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Clarifying Kings

Translated by Rabbi Shmuel Kesselman

General Editor: Rabbi Eliezer Robbins | Editor: Rabbi Y. Eliezer Danzinger

Content Editor: Rabbi Zalmy Avtzon

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1.

YOYAV BEN ZERACH FROM Botzra

“Yovav, son of Zerach, from Botzra”¹ was a king “who had reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the children of Israel.”² Rashi quotes the words “Yovav, son of Zerach, from Botzra,” and explains:

Botzra was a city of Moav, as it says,³ “to Keriya, and to Botzra, etc.” Since Botzra produced an Edomite king, it will be stricken along with them, as it says,⁴ “For there is a sacrifice to Hashem in Botzra.”

How is the fact that Botzra was a Moabite city relevant to the *pshat*⁵ of this verse?

Some commentators⁶ explain that by pointing out this association, Rashi resolves a difficulty: Why does the verse mention where this king came from (“from Botzra”)? Botzra is mentioned in order to tell us that “(Botzra) will be stricken along with them,” because Botzra “produced an Edomite king.”

This explanation, however, is difficult to understand and inadequate because:

a) This explanation itself poses a difficulty: Why is it relevant to know that Botzra “will be stricken along with them”? Moreover, these verses do not discuss at all the period when Edom will be stricken. (This will occur in the Future Era.)

b) **Most importantly**, Scripture details the places of origin of all the enumerated Edomite kings (except one), and Rashi does not address any of them. Furthermore, regarding the last king, the verse⁷ adds (not only that “the

¹ Bereishis 36:33.

² Bereishis 36:31.

³ Yirmiyahu 48:24.

⁴ Yeshayahu 34:6.

⁵ {The plain meaning of Scripture. Rashi says in his commentary to Bereishis 3:8: “I have come only to explain the plain meaning of the Scripture.” Though there are many levels and depths of interpretation on the Torah, Rashi adopts a straightforward approach.}

⁶ *Divrei Dovid* (by Taz); see *Sifsei Chachamim*.

⁷ Bereishis 36:39.

name of his city was Pau” but also that) “his wife’s name was Mehetavel” — and then the verse adds more details: “the daughter of Matred, daughter of Mei-Zahav.” Rashi does not address why we need so many identifying factors for one king [he merely explains the meaning of Mei-Zahav].

This proves that from the outset, this question poses no difficulty according to *pshat* (for Scripture often includes details and identifying factors).⁸ Why then does Rashi address the words “from Botzra”?

2.

TWO NATIONS AND REGIMES

We will clarify this by prefacing with an explanation of the verse that discusses the prominence of (the kingdoms of) Edom and Israel:⁹ “Two nations are in your womb, and two regimes from your insides shall be separated; and one regime shall become strong from the other, and the elder shall serve the younger.”

Rashi quotes the words, “(and one regime) shall become strong from the other,” and explains: “They shall not be equal in greatness. When this one rises, this one falls.” But Rashi does not remark on the concluding words of the verse: “And the elder shall serve the younger.” This is difficult to understand: If, “when this one rises, this one falls,” how can the verse conclude by **saying unequivocally**, “and the elder shall serve the younger”? These words imply **always** and for **all** times, independent of any conditions.

[The Midrash,¹⁰ in fact, explains: “If they {the younger} merit, they {the the elder} will serve; otherwise, they {the elder} will be served. But **Rashi** omits this.]

⁸ To clarify who it is referring to.

⁹ *Bereishis* 25:23.

¹⁰ *Bereishis Rabbah* on *Bereishis* 25:23; *Targum Yonasan ben Uziel* on *Bereishis* 25:23.

The explanation:

Rashi comments on the words, “*two nations are in your womb* — the word גוים {nations} is spelled גיִים {proud ones}... this refers to Antoninus and Rebbi...” Rashi then comments on the words, “*and two regimes* — the word ‘regime’ means kingdom.” Meaning, the doubled terms, “two nations... two regimes” is not repetitious (for the sake of poetic style, or the like), but they refer to two different things: “Two nations are in your womb” refers to Yaakov and Esav, and to their descendants as individuals. The phrase, “two **regimes**...” refers to Yaakov and Esav as kingdoms.

