YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**On Being Chosen:**

**A Philosophical Investigation into the Election of the Jewish People**

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**Shiur #06: The Seven Nations**

If you read the laws of war as they are presented in Deuteronomy, one thing is clear: the indigenous nations of the land of Israel are to be treated differently from potential enemies that lie further afield.

When you approach a town to attack it, you shall offer it terms of peace. If it responds peaceably and lets you in, all the people present there shall serve you at forced labor.[[1]](#footnote-1) If it does not surrender to you, but would join battle with you, you shall lay siege to it; and when the Lord your God delivers it into your hand, you shall put all its males to the sword. You may, however, take as your booty the women, the children, the livestock, and everything in the town – all its spoil – and benefit from the use of the spoil of your enemy, which the Lord your God gives you. Thus you shall deal with all towns that lie very far from you, towns that do not belong to nations hereabout. In the towns of the latter peoples, however, which the Lord your God is giving you as a heritage, you shall not let a soul remain alive. No, you must utterly destroy them – the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites – as the Lord your God has commanded you, lest they lead you into doing all the abhorrent things that they have done for their gods and you stand guilty before the Lord your God.[[2]](#footnote-2)

There’s no way to dress this up or avoid the fact that it’s all despicably ugly. Indeed, warfare in the ancient world was always going to be very ugly. Conquered men of military age would routinely be put to the sword because otherwise, they would regroup to continue the war. There were no prisoners of war, nor were there Geneva conventions for their proper treatment and for future prisoner swaps. The women and children from faraway towns, defeated in war, would be taken as slaves. A simple reading of the text clearly implies the Torah has no moral problem with taking them as human chattel. But if the argument of lesson 4 was correct, then the deeper reason for God’s sanctioning these ancient mores was the very same reason for which pagan slaves couldn’t, at that time, have been freed: because freeing them would have required absorbing massive numbers of pagans, who embraced human sacrifice and other horrendous cultural practices, into the wider population at the very time when Jewish culture was trying to establish itself as an alternative to those ways of life. To force them to convert was not an option either, as also discussed with regard to slavery, because conversion shouldn’t be forced.

Remember too that the Torah included laws about what one could and couldn’t do with one’s slaves, which this paragraph, in isolation, might obscure. Additionally, we should note that Jewish soldiers would never besiege a town from all four sides. At least when fighting an enemy not from the list of seven nations, a Jewish army would always leave an escape route for those who didn’t want to fight, and for non-combatants to flee.[[3]](#footnote-3) Moreover, all of this would only occur if terms for surrender had been refused.

The situation with the local nations, described in the second half of the above passage, was clearly much worse. But here, a number of thorny issues of interpretation arise. In how many ways is the wartime treatment of close-by and faraway nations to differ? The clear difference is that, in faraway towns, women and children would be *spared*, whilst in the towns of the seven nations, they would not. But is the prior call for peace (or, if you prefer, call it a call for surrender) extended to *all*, or just to the faraway towns? In other words, are the towns that belong to the seven indigenous nations of Canaan offered terms of surrender *before* their towns are invaded and their people put to the sword? The text could be read both ways. Rashi claims that towns belonging to the seven nations are *not* offered terms for surrender.[[4]](#footnote-4) This is an option that, as far as he’s concerned, is offered only to faraway enemies. But the Rambam and the Ramban disagree with Rashi’s position.[[5]](#footnote-5)

One piece of evidence, offered by the Ramban, is that Moses offers peace terms to Sihon, who was an Amorite king living just outside of the land of Israel. He belonged to one of the seven nations, and his territory cannot plausibly be described as “far away” from the land of Israel. If there was a commandment to annihilate these local enemy nations, why did Moses offer Sihon terms of surrender? So strong is this consideration that some have even sought to read Rashi as suggesting that we *should* offer the seven nations terms of surrender, but only *before* we cross over the Jordan and enter the land;[[6]](#footnote-6) from that point on, they can be given no second chance to accept our offer.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Let us not forget, too, that Proverbs describes the Torah in the following terms: “All of her ways are pleasant, and all of her paths are peace.”[[8]](#footnote-8) Surely, this understanding of the essence of Torah lends support to the Rambam and Ramban. Our reading of any given portion of the Torah should be affected by the narrative frame of the Bible as a whole, and by passages elsewhere. I would suggest that the Rambam and the Ramban are, as is appropriate, allowing the rest of the Bible to affect their reading of this passage, which could otherwise be read in more than one way.

