**Can We Get Rid of the Goy? On Jews and Gentiles in the Persian and Hellenistic Periods**

**Preface**

The question of the development, definition and components of the Jewish identity during the Second Temple has been the subject of lengthy discussion in a number of studies. It seems clear that any allusion to this issue contains direct or indirect reference to the question: “Who is not a Jew?” as all identities are based on distinction and separation. However, it was not necessarily the opinion of the Jews who lived then that everyone who was not Jewish was part of a single category with some common denominator; it is possible that they were seen as nothing more than a collection of various distinct nations, and even the attitude towards them – as a society and as individuals – was not uniform. Indeed, Ishay Rosen-Zvi has recently claimed that this generalization, in which there is a binary division of all humans into “Jews” and “Goyim,” and that views all gentiles as some form of single nation, in which each gentile’s ‘Goy-ness’ is expressed identically, was formulated only in the first two centuries CE and is reflected in the writings of the Sages and of Paul. Although several components of this approach can be found in Hellenistic literature, in Rosen-Zvi’s opinion, only in the literature of the Sages did various components coalesce into a new discourse. This was based on a combination of ethnic thinking with a metaphysical load and a binary dichotomy and it has many practical implications such as the development of a formal conversion process; the disappearance of sectarianism; and a blurring of the distinction between different intermediate groups within Judaism. That is, each person is either completely a Jew or completely a Goy. In his opinion, the very use of the term Goy as directed towards an individual is an innovation of the literature of the Sages that reflects the new discourse. In the following article I would like to discuss the question of the definition of ‘Goy’ in the Persian and Hellenistic periods and its consequences.

Firstly, the topic of discussion must be clarified: although everyone who is not a Jew belongs to the non-Jew category, the question is at what point was this category defined by Jews in the positive sense as well, and not just by negation. So, for instance, it is clear that according to Deuteronomy the nation of Israel was a category separate from other nations, because God had chosen it and separated it from all nations: “For you are a people consecrated to the Lord your God” (Deut 14:2).

This holiness, which stems from a national, as opposed to a ritual approach (in contrast to the view of the priestly source), is of great practical significance, and in the words of Moshe Weinfeld: “Only someone who is connected by ties of blood and race with the Israelite nation is truly an Israelite upon whom the laws of the Torah apply.” Yet this distinction between Israel and the nations does not necessarily classify all nations under one abstract, generalizing category of ‘Goyim’ who are essentially the same: on the one hand the biblical *ger* is not obligated by commandments and may eat a ritually unfit carcass (Deut 14:21), on the other hand he abstains from work on the Sabbath together with Israel (ibid 5:14), receives tithes and gifts to the poor (ibid 24:19-21) and goes on pilgrimage (ibid 16:11). Meaning, in certain cases, the distinction between Israelites and Goyim is not completely clear. Similarly, in regard to intermarriage between Israelites and gentiles, Deuteronomy distinguishes among various nations: marriage with the seven Canaanite nations is forbidden because of the fear of adopting their despicable ways (such as idolatry), while the prohibition against Ammonites and Moabites joining God’s congregation is explained by the negative treatment displayed by these nations towards Israel in the past. However, it can be deduced from the text in Deuteronomy that there is no prohibition against marrying other nations.

A positive, generalizing term for ‘Goyim’ can be expressed in two ways: for instance, in several works from the Hellenistic period there are descriptions of, among other things, the political and historical ties between the Israelites and the nations of the world. As I will show below, some contain an expression which I consider a dichotomous division between ‘Israel’ and the ‘Goyim.’ However, it should be kept in mind that the variety of works sometimes influence the narrative description. So for example, historiographical works deal, by their very nature, with specific people and specific nations: it was not ‘Goyim’ who destroyed the First Temple, but the Kingdom of Babylon; it was not ‘Goyim’ who destroyed the Second Temple but the Roman Empire. Even if in the view of this or that author the ontological essence of the Romans or the Babylonians as ‘Goyim’ is the same, on the realistic historic plane each nation acts independently and not as part of a collective. A good example of this is The Animal Apocalypse in En 1, i.e., chapters 85–90 of the composition, which describe the annals of humanity in general and the history of the Israelites in particular, beginning with the creation of mankind and continuing through to the Messianic era (based on the historic clues in the vision, most scholars assume it was edited or written at the end of the third century or in the second century BCE). In the description of postdiluvian era, the Israelites appear as a flock, while the gentiles appear as various wild animals that represent a variety of nations active on the historic sphere. However, one cannot learn from this that the author was unfamiliar with the dichotomous division between ‘Israel’ and the ‘Goyim’ as this division, necessarily, has no historiographical implications. On the other hand, the Sages did not deal in historiography and it did not interest them in the least; their focus is moral-educational and historical accuracy was not at the forefront of their concerns. It is therefore clear that distinguishing between various nations in reality was not necessarily expressed in the literature of the Sages which mostly did not focus on this level. Nevertheless, one can find discussion of specific nations in specific historic contexts.