On this basis, we understand that the two further details in the verse, “and one regime shall become strong from the other regime, and the elder shall serve the younger” correspond to the two previous categories. “**And one regime shall become strong from the other**” refers to the kingdom of Israel (Yaakov) and the kingdom of Edom (Esav). Occasionally, “this one rises (and this one falls),” and *occasionally*, the reverse. In contrast, the clause “and the elder shall serve the younger” refers to Yaakov and Esav (and their children) as **individual people**. In this context, “the elder shall” *always* “serve the younger.”

We find a similar idea later concerning Yitzchak’s blessings to Yaakov. Yitzchak blessed Yaakov¹¹ — “be a lord to your brothers” — and he did not make any conditions or set any limitations to this blessing (e.g., that it should apply only at specific times).

Indeed, for this reason, Yitzchak told Esav,¹² “Of what benefit is a blessing to you? If you get possessions, they are his... since whatever a slave gets is acquired by his master.” Except that “when you will be aggrieved” (meaning, when the Jewish people violate the Torah), then “**you may remove his yoke** from upon your neck.”¹³ Meaning, even when “you will be aggrieved,” Esav will still not be able to receive the blessings, for he will also be Yaakov’s slave. Just that practically, Esav will then be able to remove the **yoke** of servitude.

¹¹ Bereishis 27:29.

¹² Rashi on Bereishis 27:37.

¹³ Rashi on Bereishis 27:40.

3.

FOREIGN KINGS

On this basis, however, a difficulty arises regarding the verse,¹⁴ “These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before a king reigned over the children of Israel.” Torah informs us here how the prophecy that “one regime shall become strong from the other regime... when this one rises, this one falls” came to fruition. The Edomite kings “reigned... **before** a king reigned over the children of Israel.” However, once “a king reigned over the children of Israel,” “the monarchy of Edom **dissolved** in their days.”¹⁵

The two clauses, “and the elder shall serve the younger,” and “be a **lord** to your brothers,” describe a perpetual relationship between individual people, even during a period when “you will be aggrieved {and} you may remove his yoke...” (as discussed). Accordingly, how was it possible for Esav’s descendants to have produced **kings** in their respective times, **just as** Yaakov’s descendants produced kings in their respective times, with no difference between these monarchies that would support the prophecy for Yaakov to perpetually “be a lord to your brothers”? [As discussed above, the condition, “when you will be aggrieved,” only enables that “you may remove his yoke” — it means merely that Esav’s descendants would not be subjugated **in actuality**, but not that Esav would be a “**lord**” and king.]

The explanation:

The *parshah* itself addresses this question by detailing the name of the place or city from where each one of the Edomite kings originated. All these places were **not** within the lands of Edom.¹⁶ The Torah thus emphasizes that the **kings** of Edom did **not** emerge from Esav’s descendants; they hailed from **other** (countries and thus, other) nations.

¹⁴ Bereishis 36:31.

¹⁵ Rashi on Bereishis 36:31.

¹⁶ See Bereishis Rabbah, Radak and Sforno on Bereishis 36:31.

4.

WHAT ABOUT YOVAV SON OF ZERACH

However, the verse, “Yovav son of Zerach, from Botzra,” contradicts this explanation. This verse implies that he **was** a descendant of Esav. This is implied because: (a) Zerach was one of the “chiefs” (head of families)¹⁷ of the descendants of Esav;¹⁸ and, (b) in several places in the Prophets,¹⁹ Botzra is mentioned in connection with the land of Edom. This implies that Botzra was a city in the land of Edom.

Therefore, Rashi must immediately preempt: “Botzra was a city of **Moav**.”

[Rashi then provides an unassailable proof: “As it says, “To Keriyyos, to Botzra, etc.” All the cities listed are of the lands of Moav,²⁰ as the verse concludes there, “and **all** the cities of the land of Moav....”]

This also proves that (Yovav, son of) Zerach was **not** a descendant of Esav (for he came from the lands of [and thus, was originally a member of the nation of] Moav).

