שלום</p>

Source 2

B. Gittin 57b

<p>A Sage taught a <i>baraita</i> relating to this matter: Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram (see II Kings, chapter 5), was not a convert, as he did not accept all of the mitzvot, but rather he was a <i>ger toshav</i>, a gentile who resides in Eretz Israel and observes the seven Noahide mitzvot. Nebuzaradan, by contrast, was a convert, as explained previously.</p>	<p>תנא נעמן גר תושב היה נבוזראדן גר צדק היה</p>
<p>The Gemara adds that some of Haman's descendants studied Torah in Bnei Brak, and some of Sisera's descendants taught children Torah in Jerusalem, and some of Sennacherib's descendants taught Torah in public. Who are they? They are Shemaya and Avtalyon, the teachers of Hillel the Elder.</p>	<p>מבני בניו של המן למדו תורה בבני ברק מבני בניו של סיסרא למדו תינוקות בירושלים מבני בניו של סנחריב למדו תורה ברבים מאן אינון שמעיה ואבטליון</p>
<p>As for the incident involving the blood of Zechariah, this is alluded to by that which is</p>	<p>היינו דכתיב (יחזקאל כד, ח) נתתי את דמה על צחיה סלע לבלתי הכסות</p>

<p>written: “I have set her blood upon the bare rock that it should not be covered” (Ezekiel 24:8).</p>	
<p>Apropos its discussion of the destruction of the Temple and the calamities that befell Israel, the Gemara cites the verse: “The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau” (Genesis 27:22), which the Sages expounded as follows: “The voice”; this is the cry stirred up by the emperor Hadrian, who caused the Jewish people to cry out when he killed six hundred thousand on six hundred thousand in Alexandria of Egypt, twice the number of men who left Egypt. “The voice of Jacob”; this is the cry aroused by the emperor Vespasian, who killed four million people in the city of Beitar. And some say: He killed forty million people. “And the hands are the hands of Esau”; this is the wicked kingdom of Rome that destroyed our Temple, burned our Sanctuary, and exiled us from our land.</p>	<p>בראשית כז, כב) הקול קול יעקב והידים ידי עשו הקול (זה אדריינוס קיסר שהרג באלכסנדריא של מצרים ששים רבוא על ששים רבוא כפלים כיוצאי מצרים קול יעקב זה אספסיינוס קיסר שהרג בכרך ביתר ארבע מאות רבוא ואמרי לה ארבעת אלפים רבוא והידים ידי עשו זו מלכות הרשעה שהחריבה את בתינו ושרפה את היכלנו והגליתנו §מארצנו</p>
<p>Alternatively, “the voice is the voice of Jacob” means that no prayer is effective in the world unless some member of the seed of Jacob has a part in it. The second clause in the verse, “and the hands are the hands of Esau,” means that no war grants victory unless some member of the seed of Esau has a part in it.</p>	<p>דבר אחר הקול קול יעקב אין לך תפלה שמועלת שאין בה מזרעו של יעקב והידים ידי עשו אין לך מלחמה שנוצחת שאין בה מזרעו של עשו</p>
<p>And this is what Rabbi Elazar says: The verse that says: “You shall be hid from the scourge of the tongue” (Job 5:21), means: You shall need to hide on account of quarrels provoked by the tongue. Rav Yehuda says that Rav says: What is the meaning of that which is written: “By the rivers of Babylonia, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion” (Psalms 137:1)? This teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, showed David the destruction of the First Temple and the destruction of the Second Temple. He saw the destruction of the First Temple, as it is stated: “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept.” He saw the destruction</p>	<p>והיינו דא"ר אלעזר (איוב ה, כא) בשוט לשון תחבא בחירחורי לשון תחבא אמר רב יהודה אמר רב מאי דכתיב (תהלים קלז, א) על נהרות בבל שם ישבנו גם בכינו בזכרנו את ציון מלמד שהראהו הקב"ה לרוד חורבן בית ראשון וחורבן בית שני חורבן בית ראשון שנאמר על נהרות בבל שם ישבנו גם בכינו בית שני דכתיב (תהלים קלז, ז) זכור ה' לבני אדם את יום ירושלים האומרים ערו ערו עד היסוד בה</p>

of the **Second Temple**, as it is written later in that same psalm: **“Remember, O Lord, against the children of Edom the day of Jerusalem, when they said: Raze it, raze it, to its very foundation”** (Psalms 137:7), as the Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans, “the children of Edom.”