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 #13: Israel, a Nation Among Nations**

We are nearing the end of the first phase of this project. The task, so far, has been to accumulate and impose some order upon the relevant Biblical data for a theory of the Jewish election. The next phase will be to accumulate the Rabbinic data, from the Talmud and Midrash. Only then can we start to articulate a well-informed doctrine of the election, consonant with the weight of the tradition. In next week’s lesson, I will summarize our progress to that point. First, in this week’s lesson, I gather some final miscellaneous clusters of data. This data can be loosely organized around the theme of Israel’s relationship with other nations.

**Jews and Gentiles at the End of Days**

Given the narrative frame of the Bible, which we explored in lessons 2 and 3, the election of Israel has to sit within a wider story about God’s relationship with all of humanity; a relationship in which God seeks the good of all people through the creation of a social environment that allows for the flourishing of each individual within their families and communities. A question then emerges: if Israel’s job is somehow to bring that state of affairs about, will they have any distinctive role to play once they have succeeded?

Some verses imply that Jews and Judaism will continue to play a special role in the end of days, mediating God’s blessings and His Torah to the world.[[1]](#footnote-1) The Jews will continue to be Jewish, Judaism will have a decisive influence over the world, and gentiles, notwithstanding this influence, will continue to be gentiles.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Other verses, in contrast, imply that there won’t be any distinctive job for the Jews to play in the end of days. Instead, it seems as if all peoples will merge *into* the Jewish people. According to Isaiah, “the Lord shall take priests and Levites even from the nations.”[[3]](#footnote-3) The Psalmist says that “Yes, even Philistines, people of Tyre, and Cush will say that they are born of Zion.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Everyone will say they’re Jewish. And perhaps they will be. But if everyone is Jewish, then there’s a sense in which nobody is, because there will be nothing distinctive about Jewishness.

In those days, “The Lord of Hosts will make on this mountain, for all the peoples, a banquet of rich viands, a banquet of choice wines, of rich viands seasoned with marrow, of choice wines well refined.”[[5]](#footnote-5) This seems to outstrip even the feast that the elders of Israel enjoyed, in the presence of God, to celebrate the covenant at Mount Sinai.[[6]](#footnote-6) At this festive meal, there is no distinction between elders and anyone else, nor between Jew and gentile. The very next verse, opaque as its meaning may be, seems to indicate that the veils that divided the nations from one another, and from God, will be removed on that day.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Admittedly, some commentators present very different readings. Playing with the words there, Rashi says it will be a feast of fats that turns into a feast of dregs,[[8]](#footnote-8) as the nations realize their shame. Radak says the veil removed from the nations is the cover that had, until that day, been protecting them from punishment.[[9]](#footnote-9) But despite these commentaries, it’s hard to ignore the simple meaning of the verses, describing a feast for all peoples and the dissolution, before God, of all the distinctions that used to divide them.

Running with the simple meaning of these verses, it’s clear that the Bible in some places dials down the extent to which divisions between Jews and gentiles will remain in force. And yet, there are plenty of verses that seem to revel in the notion that the nations will be broken, cast out, and shamed, in Zion, in the end of days.[[10]](#footnote-10) Indeed, there are verses that eagerly foresee gentile servitude to Jews in the eschaton.[[11]](#footnote-11) God will go so far as to sacrifice the well-being of other nations, to protect His beloved Israel:

For I the Lord am your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as a ransom for you, Nubia and Saba in exchange for you. Because you are precious to Me, and honored, and I love you, I give men in exchange for you and peoples in your stead.[[12]](#footnote-12)

So much for Isaiah’s earlier universalism! Joel Kaminsky notes, regarding the book of Isaiah:

