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In the Torah, Is the Ger Ever a Convert?

Conversion to Judaism as we know it is a rabbinic development, but what, then is the biblical *ger*, and why does he need to be circumcised in order to eat from the paschal offering?

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A Torah scroll, on a synagogue alter, with Kippah and Talit. Oleg Ivanov – 123rf

Rabbinic Judaism has a category of people called “converts” or “proselytes,” i.e., people born not Jewish but who undergo a ritual process—immersion in a *mikveh* (ritual bath) and circumcision (for men)—that turns them into Jews. The term for such a person in rabbinic Judaism is *ger* (גר), a biblical term from which the rabbinic category ostensibly derives. But does the Torah have converts in mind?

The Torah’s Many *Gerim*

The Torah speaks many times about the *ger* (pl. *gerim*), a noun from the verb *gur*, “to dwell”; thus, the *ger* is literally “a dweller.” But defining exactly what kind of person the Torah means by this term is difficult, and assorted passages understand this term differently.

Israelites Living Among Non-Israelites

A number of verses describe the *ger* as a foreigner living among people of a different group. For example, Moses names his first son Gershom, because גֵּר הָיִיתִי בְּאֶרֶץ נָכְרִיָּה, “I was a *ger* in a strange land [=שׁם, ‘there’]” (Exod 2:22, 18:3). Likewise, God warns Abraham that, גֵר יִהְיֶה זַרְעֲךָ בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא לָהֶם “your descendants will be *ger(im)* in a land that is not theirs” (Gen 15:13), and Deuteronomy explains that Israelites should not treat Egyptians with contempt because גֵר הָיִיתָ בְאַרְצוֹ “you were *ger (im)* in their land” (Deut 23:8).

Similarly, when Abraham wishes to buy a plot of land to bury Sarah, he says to the Hittites of Hebron:

בראשית כג:ד גֵּר וְתוֹשָׁב אָנֹכִי עִמָּכֶם תְּנוּ לִי אֲחֻזַּת קֶבֶר עִמָּכֶם…

Gen 23:4 I am a *ger* and a *toshav*among you; sell me a burial site among you…

Here the term *ger* is coupled with *toshav*, meaning “resident,” in what seems to be a hendiadys, two words that convey one concept. Abraham is not a Hittite, but he lives among the Hittites and wishes to bury his dead in their territory.[1]

These examples refer to Israelites living as foreigners among other groups, but the Torah also uses the same term when discussing foreigners living among Israelites. When describing these non-Israelites, the term *ger* is likely used in more than one way.

Vulnerable Non-Israelites Living Among Israelites

In some cases, *gerim* are foreigners living on the land of an Israelite host, and therefore, vulnerable to predations. A number of laws, therefore, come to protect them. For example, Exodus’ Covenant Collection says:

שמות כג:ט וְגֵר לֹא תִלְחָץ וְאַתֶּם יְדַעְתֶּם אֶת נֶפֶשׁ הַגֵּר כִּי גֵרִים הֱיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם.

Exod 23:9 You shall not oppress a *ger*, for you know the feelings of the *ger*, having yourselves been *gerim* in the land of Egypt.

A few verses later, we are told that every seventh day should be a day of rest,

שמות כג:יב …לְמַעַן יָנוּחַ שׁוֹרְךָ וַחֲמֹרֶךָ וְיִנָּפֵשׁ בֶּן אֲמָתְךָ וְהַגֵּר.

Exod 23:12 …in order that your ox and your donkey may rest, and that your bondman and the *ger* may be refreshed.

Deuteronomy’s law of the tithe emphasizes the vulnerability of *gerim* and the need for Israelites to take care of them:

דברים כו:יב כִּי תְכַלֶּה לַעְשֵׂר אֶת כָּל מַעְשַׂר תְּבוּאָתְךָ בַּשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁלִישִׁת שְׁנַת הַמַּעֲשֵׂר וְנָתַתָּה לַלֵּוִי לַגֵּר לַיָּתוֹם וְלָאַלְמָנָה וְאָכְלוּ בִשְׁעָרֶיךָ וְשָׂבֵעוּ.

Deut 26:12 When you have set aside in full the tenth part of your yield—in the third year, the year of the tithe—and have given it to the Levite, the *ger*, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat their fill in your settlements.

This verse suggests that the *ger* was powerless, just like the fatherless and the widow.