What about the law according to which we don’t surround a city on all sides? Does that law apply also to the cities of the seven nations? According to the Rambam, it does.[[9]](#footnote-9) Therefore, for Maimonides, and gruesome though it still may be, the only slaying the Torah mandates here is for those living within cities that belong to these seven nations, who refused terms of surrender and didn’t take the opportunity to flee during the ensuing siege.

**What really happened?**

The Biblical and archaeological evidence suggests that the more moderate reading of the Rambam and the Ramban was closer than the more aggressive understanding of Rashi to the policy of ancient Israel. As Reuven Kimelman notes, “The archaeological record confirms that Israel primarily settled in previously unoccupied territory.”[[10]](#footnote-10) There is no trace of a slew of burnt or otherwise destroyed Canaanite remains, upon which new Israelite settlements were built.

In the book of Judges, an angel of the Lord criticizes the Jews not merely for making covenants with members of the seven nations (which, after all, may have been allowed), but for refusing to tear down their altars (which suggests that our terms for surrender hadn’t been sufficiently stringent).[[11]](#footnote-11) And then, even at the height of Israelite power, under the reign of Solomon, we’re told that the remaining “Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites” were pressed into service in the king’s various building projects. As the Ramban points out, if Solomon was powerful enough to press these people into his service, presumably he was powerful enough to wipe them out.[[12]](#footnote-12) But he didn’t. There was no expectation that he should. And there seems to have been no criticism levelled against him for this state of affairs.

God promised, in the books of Exodus and Leviticus, that He would, *gradually*, push the seven nations out of the land.[[13]](#footnote-13) The idea that we had a mandate to expedite this Divine promise, with violence, is the consequence of just one possible reading of Deuteronomy, and it doesn’t match the ways in which the Jews later behaved. Later Jewish practice suggests that the more peaceful readings of the Rambam and the Ramban were how Deuteronomy had been understood.

**The nature of the problem**

We must take note of the fact that God’s problem with these nations wasn’t racial. His disdain was explicitly aimed at their culture, and how they act. There was a constant and justified fear that our culture would assimilate into theirs.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Likewise, when members of certain other nations were forbidden from converting to Judaism, the fear wasn’t a matter of race but of a negative *cultural* influence. The proof for this claim is twofold. First: Given the patriarchal nature of the ancient world, there was less fear of women controlling the cultural affiliation of the family than the male head of the household. For that reason, when nations were proscribed from converting to Judaism, the ban was understood only to apply to men, and not to women – hence Ruth, the Biblical prototype for conversion, and an ancestor to King David, was a member of a “forbidden” nation. The problem wasn’t *racial*. Second: After the regional conquest of Sennacherib, who forcibly mixed up populations to disrupt the chance of rebellion, the Rabbis were happy to accept even male converts who claimed to descend from any of the proscribed nations.[[15]](#footnote-15) The matter of their *racial* identity was of no consequence. Once these nations had been undermined as *cultural* forces, by Sennacherib, any Biblical prohibition on their entering into the Jewish people was understood to have lost its force.[[16]](#footnote-16)

We are told that the seven nations “perform for their gods every abhorrent act that the Lord detests; they even offer up their sons and daughters in fire to their gods.”[[17]](#footnote-17) We must note two things about this observation. The first, again, is that God’s hatred is for how these people *act*. The project was to create a new culture in a sea of human-sacrificing paganism, a culture that would respect the sanctity of life. Paradoxically, it might have been the case that a certain amount of bloodshed was necessary to create the space for such a new culture to take root. Second, if God hated these people and wanted their deaths as an end in itself, then why would He hate them killing their children? Wouldn’t that be a good thing? Isn’t that what He wants us to do to their children too? The intimation is that, on the contrary, he cares for their children. He cares for all children. But he wants us to create a society in which care for children becomes the norm, and He knows that if we don’t subjugate these people to our terms – brutal though such subjugation may be – they will remain the dominant cultural force in the area, to the detriment of everybody’s children.