An extraordinary example of an ancient historiographical essay with a binary discourse distinguishing between ‘Israel’ and the ‘Goyim’ (a discourse that, according to Rozen-Zvi, is typical of the literature of the Sages) is Macc 1. At the beginning of the book the author already has the scoundrels voice the claim that a treaty should be made with “the Goyim who are around us” because “since we have become different from them many evils have found us.” The approach that the nation of Israel stands opposite the ‘Goyim’ is expressed throughout the book, and the author does not differentiate between various nations so far as it touches upon the principled outlook regarding the relationship between the ‘Israelites’ and the ‘Goyim.’ Throughout the book, there is no clue that the Maccabees are fighting the Seleucid regime specifically, or that there is a conflict between the Jewish culture and the Hellenistic culture specifically; different nations partner with the Seleucids in order to harm Israel, and as Simeon says in his speech to the people before the war with Trypho: ‘In their hatred all the gentile nations have gathered together to destroy us’ (the actual reality was, of course, different). There is no doubt that the description in Macc I is influenced by various biblical descriptions yet it is clear, in my opinion, that the author is emulating the bible as it agrees with his own world view. And in both cases the author deviates from the Deuteronomic tradition on which he relies to describe the battles against various foes—in his description of the conquest of Gezer (1 Macc 13:47-48) and his description of the conquest of the Akra (ibid 50). Regarding the conquest of Gezer the author notes that Simeon ‘made the people leave the town’ and ‘he purified the houses in which there had been idols’ (47). Simeon ‘eliminated everything that would make the town ritually unclean’ (48). Regarding the Akra the author notes that Simeon removed its residents and purified it of idolatry (50).

The purification of Gezer and of the Akra represent a view which regards gentiles, or at the very least their idols, impure. Indeed, a much more significant stance regarding the dichotomy between ‘Israelites’ and ‘non-Israelites’ does not relate only to the political and historical sphere, but also to the ontological sphere: a worldview that claims that all people who are not Israelite are identically and ontologically different from Israelites. For example, all those who are not Israelites are ritually unclean. This world view expresses a clear and significant dichotomous stand regarding the difference between ‘Israelites’ and ‘Goyim’ already reflected, I believe, in sources from the Persian era.

1. **Gentile impurity, intermarriages and conversion**

A generalizing category of ‘those who are not Israelites’ can be found in sources from the Return to Zion period, undoubtedly representing a turning point in this issue. This is expressed, first and foremost, in the banishing of the gentile women described in Ezra: “The people of Israel and the Priests and Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the land . . . they have taken their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy seed has become intermingled with the peoples of the land” (Ezra 9:1-2). Ezra is shocked to hear these things and recites prayers, from which it is clearly understood that the reason for forbidding marriage between Israelites and the ‘peoples of the land’ is not events from the distant past relating to specific nations only, or fear of idolatry, but the impurity of the ‘peoples of the land’. Many scholars discuss Ezra’s statement and consider it a form of halachic commentary. There is no doubt that Ezra’s stance was a significant legal innovation, as Lev 18 warns the nation of Israel to refrain from a list of sexual abominations practiced by the gentiles. These actions defile their perpetrators and the land, which then expels its residents. However, Israel may expect a similar fate if they imitate the Canaanites’ actions (ibid, 28-29), and it is never stated that Israel should separate from the gentiles because of their impurity. Moreover, from Ezra’s words it seems that he regarded intermarriage as threatening the inheritance of the land, meaning that it is an abomination that causes defilement (such as the actions described in Lev 18). However, what is important here is Ezra’s claim that there is a common denominator among all people who are not part of the nation of Israel: they are ritually impure therefore one should not marry them. “Ezra’s prayer is the culmination of the process in which all sources of filth and revulsion – menstruation, abomination and ritual impurity – are transferred to one factor only: the peoples of the land. For this reason there is no longer a difference if the abomination is ceremonial or moral or an everyday gentile custom. The fact that they are not from Israelite seed is the source of evil… explaining the differentiation from the Goyim by categorizing all the nations in a category of impurity and abomination… is an idea found in the bible only in Ezra’s prayer.” It seems that the author of Ezra 9 is well aware of the novelty of these words.