Non-Israelites Equal to Israelites Under the Law

Other texts from the Torah emphasize the need for equal treatment of the *ger*, noting that the *ger* share obligations and rights with the natural citizen (אזרח). For example, a *ger*has a right to bring the paschal offering:

במדבר ט:יד וְכִי יָגוּר אִתְּכֶם גֵּר וְעָשָׂה פֶסַח לַי־הֹוָה כְּחֻקַּת הַפֶּסַח וּכְמִשְׁפָּטוֹ כֵּן יַעֲשֶׂה חֻקָּה אַחַת יִהְיֶה לָכֶם וְלַגֵּר וּלְאֶזְרַח הָאָרֶץ.

Num 9:14 And when a *ger* who resides with you would offer a paschal sacrifice to YHWH, he must offer it in accordance with the rules and rites of the paschal sacrifice. There shall be one law for you, whether *ger* or citizen of the country.

The *ger*also has the right to bring gift offerings:

במדבר טו:יד וְכִי יָגוּר אִתְּכֶם גֵּר אוֹ אֲשֶׁר בְּתוֹכְכֶם לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם וְעָשָׂה אִשֵּׁה רֵיחַ נִיחֹחַ לַי־הֹוָה כַּאֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשׂוּ כֵּן יַעֲשֶׂה. טו:טו הַקָּהָל חֻקָּה אַחַת לָכֶם וְלַגֵּר הַגָּר חֻקַּת עוֹלָם לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם כָּכֶם כַּגֵּר יִהְיֶה לִפְנֵי יְ־הֹוָה.טו:טז תּוֹרָה אַחַת וּמִשְׁפָּט אֶחָד יִהְיֶה לָכֶם וְלַגֵּר הַגָּר אִתְּכֶם.

Num 15:14And when, throughout the ages, a *ger* who has taken up residence with you, or one who lives among you, would present a gift offering of pleasing odor to YHWH—as you do, so shall it be done by15:15 the rest of the congregation. There shall be one law for you and for the residing *ger*; it shall be a law for all time throughout the ages. You and the *ger* shall be alike before YHWH; 15:16 the same ritual and the same rule shall apply to you and to the *ger* who resides among you.

Similarly, if the nation as a whole has unintentionally sinned, the priest’s *chatat* (sin or purification offering)[2] atones for all:

במדבר טו:כו וְנִסְלַח לְכָל עֲדַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלַגֵּר הַגָּר בְּתוֹכָם כִּי לְכָל הָעָם בִּשְׁגָגָה.

Num 15:26 The whole Israelite community and the *ger* residing among them shall be forgiven, for it happened to the entire people through error.

Moreover, *gerim*are sometimes subject to the same requirements and even punishments if they violate Israelite norms:

במדבר טו:כט הָאֶזְרָח בִּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלַגֵּר הַגָּר בְּתוֹכָם תּוֹרָה אַחַת יִהְיֶה לָכֶם לָעֹשֶׂה בִּשְׁגָגָה.טו:לוְהַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה בְּיָד רָמָה מִן הָאֶזְרָח וּמִן הַגֵּר אֶת יְ־הֹוָה הוּא מְגַדֵּף וְנִכְרְתָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהִוא מִקֶּרֶב עַמָּהּ.

Num 15:29 For the natural citizen among the Israelites and for the *ger* who resides among them—you shall have one ritual for anyone who acts in error.15:30 But the person, be he natural citizen or *ger*, who acts defiantly reviles YHWH; that person shall be cut off from among his people.

In Leviticus (24:15–22), this principle of the *ger* receiving the same treatment as the natural citizen is applied explicitly to blasphemy as well as murder and the lex talionis more broadly. This image of the *ger* is very different than the one of a protected foreigner, who is clearly not like the Israelite.

Different Sources, Different *Ger*

Contemporary critical scholarship has suggested an alternative model, namely, that the Pentateuch’s various sources have different understandings of what the place of foreigners among Israelites should be. The key difference, in this model, is between the Deuteronomic source on one hand, and the Priestly source on the other.

The Deuteronomic *Ger*

As noted above, the Deuteronomic texts imagine the *ger* as a foreigner living among Israelites. These *gerim* are vulnerable socially and economically and must, therefore, be assisted.[3]This is seen clearly in Deuteronomy’s tithe law (מעשר עני, “the tithe for the poor” in Rabbinic terminology),[4] which states:

דברים יד:כט וּבָא הַלֵּוִי כִּי אֵין לוֹ חֵלֶק וְנַחֲלָה עִמָּךְ וְהַגֵּר וְהַיָּתוֹם וְהָאַלְמָנָה אֲשֶׁר בִּשְׁעָרֶיךָ וְאָכְלוּ וְשָׂבֵעוּ לְמַעַן יְבָרֶכְךָ יְ־הֹוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל מַעֲשֵׂה יָדְךָ אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה.