At times the text contains seemingly contradictory exclamations right next to one another. In Isa 45:22, for example, [God] proclaims: “Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth!” However, the very next verses announce that the whole world not only submits to God, but that the nations who are responsible for Israel’s low state will be shamed while Israel triumphs (Isa 45:23-25). In Isa 49:23, foreign kings and queens are described as licking the dust of the former exiles’ feet, while in Isa 49:26 the oppressors of Israel are made to eat their own flesh and drink their own blood. Clearly, 2nd Isaiah sees the nations as subservient to Israel as well as to God, but in a manner that seems incompatible with the notion that foreigners and Israelites should benefit equally from [God]’s saving acts…[[13]](#footnote-13)

A similar conflict can be found in the book of Zechariah. In one and the same chapter, he speaks triumphantly of the nations being smashed to pieces[[14]](#footnote-14) and of the survivors of those nations making an annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem.[[15]](#footnote-15) What is our desire for the nations of the world; that they be destroyed, or that they be absorbed into the religion of the Jews?

Despite the internal tension in the book of Isaiah, he does seem unequivocal when he says, “Just as the new heavens and the new earth that I make stand before me – says the Lord – so will your offspring and your name stand.”[[16]](#footnote-16) That is to say: the Jewish people will exist forever. Similarly, Jeremiah writes:

Thus says the Lord who made the sun as daylight, the laws of the moon and the stars as nightlight… If these laws [i.e., these laws of nature] should ever be removed from before Me, only then will the offspring of Israel cease to be a people for all time.[[17]](#footnote-17)

But why? If the Jews fulfil their eschatological mission, whatever that might be, what’s the *point* of their continued existence?

To summarize what we’ve seen so far: some verses in the various books of the prophets hint that the distinction between Jews and gentiles will disappear, and some insist that Israel’s identity as a distinct nation will survive all the way through the eschaton, until the very end of the world. Some might put this down to a simple disagreement between the prophets. But if all the words of the prophets are true, as Orthodox Judaism insists, then we’ll have to find some way to reconcile these conflicting perspectives. Moreover, as we’ve seen with Isaiah and Zechariah, the conflict isn’t only between verses found in different prophetic books, but between verses that sit together in the very same books.

The various tensions here are related to those we saw last week between verses that present God’s relationship with Israel as *exclusive* and those that present it as just one special relationship among many. A philosophically and theologically adequate articulation of the doctrine of the election, guided by the principles laid down in our very first lesson, will have to smooth over these tensions, in ways that are consistent with God’s goodness and perfection.

**Jews and Gentiles Before the End of Days**

The Bible doesn’t merely present conflicting pictures of the end of days. It also presents conflicting, or at least ambiguous, roadmaps for how we’re supposed to get there. A major feature of the Genesis model of the election is that the Jewish people should bring blessing unto all the families of the earth. They are to be a vehicle for the redemption of the world. We also explained Abram’s name change, to Abraham, in terms of his being some sort of example or role model to others.[[18]](#footnote-18) How is this supposed to work?

The phrase that most embodies this element of the election is Isaiah’s description of Israel as a light unto the nations. This image is found three times in the book of Isaiah. We’ll come to the first instance last. In the second instance, the image seems to describe Isaiah himself, rather than the people of Israel. It seems as if Isaiah’s light will function like a beacon to bring the scattered Israelites back home from the exile. In other words, Isaiah is to function as a light unto his own nation. Speaking about himself, he says:

And now the Lord has resolved – He who formed me in the womb to be His servant – to bring back Jacob to Himself, that Israel may be restored to Him. And I have been honored in the sight of the Lord. My God has been my strength. For He has said, “It is too little that you should be My servant in that I raise up the tribes of Jacob and restore the survivors of Israel: I will also make you a light of nations, that My salvation may reach the ends of the earth.”[[19]](#footnote-19)

The light of Isaiah’s example will find its way to all Jews in exile – even if they’ve been scattered to the ends of the earth – in order to lift up and restore the survivors of Israel.