The new prohibition created by Ezra stems from an approach that categorically considers anyone who is not an Israelite to be unclean. Possibly there is still no general term directed towards anyone who is not an Israelite (such as ‘Goy’). Nevertheless, the approach certainly exists.

The interdiction against marriages between Israelites and gentiles—based on a perceived ontological difference between the two groups—can also be found in sources from the Hellenistic period. In T. Levi 14:6, Levy reproves his offspring for taking gentile wives in future. In some manuscripts, there is an addition to this statement: Levi accuses his offspring of trying to purify the women by ‘unlawful purification’. Charles commented on this formula: xxx. That is, not only does the author repudiate marriage between Israelites (priests) and gentile women, he even repudiates marriage with gentile women who underwent some form of “Judaization.” His claim is that the women remained ritually impure and could not be purified. This shows that the difference between Israelites and gentiles (expressed in the impurity of the latter) is ontological and lies behind the prohibition on intermarriage between the two groups. However, it is not clear if the writer of the Testament of Levi objects to conversion entirely or possibly only to a certain process that, in his view, is not being carried out properly.

As Christine Hayes claims, this source and similar ones that I will present below, view the nation of Israel (following Ezra 9) as ‘holy seed’, and as inherently different to the gentiles. For this reason, intercourse between Jews and gentiles is considered an abomination and leads to moral impurity, similar to the abominable acts mentioned in Lev 18. According to this outlook, it is clear that a formal process of one kind or another cannot cancel the ontological difference between Jews and gentiles, and this is the reason that marriage between Jews and so called ‘converted’ women is also considered intermarriage. Ishay Rozen-Zvi claims that the Sages, “invented conversion, by exchanging diffused transference spheres with a clear, unambiguous process… this process is part of the actual establishment of the boundary, a part that complements the establishment of the differentiating wall that includes within it several organized and well supervised border crossings.” This claim is not precise. A fortified wall had been built back in the Persian period, and since then an argument had been raging between those who allowed passage through the wall (even if its exact nature is unclear to us and it was not as clear and unambiguous as the Sages’ formal conversion process), and between those who denied passage through the wall.

It is possible that an issue such as mixed marriages was also dealt with in the description of the Watchers in En 1 (the ancient core of these chapters of the book are dated to the beginning of the 3rd century BCE). In 1 En 10:11 it says (in the Greek version) that the Watchers came together with human women and were defiled by their impurity, and there (15:3-4) Enoch is commanded to reprove the Watchers for being defiled by the women’s blood (in the Ge’ez version there seems to be an error). Several scholars suggest that this story reflects criticism of priests who married Israelite women who were not highborn. However, Eibert Tigchelaar suggests that the story represents a polemic against marriage between priests and gentile women during the reign of Darius III. William Loader even claims that in the myth’s background is the fear of women who may destroy the priests (and possibly not only them), such as gentile women, and that this is criticism of mixed marriages (at least in 1 En 6-11 where, in his opinion, the author’s fear is not focused on marriage between priests and Israelite women who are not highborn, while possibly chapters 12-16 deal only with the issue of priests). Devora Dimant raises the possibility that the impurity of women mentioned in these chapters is the impurity of menstruation, although it may be that this defilement symbolizes gentiles’ ritual impurity, which the flesh of the Watchers/priests was defiled by, and that the Book of Watchers also expresses an ontological dichotomy between Israelites (at least priests) and gentiles.