**The Book of Joshua**

One more question you could ask is this: What about the book of Joshua? Jews may have lived alongside the seven nations throughout the first commonwealth (roughly, 1250-586 BCE). But surely, at the very beginning of our tenure in the land of Israel, in the book of Joshua, there was a concerted effort to annihilate them all, just as one might think we had been mandated to do in the book of Deuteronomy. Isn’t the book of Joshua the document of a rampage in which we try to slaughter all the inhabitants of the land? (Other than the wily Gibeonites, who somehow manage to hoodwink us into a peace treaty.)

The book of Joshua is a strange book. It presents its readers with a clear and palpable contradiction. In fact, it’s almost as if it were formed by two contrary books rolled into one. As Rabbi Amnon Bazak puts it: “Had the book of Joshua been composed only of its first twelve chapters, it would have left the impression of a ‘uniform military conquest,’ with a string of victories and the complete annihilation of the Canaanites.”[[18]](#footnote-18) But then, as he points out, “The text goes on to paint a very different picture.”[[19]](#footnote-19) Chapter 13 begins with God saying to Joshua, “You are old and advanced in age, yet there remains much of the land still to be possessed.”[[20]](#footnote-20) Then we’re presented with a list of the places that remain. This becomes a recurring theme in the remainder of the book, as the verses detail which bits of land were inherited by which tribes; “the text mentions again and again the places not yet conquered (Josh. 15:63; 16:10; 17:12-13).”[[21]](#footnote-21) And, as we mentioned, the beginning of the book of Judges, after the death of Joshua, speaks of the fact that Canaanite religions were still being practiced by the many people with whom the Jews had made peace – though it appeared from the first half of Joshua that they were not making peace with anyone.

Of course, when a book wears such obvious contradiction on its sleeve, the source critic will understandably suggest multiple authors, whose multiple texts were stitched together. But that line of argument is somewhat unimaginative, given how obvious the tension is here, with its glaring fault-line after the first 12 chapters. This is too badly stitched together to appear as if any effort was made to reconcile conflicting traditions in a single book. Rav Bazak relates to this contradiction as an ingenious literary device of a single author. As he sees things:

[T]he two descriptions of the conquest in Joshua express two aspects of the conquest of the land. One depicts the ideal picture – a uniform continuous military conquest, representing God’s willingness to give the land to the Children of Israel, and crediting Joshua, God’s servant, with the entire process. The other shows the objective reality in which the process of conquering lasted several years; apparently, the children of Israel were in no rush to take on the challenges awaiting them.[[22]](#footnote-22)

We might even add that the ideal would have been for the nations to all capitulate and surrender, on our terms, renouncing their evil ways. But by describing possible conquest, the text is illustrating the extent to which God would have had our back, if we had tried to impose our terms and if they had rejected those overtures.

The point we have to take away is this: the book of Joshua, understood as a piece of literature, is not pretending to be an accurate history. It describes how things were, alongside how things could have been, not making clear which is which, for literary and religious purposes. So, we shouldn’t take its early description of a rapid and violent conquest as historical gospel.