In the third instance, Isaiah uses the image to refer to Israel, but in a way that seems to render her passive – like a lightbulb at the center of a room, which can illuminate pockets of darkness without moving. God says:

Hearken to Me, My people, and give ear to Me, O My nation, for Torah shall go forth from Me, My law, for the light of peoples. In a moment I will bring it.[[20]](#footnote-20)

The real source of the light here is God. It is from God that the teaching emanates. If Israel abides by His Torah, as the prophets tell us that they will one day (whether by free choice, or by virtue of the new hearts that God will have given them[[21]](#footnote-21)), then they *will* reflect God’s light far and wide. But there is no sense that God is calling the Jews to actively join Him in missionizing to the world. Presumably, if God’s nation abides by God’s law, then God’s light can emanate outwards even if His law-abiding nation decides to live in a self-imposed ghetto.[[22]](#footnote-22)

In the very *first* instance of the image, however, it does seem as if Israel are called upon, as a collective, to be *active*, in a mission to serve as a light unto the nations. God says:

I the Lord, in My grace, have summoned you, and I have grasped you by the hand. I created you, and appointed you a covenant people, a light of nations; to open eyes deprived of light, to rescue prisoners from confinement, from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.[[23]](#footnote-23)

There is still plenty of ambiguity here. Rashi’s reading of the end of this excerpt makes it sound as if God is once again speaking to Isaiah, rather than to Israel. The word “nations,” in his reading, refers to the twelve tribes of Israel. Isaiah will be a light unto them. He will help Israel to open their eyes to the errors of their ways, freeing them from the prison of sin. Alternatively, Rashi suggests, Isaiah will prophesy about the end of the Babylonian exile and thereby rescue the prisoners, confined in the exile, from their dark dungeons of despair, with the hope of salvation.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Unlike Rashi, Radak recognizes that the first verse here really is talking about the Jews being a light unto the *nations*, with their Torah observance setting an example to the world. That seems to be the simplest reading of the original words. In this connection, Radak refers to the role that the Messiah will play in actively teaching and instructing the nations. But when the words seem to suggest that, as a light unto the nations, Israel as a collective is called upon to reach out to those “nations” (presumably, gentiles) who languish in darkness, and seek to release them from their metaphorical prisons, Radak takes a step back. The people in prisons and darkness, according to Radak, are the Jews in exile – not the gentiles.

To provide some context for the Radak’s reading, remember that when the Jews returned from Babylon, to begin the second commonwealth and build the second temple, many of their brethren remained in Babylon. Perhaps their eyes were “deprived of light,” as they remained incarcerated in the almost self-imposed confinement of exile. On Radak’s reading, God is speaking to those of the Israelites who *will* return, who will have been “grasped by [God’s] hand” and will have reembraced their covenant. They will be a light unto the nations because they will observe the Torah – and, one day, their Messiah will teach the ways of Torah to the gentiles. As a people, they will also help to open the eyes of those Jews who were left behind in the exile. They will actively reach out to their exiled brethren. If anyone is active in reaching out to the *gentiles*, instructing *them*, it isn’t Israel as a collective. That isn’t their job. Not on the reading of the Radak, and certainly not on the reading of Rashi.

But as the Rabbis were wont to say, a verse does not depart from its simple meaning.[[25]](#footnote-25) The simple meaning of this, the very first, instance of the image of a light unto the nations, is that the people of Israel are being called upon to be *active* – not merely to set an example from a distance, but to release those, even among the gentiles, who are imprisoned by falsehood. But if that’s true, why do the classical commentaries seem so interested in diluting the extent to which this obligation is an active duty, incumbent upon the nation as a whole? And if this is the entire purpose, or even if it’s only one among many of the primary purposes, of God’s calling upon us to be a nation in His service, then why isn’t Judaism as an organized religion more directly organized around that very task?

