

Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

Published Mantua 1778*

Chapter XLVII: Re'eh (Deut. 11:26–16:17)

Essay 4. Tithing shows that G-d is King

מדרש ילקוט "עשר תעשר" וכו' אם זכיתם סוף שאתם יוצאים לזרוע השדה ואם לאו סוף שהיוצא השדה מתגרה בכם, ואיזה זה? עשו, דכתיב "איש ידע ציד איש שדה" עכ"ל. קשה למה דנקא בעבירה זו ותגרה עשו יותר משאר העבירות.

There is a **Midrash Yalkut Shimoni** (893:1) on the verse, **“You shall set aside a tenth part of all the yield of your sowing brought from the field every year.”**¹ The midrash states: **“If you merited [to fulfill the mitzvah], it the end you will [continue] going out to sow a field. If not, in the end the one who goes out to the field will fight you. Who is this? Esau, as it is written, ‘Esau became a man who knew hunting, a man of the field.’”**² A question is why particularly for this sin will Esau fight us more than the other sins?

ויש לומר שהרי מצינו שעשו היה מרמה את אביו במצות מעשר כמו שפרש רש"י על פסוק "ידע ציד" שהיה שואל לו כיצד מעשרין התבן כיצד מעשרין המלה. וגם על זה קשה למה דנקא היה מרמה אביו במצוה זו, וצריך לומר שהמתנה יותר גדולה שהבטיח הקב"ה לאברהם היתה לתת לבניו ולזרעו ארץ ישראל, כדכתיב "ויבן שם מזבח לה'" על בשורת ארץ ישראל. והנה אז באותו הזמן היה מוחזק בה הפנעני כדכתיב "והפנעני אז בארץ", והקב"ה הבטיחו להוציא משם כמו שפרש רש"י עתיד אני להסזירה וכו'.

It can be said that we find that Esau was deceiving his father in the commandment of tithing, as Rashi explained on the verse, “a man who knew hunting.” Rashi wrote that Esau asked Jacob, **“How do we tithe straw? How do we tithe salt?”**³ Esau knew that these items are not subject to the commandment of tithing, but the question misled Jacob to think that Esau was very strict in observing G-d’s commandments. **It is also difficult to understand why he was misleading his father particularly in this commandment. It must be said that the greatest gift that the Holy One, Blessed be He, had promised to Abraham was to give to his sons and his descendants the Land of Israel. As it is written, “The L-rd appeared to Abram and said, ‘I will**

* English translation: Copyright © 2022 by Charles S. Stein. Additional essays at <https://www.zstorah.com>

¹ Deut. 14:22.

² Gen. 25:27.

³ Rashi on Gen. 25:27, based on Midrash Gen. Rabbah 63:10.

assign this Land to your offspring.' **And he built an altar there to the L-rd**, Who had appeared to him,"⁴ **for the good tidings of [learning that they would possess] the Land of Israel. At the time, the Canaanite was possessing it, as it is written, "The Canaanites were then in the land,"**⁵ **and the Holy One, Blessed be He, promised [Abraham] to evict [the Canaanite] from there, as Rashi explained, "I will in some future time return it to your children who are descendants of Shem."**

ולכאורה נראה שישראל גזלו הארץ מהכנענים כמו שפרש רש"י על פסוק "בראשית ברא אלהים" שאם יאמרו האומות לקטים אתם שקבשמתם ארצות שבעת גויים וכו' כל הארץ של הקב"ה היא, הוא בראה ונתנה לאשר יישר בעיניו, ולכן כדי להראות לעולם שהקב"ה אדון הארץ צנה לנו מצנת המעשרות לאתר שנכנסנו לארץ, שהמעשרות הם כמו המס שנותנים למלך כנ"ל בסמוך.

Apparently, it appears that Israel stole the land from the Canaanites, as Rashi interpreted the verse, **"In the beginning G-d created Heaven and earth,"** that **"if the nations would say, 'You are robbers, that you conquered the lands of the seven nations,'** Israel could reply to them, **'All the earth belongs to the Holy One, Blessed be He. He created it and gave it to who was straight in His eyes. Therefore, in order to show the world that the Holy One, Blessed be He is the Master of the Land of Israel, He commanded us with the commandment of tithes after He brought us into the Land, as the tithes are like a tax that is given to the king, as explained above in the adjoining essay.**

נמצא שמי שרוצה לזכות במתנת הארץ צריך שיוודה שהארץ היא של הקב"ה וצריך נמי שיתחייב עצמו להוציא המעשר, ועשו שהיה רוצה לזכות במתנת הארץ והיה רוצה שאביו יפרש לחלקו זאת הארץ, היה מרמה את אביו במצנת מעשר דוקא, והנה פשברו יצחק את יעקב נמן לחלקו מתנת הארץ, כמו שפירש הרמב"ן על פסוק "ויגלו אל-ארץ" וכו' ועיי"ש.

It is found that those who want to merit the gift of the Land of Israel must acknowledge that the Land belongs to the Holy One, Blessed be He, and also must obligate himself to pay the tithe. Esau, who wanted to merit the gift of the Land and wanted his father to set aside this Land for his portion, was deceiving his father particularly about the commandment of tithing. Thus, when Isaac blessed Jacob, he gave him the gift of the Land as his portion, as the Ramban explained on the verse, "Esau took his wives, his sons and daughters, and all the members of his household, his cattle and all his livestock, and all the property that he had acquired in the land of Canaan, and went to [another] land because of his brother Jacob."⁶

⁴ Gen. 12:7.