Moreover, even if we do attempt to relate to Joshua as an accurate history, Reuven Kimelman makes an important point. In the 10th chapter of Joshua, we’re told that Joshua destroyed the people of Gezer,[[23]](#footnote-23) but it’s later clear that the Canaanites of Gezer remain,[[24]](#footnote-24) and remained until after the reign of Solomon, when a Pharaoh finished them off.[[25]](#footnote-25) Taking this all as historically accurate, we can only conclude, with Kimelman that, “once the people [of Gezer] were defanged by having its army destroyed, they were given quarter. As a subject nation they apparently present no religious threat.”[[26]](#footnote-26)

If there was no obligation to kill these people, then why did the Gibeonites go to such lengths to convince us that they had come from far away – that they belonged to some other nation? The Ramban raises this question, and writes:

Know that the matter of the Gibeonites came to pass because they did not know the law of Israel with respect to proclaiming peace, and therefore they put forward their plan, before Joshua’s proclamation arrived. Hence, they said, “and we were sore afraid for our lives.” Or it may be that at first they did not wish to hearken to Joshua’s offer [thus laying themselves open to invasion], and in the end, they became frightened [having initially refused terms of surrender] and disguised themselves as strangers [from a faraway land].[[27]](#footnote-27)

Moreover, their trickery, according to the Ramban, didn’t really win them more than they would have gotten had they merely accepted terms without the trickery. On the one hand, our treaty with them meant that we were obligated to defend them if they ever came under attack by foreign forces (which wouldn’t have been the case without their trickery). But in virtue of their trickery, Joshua cursed them, confining them only to very lowly forms of employment. This gave them the sort of subservience to which the seven nations were supposed to be subjected, if they accepted peace. Why subject any of them? Because the whole project was to subdue the culture of Canaan, despite its regional dominance. This subjugation, distasteful as it may have seemed, was aimed at subduing a culture that was hellbent on the ravages of slavery, as practiced outside of Israel, and that celebrated both human sacrifice and forced prostitution in their pagan rites.

**The Midianites**

Having discussed Amalek and the seven nations, there is one more nation we fought, whom we must discuss. Towards the very end of Moses’s life, we read the following:

And the Lord spoke to Moses saying, “Execute the vengeance of the children of Israel on the Midianites; afterwards you shall be gathered to your people.” And Moses spoke to the people, saying, “Arm from yourselves men for the army, and let them go against Midian and avenge the Lord on Midian… And they warred against Midian, as the Lord commanded Moses, and they slew all the males… And Moses was angry with the officers of the host, the captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds, who came from the battle. And Moses said to them, “Have you saved all the women alive?!”[[28]](#footnote-28)

Moses had those women, and even the male children, put to the sword. I have said already that, in the ancient world, men of military age would be put to the sword because otherwise they would regroup to continue the war. We should assume that in the modern world, which respects rules of war, such frightful behavior would never be sanctioned by God. But even if the killing of military-aged men was an uncomfortable but necessary accommodation to the brutal realties of the ancient world, how could Moses be angry with them – in this instance – for sparing the women and the male children? The question is a strong one, but three considerations help to blunt its force.

The first is that the only people left in the city – men, women, and children – were the ones who hadn’t taken the opportunity to escape via the humanitarian corridor that Israelite armies were obligated to provide to cities under siege. Indeed, that very obligation is learned from the war with Midian.[[29]](#footnote-29) With this in mind, it becomes plausible that the children (at least the male children) who remained in the city were in fact combatants themselves.[[30]](#footnote-30)

The second fact to keep in mind is that the women of Midian were particularly active in their nation’s attempt to ensnare the Jewish people. The non-Jewish prophet, Balaam, had advised the Midianites to tempt Jewish men into marrying Midianite women, who would then entice their Jewish husbands to worship the idols of Baal Peor.[[31]](#footnote-31) If the Israelites would abandon their God, and assimilate into the Midianite people, then – they hoped – the Jews would no longer be an independent nation to fear. A whole force of Midianite women was conscripted into this plot. This was perhaps the first attempt in history to force a people to assimilate. Presumably, then, the women who chose to remain – to face the Israelite armies, and to surrender into their hands – would have been not merely complicit in the plot, but still committed to the cause of ingratiating themselves into Jewish homes for the purpose of derailing Jewish commitment to God. These were, after all, the committed remnant who hadn’t chosen to flee. Only those women that Moses could be sure had not been involved in the earlier seduction of Israelites would be spared.[[32]](#footnote-32)