Indeed, the prophetic image of our being a light unto the nations, understood as some sort of mandate, has taken hold of the Jewish imagination. It serves as a foundation of our identity. Accordingly, many Jews take this responsibility very seriously. But when we look at the general outlines of an observant Jewish life, and the details of its halakhic practice, does it look as if Judaism as a religion is directed at creating a community of activists, seeking to release the nations of the world from the falsehoods that imprison them?[[26]](#footnote-26) These are questions that a philosophy of the Jewish election will have to resolve.

**The Seed of Israel**

In lesson 6, I argued that the Bible has no racial animus towards the seven nations, or Amalek, or anyone at all. God is not a racist. In a similar vein, it could be argued that when Abraham,[[27]](#footnote-27) and Isaac and Rebecca,[[28]](#footnote-28) display a keen preference for their sons to marry from their own wider family, and not to marry local women, the issue was cultural, not racial. The project of this nascent people was to create a new culture of monotheism in a sea of paganism. Moreover, the election had something to do with liminality. To marry into the local population, who felt settled in their social and cultural environment, may have undermined the entire project.

Once the people became established, by contrast, they came to accept converts from outside. The central tribe of Judah descends from Judah’s relationship with Tamar, who seems to have been a Canaanite woman.[[29]](#footnote-29) Ruth married into the Jewish people from the proscribed nation of Moab. The messianic line of King David descends from both of these women. Thus, it seems clear that the Bible is not at all interested in notions of racial purity. To put it in modern terms: the Jewish people are a multi-racial nation, organized around a religion. Conversion into that religion suffices for a non-native to join the nation.

Given this non-racial construal of the Jewish identity, we are bound to take the Bible’s passing references to the seed of Abraham, and the seed of Israel, as carrying both literal and figurative dimensions.[[30]](#footnote-30) Given the *zekhut avot* model of the election, the fact that a person is a direct biological descendant of the patriarchs will have some significance – not because of the *racial* identity of this person, but because their great-great-great (etc.) grandparent was beloved of God. To the extent that Abraham might have a particular interest in the welfare of his descendants, and to the extent that God has a particular love for Abraham, such that God would be especially invested in Abraham’s interests, the descendant of Abraham will, to borrow the metaphor developed in lesson 10, occupy a more central position in the gaze of God. This could even fuel a halakhic argument that gentile biological descendants of Jews should be fast-tracked for conversion to Judaism, when they express a desire to convert.[[31]](#footnote-31)

And yet, to the extent that a non-Jew with no Jewish ancestors can become a Jew, and on their very first *seder* night, as a Jew, they will be commanded to celebrate their freedom and to tell their children about the Exodus from Egypt, even going so far as to say that God freed *them*, and *their* ancestors, we can see that a person can become “the seed” of Abraham or Israel without the need for any actual genealogical precedent.[[32]](#footnote-32) And thus, we can generally read references to the chosen “seed” as describing both biological and spiritual/ideological descent.

But this hermeneutic can seem more difficult to sustain in the books of Ezra and Nehemia.[[33]](#footnote-33) What we see in those books, as the Jews return from Babylon to reestablish sovereignty and build the second Temple, is a concerted effort to cleanse the Jewish community of foreign admixtures. In previous generations, wives of non-Jewish birth were readily assimilated into the Jewish community. Even women from cultures that were forbidden to convert to the Jewish faith were allowed to convert, because the prohibition was taken to apply only to men – given the role that a man would play in a patriarchal society, defining the culture and policies of the home. This is, for example, what we see with Ruth. But in the books of Ezra and Nehemia, Jewish men are urged to cast out their non-Jewish wives.[[34]](#footnote-34) These books – with their very devoted attention to matters of genealogy, and their apparent opposition to miscegenation – threaten to give chosenness a distinctly racial hue.[[35]](#footnote-35)

This stream of Biblical data has generated great consternation from the Bible’s critics. David Clines declares himself “outraged at Ezra’s insistence on racial purity, so uncongenial to modern liberal thoughts.”[[36]](#footnote-36) Gerd Lüdemann goes much further, stating that “the Nazis shamelessly directed ideas which were similar to those developed by Jews under Ezra and Nehemia.”[[37]](#footnote-37) These expressions of outrage are unfair. In Lüdemann’s case, shamefully so, since his words come far too close to a justification – God forbid – of the Holocaust. Indeed, on his reading, the very idea of racial supremacy, which came to haunt the Jews in the Holocaust, originated with the Jews themselves.