Then the Levite, who has no hereditary portion as you have, and the *ger*, the fatherless, and the widow in your settlements shall come and eat their fill, so that YHWH your God may bless you in all the enterprises you undertake.

The *ger*, here and throughout Deuteronomy, appears alongside the orphan and the widow (and sometimes also the Levite, who in Deuteronomy is a landless downtrodden individual), as those the Israelite must care for and is responsible to (Deut 10:18; 14:29; 16:11; 24:14, 17, 19, 20).[5] The *ger*is not an Israelite, but he lives “within your gates,” a client wholly dependent on his Israelite patron, just as widows and orphans are.[6] But Deuteronomy does include the *ger*in the covenant established with the entire nation (Deut 29:10, 31:12), implying that he has a mixed status.

The Priestly *Ger*

The Priestly and Holiness legislation’s presentation of the *ger*is different. As noted above, instead of presenting *gerim* as vulnerable charity cases, P and H state consistently that the *ger*should be treated like any natural citizen in matters of commandments.[7] It is in these sources that we find the refrain חֻקָּה אַחַת יִהְיֶה לָכֶם וְלַגֵּר וּלְאֶזְרַח הָאָרֶץ, “one law for you, for the *ger* and the citizen of the land,” or similar expressions.[8]

Some scholars argue that the difference between D and P reflects a social transformation between the Deuteronomistic and the Priestly societies, pointing to the fact that most Pentateuchal scholars believe the Priestly and Holiness sources to be the latest. In the society envisioned by Deuteronomy, the *ger* was akin to a poor serf living on the land of wealthy Israelite or Judahite proprietors. The Priestly *ger*, however, has a status almost equal to that of the native-born Israelite or Judahite citizen, as a result of the rise of a new class of wealthy immigrants who arrived in the period of Persian occupation.[[9]](https://thetorah.com/in-the-torah-is-the-ger-ever-a-convert/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn9)

Other scholars have argued for an evolution of the *ger*’s religious status from tolerated stranger to the convert familiar from rabbinic Judaism (which we will explore below), or something approaching this. They too support this trajectory by noting that the Priestly sources are generally dated to the Second Temple period, and thus closer in proximity to rabbinic Judaism.[10]

For example, Kenton Sparks of Eastern University calls the Prieslty *ger* an “assimilating ger” as well as a “proselyte”[11] while Reinhard Achenbach, of the University of Muenster, speaks about “religious integration*.*”[12] Sparks further argues that the Holiness Code invented the distinction between *ger*and *toshav* in order to distinguish between the old alien resident (*toshav*) and the new proselyte (*ger*), thus between social and religious integration.

Eating the Pesach: The Test Case

To substantiate the claim that the Priestly *ger* is an actual convert, these scholars point to the Priestly treatment of the *ger* who wishes to eat from the paschal sacrifice in Exodus:

שמות יב:מג ‏ וַיֹּאמֶר יְ־הֹוָה אֶל מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן זֹאת חֻקַּת הַפָּסַח כָּל בֶּן נֵכָר לֹא יֹאכַל בּוֹ.יב:מד וְכָל עֶבֶד אִישׁ מִקְנַת כָּסֶף וּמַלְתָּה אֹתוֹ אָז יֹאכַל בּוֹ.יב:מהתּוֹשָׁב וְשָׂכִיר לֹא יֹאכַל בּוֹ…יב:מז כָּל עֲדַת יִשְׂרָאֵל יַעֲשׂוּ אֹתוֹ.יב:מח וְכִי יָגוּר אִתְּךָ גֵּר וְעָשָׂה פֶסַח לַי־הֹוָה הִמּוֹל לוֹ כָל זָכָר וְאָז יִקְרַב לַעֲשֹׂתוֹ וְהָיָה כְּאֶזְרַח הָאָרֶץוְכָל עָרֵל לֹא יֹאכַל בּוֹ.יב:מט תּוֹרָה אַחַת יִהְיֶה לָאֶזְרָח וְלַגֵּר הַגָּר בְּתוֹכְכֶם.

Exod 12:43 YHWH said to Moses and Aaron: This is the law of the paschal offering: No foreigner shall eat of it. 12:44But any slave a man has bought may eat of it once he has been circumcised. 12:45No bound or hired laborer shall eat of it… 12:47 The whole community of Israel shall offer it. 12:48 If a *ger*who dwells with you would offer the paschal sacrifice to YHWH, all his males must be circumcised; then he shall be admitted to offer it; he shall then be as a citizen of the country. But no uncircumcised person may eat of it. 12:49 There shall be one law for the citizen and for the stranger who dwells among you.