In contrast, the Book of Jubilees is an example of a work that should be examined according to its literary genre: a re-writing of Genesis and beginning of Exodus based on different leanings. That is, its’ literary-historic sphere is such that the nation of Israel does not yet exist, and cannot be set against ‘Goyim’ or others. For this reason, in most of the books we meet the characters from Genesis and read re-written stories of the doings of the nation’s forefathers and their families, and their relationships with individual ‘Goyim’ such as Ishmael, Esau and Laban who are the forefathers’ family members. However, in those places in the book where the author departs from the biblical narrative to express his own viewpoint, that of an author of the second century BCE, his dichotomous outlook distinguishing between the nation of Israel and the ‘Goyim’ can be felt. Chapter two already states that even though there are many and varied nations in the world, what is common to them all – apart from Israel – is that they are not under God’s direct guidance, but under the rule of the spirits. This division represents a dichotomy between Israel and the others, even if there is not yet one name for all these others such as the ‘Goyim’ of the Sages.

And in chapter 32 Abraham commands Jacob: xxx.

It is difficult to ignore the categorical definition of the actions of the gentiles as impure and all their ways as abominations. The author gives different explanations for this, but they hold true for all nations – there is no attribution of specific actions to specific nations: all the nations perpetrate these actions. As Rozen-Zvi states regarding the approach in the literature of the Sages: “Goyim are Goyim”.

Jub 30 deals with the story of Dina and the people of Shechem, described in Gen 34. The biblical story is re-written by the book’s author in order to send a clear message against intermarriage between Israelites and gentiles. The prohibition against intermarriage is mentioned in several places in the Book of Jubilees. Already in Jub 20:4 Abraham warns Isaac, Ishmael, their sons and Ketora’s sons from marrying Canaanite women, and in 22:20 Abraham repeats the prohibition against taking “a woman from any seed of the daughters of Canaan” to Jacob. Although this appeal to all descendants of Abraham and Jacob has no origin in the story in Genesis, Abraham’s aversion to marriage with Canaanite women is still evident in his speech in Gen 24:3. In Jub 25:1-5, Rebecca commands Jacob not to take a wife from among the Canaanite women “as Esau, thy brother, who took him two wives of the daughters of Canaan, and they have embittered my soul with all their unclean deeds,” but to take a wife from her father’s house, from her father’s family. Jacob accepts Rebecca’s command and even mentions Abraham’s statement regarding it (ibid.). It should be noted that the requirement to take a wife specifically from the father’s home is not clearly and decisively mentioned in Genesis; the author of Jubilees turns it into a principle that should be adhered to, and to a condition of Jacob’s status as holy seed (Jub 25:3). At any rate, in these verses the author adheres to the framework of the biblical story and describes the prohibition against intermarriage in the context of Abraham’s descendants, directing it towards Canaanite women. However, in Jub 30 the author departs from the biblical description to timely descriptions that interest him, and in verse 7 he states that any Israelite who would like to give his daughter or sister “to who is from the seed of the nations”, will be put to death. Also, ibid, 11: “And do thou, Moses, command the children of Israel and exhort them not to give their daughters to the Gentiles, and not to take for their sons any of the daughters of the Gentiles, for this is abominable”; and ibid, 13-14: “And it is a reproach to Israel, to those who give and who take the daughters of the Gentiles… And Israel will not be free from this uncleanliness if he has a wife of the daughters of the Gentiles or has given any of his daughters to a man who is of any of the Gentiles.” The term ‘abomination’ is the term that appears in Lev 18:27 in the description of the defiling actions committed by the seven Canaanite nations—the cause of their expulsion from the land. It seems that according to the book’s author, intermarriage with gentiles, whoever they may be, is tantamount to lewdness, similarly to that stated in Ezra 9:12 (see above). The prohibition is phrased categorically, without any distinction between the nations: Goyim are Goyim (according to this, it can be understood why the Book of Jubilees does not make any mention of the offer made by Jacob’s sons to the people of Shechem regarding circumcision and does not even mention that the people of Shechem circumcised themselves, only that Simeon and Levy killed the people of Shechem ‘suddenly’. This is in contrast, for example, to Theodotus’ poem regarding the origins of Shechem, that Jacob’s offer to the people of Shechem regarding circumcision was honest and it was only Simeon who decided to kill them. Collins bases himself, among other things, on this fact when dating the poem to the time of John Hyrcanus the First, and views it as an expression of support for converting the Edomites. Even in Add Esth in LXX there is criticism of intermarriage, as in her prayer Queen Esther says (C:26) that she loathed copulation with “the uncircumcised and foreigner” [it seems that the author is of the opinion that in her marriage to Ahasuerus, Esther had the status of one who was compelled]. This shows that apparently not only is copulation with uncircumcised gentiles prohibited, but that even circumcised gentiles are considered foreigners in this regard.