Unlike Clines and Lüdemann, we should have seen enough, by this stage of this series, to know that the Bible *doesn’t* think in terms of race at all. What worried the leaders of the return to Israel, terribly so, was the viability of their project. Jews who had remained in the land of Israel through the 70 years of exile were Jewishly illiterate. As Nehemia puts it, “their children spoke half in the speech of Ashdod and could not speak in the language of the Jews...”[[38]](#footnote-38) The worry had nothing to do with *racial* purity, and everything to do with *cultural* survival. Daniel Smith-Christopher says it well when he writes:

To be troubled by what appears to be “exclusivism” on the part of Haggai, or to feel a need to put an acceptable face on the separation of the marriages of Ezra-Nehemia, is to misunderstand profoundly the nature of group solidarity and survival of minorities.[[39]](#footnote-39)

Far from a concern for racial purity, the marriage policies of Ezra and Nehemia were designed, in the words of Joseph Blenkinsopp, “to maintain the characteristic way of life, the religious traditions, even the language of a community, against the threat of assimilation.”[[40]](#footnote-40)

In a particularly controversial passage in his *Nineteen Letters*, Rabbi Hirsch decries the desire of some Jews to be admitted into gentile families via intermarriage. He writes:

Do you not see that, until the advent of the age of universal brotherhood, you should not, cannot, desire that? Not, however, on account of enmity or hostility, but because of your Israel-mission.[[41]](#footnote-41)

First, we should note Rabbi Hirsch’s insistence that our laws against intermarriage are not motivated by racist prejudice. Instead, we are motivated by the desire to keep our identity intact until it has completed its eschatological task. But the reason this passage is controversial is that – whether or not this was intended – it implies that once the eschatological mission has been achieved, there will no longer be a problem with intermarriage. There will be a universal brotherhood of humanity. This brings us back to the first topic of this lesson: will there still be the need for a distinct Jewish identity in the end of days? Some sources insist that there will be. Others are less clear.

There have certainly been times in which pockets of the Jewish world have obsessed over their genealogical pedigree. Indeed, the Jews who remained in Babylon after the exile continued to pride themselves on the purity of their descent, as compared to the Jews of Israel. This concern for pedigree has left a mark in some of our customs and culture. But after discussing this fact, the Babylonian Talmud recounts a discussion between Rabbi Yehuda and Ulla. The former didn’t want to marry his son to anybody’s daughter because he couldn’t be sure of their pedigree. What could make him so sure that his own pedigree was in order, if everybody else’s was in doubt, is not made clear. Indeed, Ulla eventually forces him to see that *nobody* can be sure of their pedigree. We all have undesirable ancestors somewhere up the line. The notion of racial purity, he rightly insists, is nonsense. As the Talmudic discussion continues, we are redirected from paying attention to the family tree of a suitor, to looking at their personal character traits and conduct.[[42]](#footnote-42) In the final analysis, the identity of Israel is not genetic, but is grounded in certain values.

**Is Chosenness Indigenous to Judaism?**

Jews have often been accused of supremacism and racism for having the temerity to believe that they were chosen. There’s something somewhat ironic about this fact, given that the Christians and Muslims believe themselves to be chosen too. The Chinese once referred to their land as the middle kingdom because they thought they occupied the center of the world.[[43]](#footnote-43) So, Jews are far from alone, in the annals of humanity, in viewing themselves as chosen. But were they the *first* to view themselves in that way? Were they the first to think of themselves as *elected*? Horst Dietrich Preuss argues that they were. He writes: “it should be said that the idea of the election of a people by a deity [in the Hebrew Bible] is a unique expression to this point within the religious history of the ancient Near East.”[[44]](#footnote-44) But, in an important sense, Preuss was wrong.