The final factor to consider is that the Torah itself seems somehow uncomfortable with the fact that this war had to take place. God commanded it – and God has access to considerations above our comprehension – so it must be done. But notice that God describes it as taking vengeance on behalf of Israel,[[33]](#footnote-33) whereas Moses describes it as taking vengeance on behalf of God.[[34]](#footnote-34) It’s as if neither party wants to claim the vengeance for themselves. Taking vengeance for *oneself* – it seems – is no virtue. Notice also that Moses is told that as soon as he complies with this commandment, he will die.[[35]](#footnote-35) Is that something we should want?

Admittedly, many commentators think that God was giving Moses a gift in enabling him to see, and to take joy in, vengeance enacted before he died.[[36]](#footnote-36) But we might equally read the story through the prism of Rabbi Lichtenstein’s take on Saul and Amalek, from last week’s lesson. R. Lichtenstein argues that when God unequivocally commands the unthinkable, one must do it, trusting that God knows best, but one must not take any joy whatsoever in the act of killing itself.[[37]](#footnote-37) One must be motivated, at such times, exclusively by the fact that God Himself has commanded you. In that light, one might argue that by tying this war to Moses’ own death, God was protecting Moses and his flock from any trace of the human incentive to take joy in vengeance.[[38]](#footnote-38)

Putting these considerations together, the episode with Midian is still “morally frightful” – to echo the words of R. Lichtenstein.[[39]](#footnote-39) Moreover, I can think of no reason why the Jews themselves had to be a vehicle for this violence – why didn’t God just do it Himself, as He did to the Egyptians? But it *is* conceivable that such morally frightful acts, whether performed by God or by man, would have been the only way to ensure the project of building a new nation, even one committed to ethical monotheism, in the face of all sorts of mortal threats. And this, only by the direct word of God, in an already morally frightful world of human-sacrificing paganism.

**Conclusions**

I know that throughout this and the previous lesson it seems as if I’ve been squirming in order to bring the gory details of the Hebrew Bible into closer alignment with my own liberal values. But in response to that accusation, I want to raise a question – and I believe that it’s such a difficult question that no knee-jerk response, in either direction, should be relied upon. It’s a question that deserves real soul searching. The question is this: Am I squirming in order to make the Bible fit my values, or is the Bible itself doing the squirming? The Bible’s narrative frame espouses glorious values of universal peace and justice, but throughout its middle, it has to try to realize these values in a brutal and primitive age. How could there *not* be squirming? What I’ve sought to show is that even the ugliest parts of the Bible’s accommodation to ancient times don’t force us to conclude that God is racist, or that He longs for genocide. The messy middle of the process really can be made to fit, despite the evident discomfort, within the narrative frame that the Bible provides us.

We can’t forget, when reading the difficult texts that we’ve confronted over the last few lessons, that the God described in those texts is the same God who rebukes Jonah for not caring about the fate of the Gentile city of Nineveh; the same God who would have spared even the wicked people of Sodom and Gomorra, if only there had been a sufficient number of righteous people there to make room for the possibility of steering their culture in a better direction. We can’t forget, when reading its difficult texts, that, according to Proverbs, the Torah only includes ways of pleasantness, and all of its ways are peace.[[40]](#footnote-40) We must never ignore the narrative frame within which the entire Bible unfolds. Though it may seem like my readings of difficult texts have been somewhat contorted, it is the Bible itself that motivates such contortions.

I originally wrote this lesson before the current war with Hamas began. The issues of military ethics, and our relationship with other nations, have been particularly salient for Jewish thinkers since the re-establishment of Jewish sovereignty in the holy land. Ever since we regained our independence, we have had to face excruciatingly difficult decisions and obstacles. So many of our neighbors have doggedly refused to see a future in which we might live in peace among them. Indeed, we have never been far away from a state of war. But now that our country is actually at war, the theoretical discussion of these issues suddenly becomes personal and pressing.