In the Qumran scrolls certain passages reflect a dichotomous-ontological approach to the relations between Israelites and gentiles: in scroll 4QMMT B 75-82 from Qumran, for instance, a passage is preserved that deals with intermarriage:

xxx

Scholars disagree regarding the content of this passage. According to Elisha Qimron, it is a condemnation of the phenomenon of priests marrying Israelite women who are not priests’ daughters, and he reconstructed the formula in rows 80–81 accordingly. Yet according to Joseph Baumgarten, the writer was condemning the phenomenon of intermarriage with gentile women and other scholars concur.

Christine Hayes convincingly rejected Qimron’s interpretation, and according to her the text emphasizes the holiness of Israel and not the holiness of the priests. The passage opens with a description of the transgression (forbidden sexual relations). The prohibition is then explained, and then the author strengthens his claim with additional examples (*Kilayim[[1]](#footnote-1)* and *Shatnez[[2]](#footnote-2)*). The meaning of this is that just as *Kilayim* and *Shatnez* were prohibited (meaning the intermingling of different species) so the nation of Israel, due to its holiness (line 79), was also prohibited from certain sexual relations. However, according to Qimron’s interpretation of this passage the author should have emphasized the additional holiness of the priests and not the holiness of Israel (as Israelite women are not holy enough to marry priests) and the examples of *Kilayim* and *Shatnez* should have appeared after the mention of the sons of Aaron (line 79). The fact that they are brought in order to demonstrate the holiness of Israel teaches us that this is a prohibition placed on the entire nation of Israel due to its holiness. It is therefore clear that this is a prohibition against intermarriage with gentile women (it should be noted that the editors’ suggested reconstruction for lines 81 – 82 cannot be understood according to their method, for if this was a criticism directed only at priests, what is the difference between ‘holy seed’ and ‘their seed’?). This is considered prostitution (lines 75, 82) as Israelites and gentiles are considered two separate species that may not be blended, like *Kilayim* and *Shatnez*.

4Q513, 2, ii also deals with intermarriage of priests’ daughters and forbids them and their families from eating from priestly gifts because of the prostitution (line 2) that their daughters have failed at and because of the fact that they are considered impure. Also, in the will of Kehat (4Q542), Kehat warns his sons, apparently regarding intermarriage with gentiles, which becomes clear in line 9 (ibid).

What is clear from all these sources is that in contrast to Rozen-Zvi, it was not the Sages who drew the line between Jews and gentiles – the line had been drawn back in the times of Ezra and Nehemiah. The latter and their followers did not enable passage between the groups because of the ontological difference between them, while the Sages enabled passage through the process of conversion.

1. **Sectarianism**

According to Rozen-Zvi, another consequence of creating the ‘Israelite – Goy’ dichotomy is the disappearance of the sectarian discourse from the writings of the Sages. In Jub 15 for example, there is an argument against various groups within Israel who do not circumcise according to (the author’s interpretation of) Jewish law. The book states that these groups are not considered part of the Israelite nation, and Rozen-Zvi claims that such a statement is possible only before the development of the ‘Israelite – Goy’ binary system. Yet after its appearance, internal distinctions within the ‘Israelite’ category or within the ‘Goy’ category are secondary in comparison with the more basic dichotomy. Therefore, according to the new discourse in the writings of the Sages, whoever is not a ‘Goy’ is a ‘Jew’ even if he is a sinner, misguided or a rebel.