Reuven Firestone claims that we shouldn’t really talk about multiple ancient religions in the near east. Instead, before the rise of Jewish monotheism, there was – in a sense – just one religion, with distinct local branches. The basic idea was that each region of the known world had its own god with its own local jurisdiction. Everyone believed in all of these gods but would show loyalty only to the one who had jurisdiction over *them*. In this picture, “each nation had a unique relationship with its ‘own’ god”:

If you were a Moabite, for example, your national god was Kemosh. Kemosh protected you and your kin. He would also make sure your crops and your flocks were fertile, and protect you and your family and tribe from attack by foreigners. In return, you made offerings to him and demonstrated your loyalty and that of your family to him.

The gods of other nations would normally take no interest in you, nor you in them. Born a Moabite, you were born into a community that worshiped its Moabite god, Kemosh. You could no easier change gods or religions than you could change your family history. Nevertheless, if you were in a foreign land, you would most likely make an offering to the local god as a form of respect and a means of gaining needed temporary protection in the area under the god’s jurisdiction. Because there were many deities that powered the world, you might wish to hedge your bets and make sure that offerings were made to certain foreign gods as well as your own national deity even when not traveling.[[45]](#footnote-45)

Within the parameters of this theology, Firestone claims that it was generally understood that every single nation was chosen. Each was chosen by its own god. What was distinctive about Judaism, according to Firestone, wasn’t the idea of being chosen by a deity. That was believed by every nation in the ancient near east. Rather, what was distinctive was that the Jews believed they were chosen by the only God that actually exists. They believed that the other nations were not chosen by gods, because their gods weren’t real. What’s important about this insight, I think, is that the sensation, or perhaps even the religious experience, of being chosen isn’t something that was new to Judaism. It may well be something quite basic to the human condition. This is something to which we’ll return much later on in this series.