The pogrom that we suffered on the 7th of October is horrifying evidence of the hatred that is pitched against us, and of the imperative to never let down our guard. The vaunted Biblical principles of justice and humanitarianism shouldn’t come at the expense of our safety, or encourage us into a naïve nonchalance about the threats that we face. Right now, we have a war to fight. But should we care, even as we fight our just war, for the innocent civilians caught up in Gaza? Should we care about the children and the babies?

It is sometimes said that in such trying times, we should jettison the liberal values that we picked up in the Diaspora and return to the ethics of the Bible; we should simply assert ourselves, as we did in the days of Joshua. To advocate for this approach, however, is to misunderstand the ethics of the Bible. It is to mistake the messy middle of the book, in which a vision slowly comes to be manifest on earth, for the glorious vision itself, which is all about the flourishing of all human beings. And, as we’ve seen, it is to perhaps misunderstand the book of Joshua itself.

According to Rabbi Sacks, the entire reason the Jewish people had to be “born in exile, forged in slavery, and made to suffer brutal oppression,”[[41]](#footnote-41) was to teach us a crucial lesson. What you suffered, the Torah wants to tell us, is precisely what you should not inflict on others.

You have been victims, therefore you may not be oppressors. You have been murdered, therefore do not join the ranks of the murderers. Until we have understood this we have not understood Judaism, however religious we are.[[42]](#footnote-42)

To lose our sensibility for the suffering of innocent people, even in times of war, is to ignore a central Jewish message. Rabbi Sacks continued:

We spill drops of wine [during the Seder service] at the mention of the plagues as symbolic tears for their Egyptian victims... This is not ‘*galut* mentality’, nor is it the ethic of a timorous minority. It is Judaism plain and simple.[[43]](#footnote-43)

This is what I've tried to illustrate in our exploration of the values that underlie the Bible. These values are also made salient by our history as a people. In Rabbi Sacks’s powerful words, “we did not survive two thousand years of powerlessness in order to become brutalised by power. We did not outlive our enemies so that we could become like them.” Our enemies don't care about the lives of innocent men, women, and children – even their own. But our history, and the narrative frame of the Bible, calls upon us to be different. Indeed, that is why the IDF goes to great lengths to protect innocent civilians from harm.

Even as we fight with all of our might against the forces of evil, we must not allow our hearts to become unfeeling for the human tragedy that Hamas, by starting this war, and its use of human shields, has brought down upon the people of Gaza. This is part of what makes us the people of the Torah. We will not lose our compassion, even as we continue to reel from the pain that has been cruelly inflicted upon us, and as our soldiers continue to face unspeakable danger.

We must obviously defend our lives and liberty, with as much force and tenacity as is necessary. Our soldiers are fighting a just and brave war. But if, as I shall argue in future installments of this series, we were chosen to be servant-leaders of the world, then the desire to simply and unconcernedly assert ourselves militarily cannot really be the voice of Torah. It can only be the voice of Amalek – the will to power – within us, against which we must battle for all time. To fight the voice of Amalek within us, we need to articulate a more inspiring alternative – the power of the book over the power of the sword. To celebrate military might, rather than to see it for the necessary evil that it is, is to succumb to the sin of Saul, and to forget the Divine dream of turning our swords into ploughshares.