However, it seems to me that there is no connection between the binary ‘Israelite / Goy’ division and a sectarian outlook. If the significant part of the definition of any Israelite group as a sect is the boundary that it places between itself and the rest of the society it belongs to, then without the binary division the sect refers to others as foreigners of this type or another, while after the binary division the sect can refer to the others as ‘Goyim’ for all practical purposes. Meaning: the basic line is drawn between ‘Goyim’ and ‘Jews’ but its location is moved, and the sect can determine that only its own members are ‘Jews’ or ‘Israelites’ and all the others are ‘Goyim’. Cana Werman, for example, states: “According to the Book of Jubilees, humanity is divided in two: on the one hand are all the nations and those of the nation of Israel who are uncircumcised… and on the other hand are the righteous of the nation of Israel. The wicked of Israel are placed under the rule of Prince Mastema [Satan] who strives to make them (as well as the rest of humanity) sin. The righteous of Israel – are under the rule of God.” It should be noted that one of the characteristics of the Jewish sects in the Hellenistic period is that they applied ancient differentiating customs aimed at gentiles to other Jewish groups. Meaning: the binary division instead of blurring the lines between different Jewish groups, actually enables the rise of sectarianism. Another example can be found in the Odes Sol essay: xxx. The book presents wicked Israelites (2:2-3), yet the nation of Israel will praise the Lord’s name, and Israelite congregations will glorify God’s name (10:6-8) – it seems clear that the author identifies his group with the true nation of Israel, and the wicked Israelites have no part of this group (14:5-6). Similarly, if – according to the Qumran scrolls – ‘Goyim’ could also be counted among the ‘Sons of Light’ as gentiles, then clearly the Qumran sect does not accept the ‘Israelite – Goy’ dichotomy. However, theoretically at least, it can be argued that the Qumran scrolls retain, on the one hand, the distinction between ‘Israel’ and the ‘Goyim’ alongside the distinction between the ‘Sons of Light’ and the ‘Sons of Darkness’ on the other hand. This assumes that only Israelites counted among the ‘Sons of Light’ represent the true nation of Israel, and that the remaining Israelites, together with all the gentiles, are the ‘Sons of Darkness’.

An example of the relationship between the binary approach and the sectarian discourse can already be found in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah: there is no doubt that the immigrants from Babylon at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah considered themselves a unique group, and this is reflected in the monikers they gave themselves, such as the ‘Congregation of the Returning’ (Ezra 4:1; 6:19; 10:7), ‘Returned Exiles’ (ibid, 10:8) and more. It is possible that this approach explains why the books of Ezra and Nehemiah completely ignore those Israelites who were not exiled to Babylon and remained in Israel. While archaeological evidence clearly shows that the cities of Benjamin, for example, were not destroyed by the Babylonians and their residents were not exiled, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah recognize only one congregation of Israelites in the Land of Israel—the congregation of returned exiles. From the list of immigrants in Ezra 2 (and its parallel in Nehemiah 7) it seems that all former residents of Judea returned ‘each to his own city’ (Ezra 2:1), meaning: the cities of Judea remained abandoned, waiting for the return of their residents, and the residents of Israel during the Babylonian exile were only ‘peoples of the land’. Moreover, many scholars claim that the intermarriages described in Ezra 9 were actually marriages between Israelites returning from exile with the daughters of local Israelites whose forefathers were not exiled by the kingdoms of Assyria and Babylon. According to this, not only do Ezra and Nehemiah categorically state that whoever is not an Israelite is impure; according to their view, the residents of Judea whose forefathers were not exiled (and therefore are not counted among the ‘returned exiles’) are not Israelites but impure ‘peoples of the land’. In the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, the returned exiles are also called, "Israel" (Ezra 10:1, 10), "The people of Israel" (ibid 9:1), "all Israel" (ibid 10:5). This is, in effect, a sectarian approach that draws a line between the congregation of returning exiles and other Israelites and identifies them as ‘peoples of the land’ and impure. It is actually the binary division between ‘Israelites’ and ‘peoples of the land’ that enables identifying some of the Israelites as ‘peoples of the land’. For this reason for example, Nehemiah is not satisfied with expelling Tuvia the Ammonite (who was undoubtedly an Israelite) from the Temple, and purifies his chambers.

On the other hand, another implication of the new binary discourse in the writings of the Sages, according to Rozen-Zvi, is the attempt to blur the distinction between various middle classes within Judaism: every person is either a complete Jew or a complete ‘Goy’. However an example of this attempt can already be seen in the treatment of the Samaritans in the book of Ezra: there are many disagreements among scholars regarding the ethnic identity of the residents of Samaria following the Assyrian exiles. According to 2 Kgs 17

xxx

In contrast, the Book of Chronicles does not directly report the destruction of the Kingdom of Israel and the exile of its residents. In the description of the religious reformation of the kings of Judea, Hezekiah and Josiah, the author notes that they were intended to encompass “all Israel, from Beersheba even to Dan” (2 Chronicles 30:1-5), or parts of Israel (ibid, 34:5-9).