⁵ Gen. 12:6.

⁶ Gen. 36:6.

וְנָהוּ שֶׁאָמַר לוֹ "וַיִּתֵּן-לְךָ הָאֱלֹהִים מִטַּל הַשָּׁמַיִם וּמִשְׁמַנֵּי הָאָרֶץ" כְּלוֹמַר כָּל שֶׁפַע הָאָרֶץ יבֹא מִן הַקֹּב"ה, וּמִשׁוּם הֵכִי אֲתָה מְחַוֵּיב לַעֲשׂוֹר וְאִם לֹא תַעֲשׂוֹר לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ. וְחַיִּיב הַמַּעֲשָׂוֹת אֵינּוּ אֶלָּא בְּאָרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל. אָבֵל (ל) עָשׂוֹ אָמַר "מִשְׁמַנֵּי הָאָרֶץ יִהְיֶה מִוִּשְׁבְּךָ" שֶׁיִּהְיֶה מִוִּשְׁבְּ טוֹב וְלֹא יִהְיֶה הַשׁוּמֵן בְּפִירוֹת כְּמוֹ בְּאָרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל, דְּזוֹ הִיא אֵיטְלְיָא שֶׁל גֵּן, כְּמוֹ שֶׁפִּירְשׁוּ ו'ל.

This is referring to what he said to him, “May G-d give you of the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth,”⁷ as if to say, “All the goodness of the Land will come from the Holy One, Blessed be He, and because of this, you are obligated to tithe, and if you don’t tithe, it won’t be yours.” The obligation to tithe is only in the Land of Israel.

But to Esau, he said, “Your abode shall enjoy the fat of the earth,”⁸ as if to say, “It will be a good abode, and it won’t be the fat of the fruits like the Land of Israel.” This [abode of Esau’s] is Greek Italy, i.e., Southern Italy, as the [rabbis] of blessed memory explained.⁹

אִי גַּמְי ד' מוֹשְׁבָךָ" רְצָה לוֹמַר שֶׁעַד שֶׁיֵּשֵׁב הוּא שָׁם יִהְיֶה חֶלְקוֹ טוֹב אָבֵל אַחַר כֵּן יִכְלֶה וַיֵּאָבֵד כְּמוֹ שֶׁפִּירְשׁוּ שָׁם הַרְבֵּ הַנ"ל. וּמִטַּעַם זֶה אִם יַעֲקֹב וּבְנָיו לֹא יִפְרִישׁוּ הַמַּעֲשָׂוֹת אִם כֵּן אֵינָם מוֹדִים שֶׁהָאָרֶץ הִיא שֶׁל הַקֹּב"ה וּמִתַּנֵּת הָאָרֶץ חֻזְרֹת וְהֵם נִקְרְאוּ גִזְלָנִים.

Alternatively, “your abode” means that until he settles there in Italy, his portion in Israel will be good, but afterward, it can be consumed and lost, as the rabbi mentioned above, i.e., the Ramban, explained there, on Gen. 27:28.

For this reason, if Jacob and his sons hadn’t set aside the tithes, if so, they would not have been acknowledging the Land as belonging to the Holy One, Blessed be He, and the gift of the Land would have returned from them and they would have been called robbers.

וְהַטַּעַם שֶׁעָשׂוֹ אָבֵד הַבְּרָכוֹת הֵינּוּ מִשׁוּם דְּכַתִּיב "אִישׁ אֲמוֹנוֹת רַב-בְּרָכוֹת", וְכִשְׁהֵלֵךְ עָשׂוֹ הַשְּׂדֵה כְּתִיב "לְצוּד צִיד לְהַבִּיא" וּפִירְשׁוּ רז"ל שֶׁהֵלֵךְ בְּמִחְשְׁבָה שְׂאֵם לֹא יִמְצָא מִן הַקְּפָר יָבִיא מִן הַגִּזְלָה וְעוֹלָה לֹא מִצְלַחַת מִשׁוּם הֵכִי אָבֵד הַבְּרָכוֹת. וְכִשְׁיִשְׂרָאֵל אֵינָם מַעֲשָׂרִים גַּם הֵם נִקְרְאוּ גִזְלָנִים וְעָשׂוֹ הַנִּקְרָא "אִישׁ שְׂדֵה" יִתְגַּרֶה בָּהֶם, וְעוֹד דְּכַתִּיב "וְהָיָה פֶּאֶשֶׁר תִּרִיד" וְכו'.

The reason that Esau lost the blessings was because, as it is written, “A dependable man will receive many blessings.”¹⁰ Regarding when Esau walked in the field, it is written, “to hunt game to bring [home],”¹¹ and the rabbis of blessed memory explained, that he walked with the thinking that if he wouldn’t find ownerless property, he would bring private

⁷ Gen. 27:28.

⁸ Gen. 27:39.

⁹ Midrash Gen. Rabbah 67:6; Megillah 6b.

¹⁰ Prov. 28:20.

¹¹ Gen. 27:5.

property by way of robbery.¹² He did not have good fortune, and therefore brought stolen food home, and because of this, he lost the blessings.

When Israel are not tithing, they are also called robbers, and Esau, who was called “a man of the field,” will fight you, and it is also written that Isaac told Esau, “Yet by your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother; **but when you grow restive**, you shall break his yoke from your neck.”¹³

* * *

¹² Rashi on Gen. 27:5, based on Midrash Gen. Rabbah 65:13.

¹³ Gen. 27:40.