1. Although it’s important to note that if they accepted terms, they don’t become slaves in the technical sense. Rather, they can be conscripted into labor, but are paid for their work (*Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Kings and Wars, 6:1). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Deuteronomy 20:10-18. Attentive readers will notice that only six nations are listed here, rather than seven. The missing nation is the Girgashites, who do appear in other lists of the nations, apparently to be wiped out. See, for example, Exodus 33:2 and Deuteronomy 7:1. Rashi, on our excerpt from Deuteronomy 20, argues that the Girgashites are included by the words, “as the Lord your God has commanded you,” which alludes to these other lists. There is however a tradition that the Girgashites fled the land of Israel in order to avoid the incoming Israelites (see *Vayikra Rabba* 17:6). One might wonder whether their omission from Deuteronomy 20:17 was among the background motivations for this tradition. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This law is derived by Rabbinic tradition, from its reading of Numbers 31:7 – see *Mishneh Torah*, Kings and War, 6:7. Nachmanides goes so far as to include this as one of the 613 commandments of the Torah (*Hasagot Ha-Ramban al Sefer Ha-mitzvot* – Positive Commandments omitted by the Rambam, 5). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Rashi, Deuteronomy 20:10, s.v. *ki tikrav el ir*. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Mishneh Torah*, Kings and Wars 6:1, and Ramban on Deuteronomy 20:10, s.v. *ki tikrav el ir* *le-hilachem aleha*. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. That is to say, messengers should be sent over the river, with messages detailing terms of surrender, before the Israelites crossed over *en masse*. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Lechem Mishneh*, Kings and Wars 6:1, s.v. *echad milchemet ha-reshut*. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Proverbs 3:17. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. This is the implication of Kings and Wars 6:7, though it’s an implication that the Radbaz was unwilling to accept. See Radbaz, loc. cit., s.v. *ke-shetzarin al ir le-tafsah*. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Reuven Kimelman, “Israel’s Election and the Moral Dilemma of Amalek,” in Alon Goshen-Gottstein (ed), *Judaism’s Challenge: Election, Divine Love, and Human Enmity* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2020), 143-173, p. 165. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Judges 2:1-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ramban on Deuteronomy, ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Exodus 23:27-30 and Leviticus 18:24-25. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Exodus 34:12-16 and Leviticus 18:26-30. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See BT *Berakhot* 28a; *Mishneh Torah*, Forbidden Intercourse 12:25; and *Shulchan Arukh*, Even-HaEzer 4:10. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. My suggestion is that the reason people claiming such descent can become Jewish is not primarily because we don't believe them about the facts of their ancestry. Instead, the fact that we can’t be sure about their ancestry is proof positive that the culture no longer has the negative power it once had. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Deuteronomy 12:31. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Rabbi Amnon Bazak, *To This Very Day: Fundamental Questions in Bible Study* (Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2020), p. 272. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Joshua 13:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. *To This Very Day*, p. 273. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Ibid., p, 275. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Joshua 10:33. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Joshua 16:10, and Judges 1:29. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. I Kings 9:16. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. “Israel’s Election,” p. 163. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Ramban on Deuteronomy 20:11, s.v. *la-mas va-avadukha*. See also *Mishneh Torah*, Kings and Wars, 6:5, quoted by Ramban. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Numbers 31:1-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. See *Mishneh Torah* Kings and Wars 6:7, which is derived from Numbers 31:7. The verse implies that we were commanded to besiege the Midianites in a certain *way*. The Rabbis received a tradition that this *way* was to always leave an escape route for citizens under siege. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. We might infer this from the fact that Moses didn’t spare them, Numbers 31:17. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Numbers 31:16. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Numbers 31:18. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Numbers 31:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Numbers 31:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. This created a clear incentive for Moses to delay in complying with the command. See *Bamidbar* *Rabba* 22:2: “Rabbi Judah said, “If Moses had wanted to live for several [more] years, he could have remained alive; as the Holy One, blessed be He, had made his death dependent upon the vengeance against Midian.” [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. See, for example, Ramban to Numbers 31:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, “Being *Frum* and Being Good: On the Relationship Between Religion and Morality,” in *By His Light: Character and Values in the Service of God* (Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2016), 89-116, pp. 110-111. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. I owe this thought to Rabbi Herzl Hefter. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Proverbs 3:17. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, “Chief Rabbi’s Notebook,” *Le’ela* (September 1994), pp. 2-5, p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)