Why, then, do we find numerous sources where Botzra is mentioned together with Edom? Rashi answers this in his subsequent remarks: “Since Botzra produced a king for Edom, it will be stricken along **with them**....” Therefore, in the sources where the Torah describes the punishments Hashem will inflict upon Edom, the Torah also mentions Botzra, for “it will be stricken along with them.”

¹⁷ Rashi on *Bereishis* 36:15.

¹⁸ *Bereishis* 36:13-17.

¹⁹ *Yeshayahu* 63:1; *Yirmiyahu* 49:13,22; *Amos* 1:12.

²⁰ The entire chapter, *Yirmiyahu* 48, discusses Moav.

5.

ETCETERA

Based on the above — that by saying, “since Botzra produced... it will be stricken along with them,” Rashi’s intends [not simply to tell us of the connection between Botzra and Edom, but] to explain why Botzra is mentioned in several sources together with Edom (although, in fact, it was part of the lands of Moav) since “it will be stricken along with them” — we can explain another nuance in Rashi’s wording:

When Rashi offers the proof-text that “Botzra was a Moabite city,” he quotes the words of the verse, “to Keriyyos, and to Botzra” (and then Rashi adds) “**etc.**” When Rashi then offers the other proof-text (that “it will be stricken along with them”), he only quotes the words of the verse — “for there is a sacrifice to Hashem in Botzra” (and here, Rashi does not add, “etc.”). Seemingly, the opposite makes more sense:

To prove that Botzra was a Moabite city, the words “to Keriyyos, and to Botzra” suffice. Just as Keriyyos was a Moabite city,²¹ so too, “**and** (to) Botzra” was a Moabite city. [The continuation of the verse (which Rashi alludes to in writing “etc.”) only **supplements** the proof.]

In contrast, the proof that Botzra “will be stricken **with them**” (i.e., with Edom) is [not based on the words, “for there is a sacrifice to Hashem in Botzra” by themselves, for Edom is not mentioned. Rather, the proof comes] from the **continuation** of the verse and its conclusion “and a great slaughter in the land of Edom.” Yet, in presenting this proof, Rashi does **not** add the word, “etc.”!

This is the explanation:

From the continuation of the verse, “there is a sacrifice to Hashem in Botzra and a great slaughter in the land of Edom,” one can, seemingly, actually

²¹ As stated explicitly in *Yirmiyahu* 48:41 (according to **Rashi** and according to Radak’s second interpretation, *ibid.*) and in *Amos* 2:2.

derive a proof to **refute** Rashi's interpretation. (Namely, Botzra was a Moabite city, and it is mentioned here only because it will be stricken along with Edom.) After all, it makes no sense for Scripture to **first** describe the incidental and ensuing punishment — “for there is a sacrifice to Hashem in Botzra” — and only **afterwards (add)** the primary and cause of it all “**and** a great slaughter in the land of Edom.”

We can answer (albeit with difficulty) — and in fact we will need to understand the verse, according to Rashi, in this manner — that the “and” of “**and** a great slaughter” is not an “and” which serves to add (for this would leave us with the question mentioned above). Rather, it is an “and” which interrupts. However, since at first glance the continuation of the verse poses a difficulty with Rashi's interpretation, Rashi does not even allude to it by writing “etc.”

6.

SO WHY DID YAAKOV ACT LIKE A SLAVE?

Regarding this principle — that according to Rashi, “and the elder shall serve the younger” holds true at all times — we can ask a question from the beginning of the *sedrah*:

There we are told how Yaakov sent messengers to Esav, saying,²² “Thus shall you say, ‘**to my lord**, to Esav, so said **your servant** Yaakov... to tell my lord, to find favor in your eyes.’” This narrative continues, as the *sedrah* later recounts, that Yaakov sent honorary gifts to Esav, bowed to him seven times,²³ and called him, “my lord”²⁴ (and called himself, “your servant”)²⁵ many times. Ostensibly, this is the opposite of {the prophecy that} “and the elder shall serve the younger.”

²² Bereishis 32:5,6.

²³ Bereishis 33:3.