Another version of the split between Jews and Samaritans can be found in Antiquities of the Jews 11:302-312. Many scholars believe that in reality, the northern kingdom of Israel was completely destroyed and all its Israelite residents were exiled from it so that there was no ethnic and cultural continuum between the kingdom of Israel in the Iron Age and the population that settled in Samaria in subsequent periods. However, there are those who claim that only a few Israelites were exiled from Samaria and only a few foreigners were exiled *to* it from other parts of the empire. There are those who maintain that only the urban elites were exiled and that the Israelite population continued to exist in Samaria also after the Assyrian conquest. Yigal Levine claims that the Assyrians exiled the nobility, the scribes, the clerks, the priests and the military and replaced them with similar professionals brought to Samaria from other locations, who in the end blended into the Israelite population of Samaria (in a long process culminating at the time of Alexander the Great). At any rate, the book of Ezra strives to blur the status of the intermediate groups and turn them into complete ‘Goyim’: only the returning exiles represent the true Israel.

**Summary**

Ishay Rozen-Zvi claims that a new discourse developed in the first two centuries CE, which is expressed in Paul’s writings and in the literature of the Sages. This discourse reflects an approach that divides all people into ‘Jews’ and ‘Goyim’, and that sees all ‘Goyim’ as a kind of nation. He admits that some components of the new discourse existed also in earlier periods but, in his opinion, only in this period does the ethnic approach come together with a metaphysical load and a binary dichotomy that are accompanied by religious laws that put this into practice. That is, this is not only an ideological innovation, it also has practical implications such as the conversion process: “For the first time the literature of the Sages contains a formal and ceremonial conversion process, which instantly turns a Goy into a Jew.”

However, as I have shown throughout the present article, all important components of the new discourse already appear in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah and in Hellenistic sources: both the binary approach of ‘Israelites’ vs. ‘Goyim’, that views all gentiles as one ontological, impure entity, and that attempts to blur the status of intermediate groups such as the Samaritans and turn them into complete gentiles; and the practical implications expressed in the argument regarding the possibility of joining the nation of Israel.

There is no doubt that the binary approach became more sophisticated, and has many expressions in the literature of the sages that Rozen-Zvi describes so well. However, this is not a new discourse but the highpoint of a long process that began in the Persian period and culminated in the literature of the Sages. In contrast to Christine Hayes, I do not believe that the Sages repudiated the genealogical impurity of the Book of Ezra, the Book of the Jubilees and the Qumran scrolls, and the term ‘the impurity of the Goyim’ is not considered in the writings of the sages to be merely a decree but an ancient tradition. Although the literature of the Sages enables conversion, it did not completely repudiate the genealogical model—it enables movement from the ‘Goyim’ category to the ‘Jewish’ category despite the ontological difference between them. This movement is possible only based on the assumption that conversion is a form of re-creation: the person undergoing conversion is reborn as a person with a new ontological essence. This, to my mind, is the reason why a “Ger who converted is as a small child just born” and is allowed to have intercourse with his converted relatives, such as mother and sister, without fear of incest. While ‘the Testament of Levi’ objects to those who take foreign wives and convert them, the Sages claim this is possible. The argument, however, rages throughout the centuries between groups sharing the same basic assumption regarding the ontological difference between ‘Jews’ and ‘foreigners’.

The binary approach first appeared in the Persian period, and it was still considered an innovation in the Hellenistic period. For this reason, when the author of the Book of Jubilees or the author of the Letter of Aristeas, required their audience to distinguish themselves from the gentiles, they employed various explanations to convince circles in Jewish society who disagreed with this statement. However, for the authors themselves the distinction between Jews and gentiles was clear and unmistakable. Centuries later this approach had become so widespread among Jewish society that there was no longer any need to explain it, and the very category of ‘Goy’ already contained within it the reason for distinction from the ‘Goy’. This, therefore, was not a new approach but a chronological development.

1. The interbreeding of plants or animals. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Weaving wool and linen into one cloth. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)