

Rabbi's Article II

Boruch Hashem

A Place Called Botzrah

The closing of this week's Torah-portion tells us of the offspring of Esau (-Genesis 36:1-30), and of the kings of Esau's offspring (-ibid, verses 31-43), in which the verse lists the name of the king, and his place of origin. On the verse (-ibid, verse 33), "*Bela died, and Jobab, son of Zerah of Botzrah, reigned in his stead,*" Rashi (-[Link](#)) comments, "*Botzrah was [one] of the Moabite (not an offspring of Esau) cities, as it is said (-Jerimiah 48:24), 'And to Kerioth and to Botzrah, etc..' Since it (Botzrah) appointed a king for Edom (offspring of Esau), it is destined to be punished with them (the Edomites), as it is said (-Isaiah 34:6), 'For the L-rd has a slaughter in Botzrah.'*" However, Rashi does not comment on any of the other origins or kings --other than in verse 39, on the name 'mei zohav,' because the verse lists two names for one king!--, which means that Rashi, --who focuses solely on the simple understanding of the verses-- sees no need to explain the meaning behind the name of the places of origins --unlike the Midrash (-[Link](#)), focused on homiletics, which does comment on all of them. Hence, why is Rashi, in this one and only instance, explaining the king's place of origin?

In order to understand this, let us look at the verse that describes the greatness of Israel and of Edom, found when Prophet Shem (-[Link](#)) is explaining to Rebecca the reason for her extreme pregnancy pains (-Genesis 25:23): "*Two nations are in your womb, and two kingdoms will separate from your innards, and one kingdom will become mightier than the other kingdom, and the elder will serve the younger.*" One the words, "*and one kingdom will become mightier than the other kingdom,*" Rashi comments, "*when one rises, the other will fall --meaning that Israel is not promised to always be mightier,*" while on the words, "*and the elder will serve the younger,*" Rashi --unlike the Midrash, which clearly comments, "*If they merit they will be served, and if not, they will be serving*"-- comments nothing --meaning that regardless of Israel's behavior, they are promised to always be the master of the elder. How can these two antithetical promises coincide?!

The explanation to this is that upon the words, "*Two nations (גוים) are in your womb,*" Rashi comments on the verse's misspelling of the word *nation* (גוים --pronounced as *gai'im* --exalted persons -- instead of גוים), "*These were Antoninus (-[Link](#)) and Rebbi (Judah the Prince -[Link](#)),*" while on the word *liumim* (ליוםים), Rashi comments, "*לא always means a kingdom.*" With this Rashi is pointing out that there are two different concepts that G-d is telling Rebecca (through Shem): (i) "*Two nations (גוים 'exalted persons') are in your womb,*" refer to Jacob, Esau, and their offspring, as individual people, while (ii) "*two kingdoms will separate from your innards,*" refers to the kingdoms of Jacob and of Esau. And with this comes that (i) "*the elder will serve the younger,*" refers to Jacob, Esau, and their offspring as individuals --and this promise is always, without any conditions upon Israel's behavior, while (ii) "*one kingdom will become mightier than the other kingdom,*" refers to the kingdoms of Jacob and of Esau --and this promise is dependent upon Israel's behavior.

And so too, we find by Isaac's blessings to Jacob and to Esau, that Isaac blessed Jacob with (-Genesis 27:29), "*You shall be a master over your brother,*" to the point that when Esau pleads for a blessing, Isaac answers him (-Rashi, ibid 27:37), "*What use will a blessing be to you? If you acquire property, it will be his, for I have made him a master over you, and whatever a slave acquires, belongs to his master.*" And nevertheless, Isaac does bless Esau with (-ibid, verse 40), "*And it will be, when you grieve --Rashi: When the Israelites will transgress the Torah, and you will have cause to grieve about the blessings that he took-- you will break his yoke off your neck.*" Meaning, that even when Esau --as a kingdom-- will be able to break his actual work of servitude to Jacob, nevertheless Jacob --and his offspring, as individuals-- will always, "*Be a master over your brother,*" to the point of, "*What use will a blessing be to you? ...whatever a slave acquires, belongs to his master!*"

Returning to our discussion of the kings of Esau's offspring, this now presents a problem: *It is clearly not possible that an offspring of Esau should be a king over the offspring of Jacob! Mightier? Yes. Not have to do actual work of servitude for Israel? Yes. But for Esau, "to be a master over your brother"? No!* Therefore, the Torah is telling us the place of origin of all the kings of Esau, that they were not from *Edom* -the offspring of Esau!

However, the seemingly exception is, "*Jobab, (i) son of Zerah --(Genesis 36:10 & 13) 'These are the names of Esau's sons... Reuel... And these are the sons of Reuel... Zerah'-- and (ii) of Botzrah --(Isaiah 63:1) 'Who is this coming from Edom, with soiled garments, from Botzrah,'-- ?!*" Hence, Rashi is forced to explain that *Botzrah* was not a city in *Edom*, but in *Moav*, with the proof of (-Jerimiah 48:24), "*And to Kerioth and to Botzrah, etc.*" --with the 'etc.' Rashi is referring to the closing of the verse there, "*and to all the cities of the land of Moab'-- !*"

And with this proof that *Botzrah* is not from *Edom*, but from *Moab*, it is now self-understood that this person '*Zerah* (father of Jobab)' cannot be the offspring of Esau, for he comes from *Moab*, and not from *Edom*.

Together with this, Rashi now goes on to explain that the reason we often find in the Scriptures that *Botzrah* is mentioned together with *Edom* is because, "*Since it (Botzrah) appointed a king for Edom (offspring of Esau), it is destined to be punished with them (the Edomites), as it is said (-Isaiah 34:6), 'For the L-rd has a slaughter in Botzrah.'*"