1. Isaiah chapter 2 and Micah chapter 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This seems to be particularly clear in Micah 4:5. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Isaiah 66:21. We shouldn’t overemphasise matters. As Joel Kaminsky notes: “One often overlooked fact is that while some eschatological texts within the Hebrew Bible do acknowledge the idea of foreigners worshiping Israel’s God, and a few such as Isa 56:6-7 and 66:21 may encompass the possibility of certain select foreigners acting as cultic functionaries within the Jerusalem temple, even these passages continue to stress God’s special election of Israel, which is paired with his love of Jerusalem, Judah, and the land of Israel (e.g., Isa 66:10-14, 20, 22; Zech 14:8, 17, 20-21).” Joel Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob: Reclaiming the Biblical Concept of Election* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), p. 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Psalm 87:4-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Isaiah 25:6. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Exodus 24:9-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Isaiah 25:7. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See Rashi to Isaiah 25:6. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See Radak to Isaiah 27:7. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See, for example, Ezekiel 39:1-6, Zephania 3:8, and Joel 4:2 (and Joel 4:19). This also seems to be the spirit behind Psalms 46 and 48, for example (although the tone of these chapters is somewhat qualified by the appearance of 47:10, between them). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Isaiah 49:23. We shouldn’t forget that this sort of supremacy could also very well be read into the promise that Moses articulated in Deuteronomy 26:19 and 28:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Isaiah 43:3-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Joel S. Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob*, pp. 142-143. Kaminsky would also have us compare Isaiah chapter 2 which seems “rather irenic” with Isaiah 66 and its vision of “violent upheaval.” He notes that sometimes Isaiah goes so far as to speak of the nations *serving* Israel (e.g., Isaiah 60), and sometimes he speaks of a pilgrimage to God’s temple in Jerusalem (Isaiah 2). Ibid., p. 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Zechariah 14 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Zechariah 14:16 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Isaiah 66:22; see also 54:7-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Jeremiah 31:34-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See lesson 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Isaiah 49:5-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Isaiah 51:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. As we discussed in lesson 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. This provides the model, I think, for the Christian theologian, Horst Dietrich Preuss, who seems to relate to the notion of Israel’s light in a purely passive fashion. He writes, “Israel and the chosen servant of God are the “light to the nations” (Isa. 42:6; 49:5f.; cf. 51:4). However, this is not (yet) to be understood as an active call to mission. Rather, [God]’s activity on behalf of his people shall possess the power of attraction (cf. Isa. 60:1-3) that works outwardly in an enticing fashion (Isa. 55:4f.) to demonstrate the truth of [God] before the rest of the world.” Horst Dietrich Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 2 (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), p. 292. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Isaiah 42:6-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. See Rashi, Isaiah 42:6-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See BT *Shabbat* 63a. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. In fact, the most explicit Biblical reference to something like proselytism directed towards the nations is to be conducted, not by Jews, but by gentiles in the end of days. God says, through Isaiah, that in the end of days, He will send “survivors” from the gentile nations to “coastlands far away that have not heard of My fame or seen My glory; and they shall declare My glory among the nations” (Isaiah 66:19). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Genesis 24:1-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Genesis 26:34-35 and 27:46. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Genesis, chapter 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. A non-exhaustive list of examples of this phenomenon: Isaiah 41:8, 45:25, Jeremiah 31:36, 33:26, 46:27, Ezekiel 20:5, 44:22, Psalms 22:24, 105:6, II Chronicles 20:7. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. See *Sefer Zera Yisrael: Hilkhot Gerim ve’Giur* (Jerusalem: Machon Mekabetz Nidchei Yisrael, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. See *Teshuvot Ha-Rambam,* §158 (293 in other editions). In this letter, the Rambam addresses a convert who asks whether he should recite passages of liturgy that describe him as a descendant of the patriarchs. Maimonides is unequivocal that he should describe himself as a descendant of Abraham, and that there is no reason for him to exclude himself from liturgy that implies he is a native Israelite. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Indeed, Christine Hayes argues that in these books, an entirely new notion of impurity is developed. In addition to the older notions of ritual and moral impurity, Hayes identifies, in the books of Ezra and Nehemia, the rise of a notion of genealogical impurity. Christine Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Intermarriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. See Ezra chapters 9-10 and Nehemia 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Hayes argues (in *Gentile Impurities*) that attempts to racialize Jewish identity were a source of sectarian schism in Second Temple Judaism. Those attempts were largely rooted in the reception of Ezra and Nehemia, among other influences. Hayes recognises that the Rabbis of the Mishna and Talmud were largely opposed to these attempts. As we shall see, I don’t relate to Ezra and Nehemia as racial purists at all, even if racist sectarians *did* base themselves on their words. Moreover, this series is conducted within a network of assumptions, laid out in lesson 1, that would be somewhat alien to Hayes. Given my assumptions, the Rabbinic de-racialization of the Jewish identity must have been more in tune with the real message of the Bible than any sectarian perversion of that message. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. D. J. A. Clines, *Ezra, Nehemia and Esther* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), p. 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Gerd Lüdemann, *The Unholy in Holy Scripture: The Dark Side of the Bible* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), p. 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Nehemia 13:24. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile* (Eugene, Oregan: Wipf & Stock, 2015), p. 197. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra and Nehemia: A Commentary* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1988), p. 201. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Letter 15 of the *Nineteen Letters*, as translated by Bernard Drachman. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. BT *Kiddushin* 71b. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. This was the name of the Chinese Kingdom from 221 BCE until 1912. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1 (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), p. 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Reuven Firestone, *Who are the Real Chosen People? The Meaning of Chosenness in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Woodstock, Vermont: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2008), p. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)