²⁴ Bereishis 33:8,13,14,15.

²⁵ Bereishis 33:5,14.

According to *pshat*, this question poses no difficulty. Since Yaakov had feared that Hashem's explicit **promise to him** — “And you had said, ‘I will surely do good with you’”²⁶ — might not come to fruition because, “perhaps... I have become soiled with sin,”²⁷ for this same reason, Yaakov certainly was afraid that the **prophecy** that “the elder shall serve the younger,” which was conveyed to **his mother** (by Shem),²⁸ might not come to fruition.

However, this answer still is not altogether smooth:²⁹ The prophecy and blessing, “be a lord to your brothers,” was **not** linked to the condition of “when you will be aggrieved,” because even when the Jewish people violate the Torah, Esav may only “remove his yoke” (as discussed above at length). How, then, could Yaakov act so diametrically contrary to the prophecy and blessing, even having referred to Esav as “my lord,” and to himself as “your servant”?

The Midrash,³⁰ in fact, says that Yaakov was punished because he sent messengers to Esav and called him “my lord.” However, we have discussed frequently:³¹ The Patriarchs were “chariots” for Hashem's will “**their entire lives**.”³² Thus, for them, anything evil was not possible, G-d forbid, and consequently, neither were sins. Even though certain actions appear as sins, they were not sins in the conventional sense, G-d forbid.

As we see regarding this very topic: Although Yaakov was punished for his demeanor towards Esav, as our Sages say, we nevertheless learn³³ from Yaakov's conduct here that “we may flatter a sinner in this world to promote peaceful relations.”

²⁶ *Bereishis* 32:13.

²⁷ Rashi on *Bereishis* 32:11.

²⁸ Rashi on *Bereishis* 25:23.

²⁹ Note, too, Rambam's Introduction to his *Commentary on Mishnah* (s.v., “*ve'ha'chalek hasheni*”): “But it is preposterous and impossible that the Holy One would instruct a prophet to promise people good news unconditionally, without qualification, and that afterwards, this promise should not be fulfilled.”

³⁰ *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 75, sec. 1-3,11.

³¹ See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 5, p. 63 ff.

³² *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 23 (28b). {All the limbs of the Patriarchs were completely surrendered to the Divine will throughout their lives, like a chariot which is completely subservient to its rider.}

³³ *Yalkut Shimoni*, “*Vayishlach*,” *remez* 133; *Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer*, ch. 37.

7.

THE SOURCE

Chassidus³⁴ points out that Esav's spiritual root was actually loftier than Yaakov's (for this reason, Esav was born first). By Yaakov refining the essential character of Esav, an exalted light from Esav's root (which is loftier than Yaakov's) illuminated in Yaakov.

On this basis, we can explain why Yaakov sent “messengers **ahead of him** to Esav...” and said: “Thus shall you say, ‘**to my lord...** so said **your servant** Yaakov.” (And the same applies to the honorary gifts that Yaakov sent Esav.) Throughout all of this, Yaakov referred (primarily) to Esav's spiritual **root**, which is **loftier** than Yaakov's.

Since, however, the Midrash says that in this encounter, Yaakov **humbled** himself before Esav here in this world (and was therefore punished), we must say that **this** interpretation as well (that Yaakov sent the messengers and honorary gifts, etc., to Esav **in this world**) was justifiable (also) according to the deeper ideas in Torah.

8.

TWO WAYS OF PURIFYING

The explanation: To vanquish and refine evil, there are two general methods.

The first involves the revelation of light: The one who “refines” {negativity} draws down a powerful, holy light on the one being refined, and the powerful rays of light shunt aside any negativity and darkness, refining and elevating the sparks of holiness inside the one being refined.

³⁴ *Torah Or* and *Toras Chaim* on our parshah.

Another method involves enclothement: The refiner {the one performing the refinement} goes down to the place of the one being refined. Furthermore, the refiner clothes himself in the garments of the one being refined. This involvement with the one being refined transforms the negativity into goodness.

Each of these methods has an advantage over the other:

Regarding the **refiner**, the first method has an advantage because the job of refining does not involve a descent for the refiner, since the method is one wherein the one who refines is positioned “at a distance,” from the one being refined. This is in contrast to the second method concerning which it says, “he who wrestles {with a filthy person}....”³⁵ The refiner needs to descend to a lower standing than his original state, and this could even cause him to experience some sort of loss.

Regarding the **one being refined**, however, the opposite is true: With the first method, it is the revelation of light that causes the refinement; it is not achieved **within** and by the one being refined himself. Consequently, the refinement occurs by pushing away and nullifying {the negativity}. In contrast, with the second method, the refiner is invested in and engaged with the one being refined, on his level and in his situation. The one being refined is himself changed. While retaining his sense of **self**, he no longer opposes holiness, and no longer conceals or hides G-dliness.

³⁵ Tanya, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 28. {Tanya finishes: “...is bound to become soiled himself.”}

9.

WORLD PEACE

After all, the ultimate intent of the *avodah* of Torah and mitzvos (for which reason the Torah was given) is “to make **peace in the world.**”³⁶ True peace is achieved only when opposition is transformed and acquiesces to peace. Analogously, this applies to world peace: The world obscures G-dliness and we must infuse “**peace in the world.**” Put differently, we must transform the world into holiness.

Dressing itself in matters of “the tree of good and evil” {i.e., materialism}, the Torah “journeyed and descended”³⁷ into the world, so that through its {materialistic} garb, we can filter good from evil.

{Indeed, the Torah’s descent into materialism is most profound. Prophetically, it is described as} “I sullied, אגאלתי, all My attire {with blood}.”³⁸ This is done so that we can bring about the inner meaning of the word אגאלתי — redemption, גאולה — i.e., the refinement of the impure forces of *kelipah*. (Similarly, the verse says, “Who is this coming from Edom... from Botzra?”)³⁹ This can occur only through אגאלתי, becoming sullied, as it were: The descent of the *Shechinah* into the place of the *kelipos*.

Therefore, the same also applies to the righteous (who resemble their Creator).⁴⁰ They must (occasionally) **descend** from their lofty spiritual perch and dress themselves in the garments of the one being refined (even if this means that later the righteous themselves will need correction, etc., because of their descent). This is done to fulfill the Supernal goal of making peace in the world.

³⁶ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Megillah VeChannukah*,” ch. 3, par. 14.

³⁷ *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 4.

³⁸ *Yeshayahu* 63:3.

³⁹ *Yeshayahu* 63:1.

⁴⁰ *Bamidbar Rabbah*, ch. 10, sec. 5.

10.

TYING THE LAST END

This also explains why Yaakov belittled himself before Esav (not only to Esav's **root**, but even to Esav) **below**, in this world, despite the imperative {foretold by the prophecy}, “the elder shall serve the younger.”

Esav is only thoroughly refined when he, on **his** own accord, concedes that “the elder shall serve the younger.” In order for this to happen, there had to be (not only refinement through a revelation of light but also) enclothement of the refiner in the garments of the one being refined. This entails a descent, and even a shortcoming, of the refiner.

This was expressed (in our context) by Yaakov humbling himself in front of Esav. Specifically by doing this, Yaakov caused Esav to declare, “Let what you have remain yours”⁴¹ — “**Here**, Esav conceded that the blessings of the firstborn belonged to Yaakov,”⁴² including the blessing {that Yaakov and his descendents} “be a lord to your brothers.”

This will ultimately bring about the refinement of Esav in a revealed sense in the Future Era — “until I come to my lord at Seir.”⁴³ Then, we shall witness the fulfillment of the prophecy:⁴⁴ “For liberators shall march up on Mount Zion to wreak judgment on Mount Esav; and dominion shall be Hashem’s.”

— Based on talks delivered on *Shabbos parshas Vayishlach* 5737 (1976) and *Maamar “Vayishlach Yaakov,”* 5731 (1970)

⁴¹ *Bereishis* 33:9.

⁴² Rashi on *Bereishis* 33:9.

⁴³ Rashi on *Bereishis* 33:14.

⁴⁴ *Ovadiah* 1:21.