These scholars suggest that, according to this text, although a regular foreigner (נכר) may not offer the paschal sacrifice, if foreigners living among Israelites wish to do so, they must convert by being circumcised, making themselves like the natural citizens of the land. And thus, according to this reading, the law of the paschal sacrifice demonstrates that in P, a *ger* is a circumcised proselyte, a convert.

I do not, however, believe this to be the correct reading of the text. The circumcised *ger* does *not* become a citizen, but is rather treated “*as a* citizen” (כְּאֶזְרַח) just as is the case with the other equation clauses above. It would thus appear that the requirement to circumcise is unique to Passover; no similar requirement is recorded regarding any other commandment.

Significantly, this requirement is not restricted to the *ger*, but also to the uncircumcised Israelite, as “no uncircumcised person may eat of it.”[13] In other words, a special feature of the paschal lamb according to this legislation is that it may only be eaten by someone circumcised.

The circumcision of a foreign resident does not make the *ger*into an Israelite any more than the circumcision of the uncircumcised Israelite does; certainly, the Israelite is an Israelite even if uncircumcised. Thus, the message of the text is that among those who are permitted to eat from the paschal sacrifice—a group which excludes foreigners (נכר) but includes both natural citizens and *gerim*—the uncircumcised are excluded.[14]

This same connection between the paschal offering and circumcision also appears in Joshua, who circumcises the Israelites before they offer the Pesach (Josh 5:2–10).[15]

Blood as Protection for Passover and Circumcision

The special linkage of the Paschal offering to circumcision may be related to the apotropaic nature of both commandments – both are related to blood as a form of protection.[16]

There are still remnants to this conceptualization in rabbinic literature.[17] Thus, the Tannaitic Midrash combines the two commandments of Exodus 12, the Paschal lamb and the circumcision as the merits that made the Israelites worthy of redemption (Mekhilta of R. Yishmael; Pisḥa 5, Trans. Lauterbach, vol. I, p. 24):

נתן להם הקב״ה שתי מצות דם פסח ודם מילה שיתעסקו בם כדי שיגאלו.

Therefore the Holy One, blessed be He, assigned them two duties, the duty of the paschal sacrifice and the duty of circumcision, which they should perform so as to be worthy of redemption.

This may help explain why the paschal lamb, of all the commandments, requires that its participants, whether Israelite or not, must be circumcised.

LXX: Two Types of *Gerim*

If even the Priestly texts do not understand *ger* as convert, when and how did this understanding of the biblical text evolve? To answer this question, we must recall that, unlike contemporary Bible scholars who tend to explain contradictory concepts in the Torah by assuming multiple sources, the ancient sages read the Torah as one consistent document. As such, it should have one systematic view of what the status of foreigners living among Israelites should be. And yet, as noted above, the Torah presents more than one picture of the *ger*.

The earliest source we have to take up the problem of why the Torah uses the term *ger* in more than one sense is the Greek Septuagint (LXX), which uses two different terms to translate *ger* depending on context:

* *Paroikos* (πάροικος)*—*The standard Greek word for “neighbor,” literally “living near.” LXX uses it in the sense of foreigners living outside their own country among another group, i.e., “neighbors who are not the same.” It is the standard translation for *ger* when the term refers to Israelites living among foreigners, but is only rarely used for *ger* in reference to foreigners living among Israelites; it is, instead, the preferred translation of *toshav*, “sojourner” in such cases (Exod 12:45, Lev 22:10, 25:6, 23).[18]
* *Proselytos* (προσήλυτος)—A Jewish-Greek[19] term for a *ger*that literally means “one who has arrived,” likely implying more than just “living among,” but “joining.” LXX uses this term for the vast majority of cases when *ger* refers to an outsider living among Israelites.[20]

The *Ger* in Deuteronomy Who Eats Carrion

Although LXX avoided using *paroikos* for a *ger* living among Israelites, in some cases the translators felt they had no choice. An example from Deuteronomy is telling:

דברים יד:כא לֹא תֹאכְלוּ כָל נְבֵלָה לַגֵּר אֲשֶׁר בִּשְׁעָרֶיךָ תִּתְּנֶנָּה וַאֲכָלָהּ אוֹ מָכֹר לְנָכְרִי כִּי עַם קָדוֹשׁ אַתָּה לַי־הֹוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ

Deut 14:21 You shall not eat anything that has died a natural death; give it to the *ger*(LXX: *paroikos*) in your community to eat, or you may sell it to a foreigner. For you are a people consecrated to YHWH your God.

The position of the *ger*here is liminal. On one hand, the *ger* is explicitly marked as different from the Israelites who may not eat carrion. On the other hand, the *ger* is distinguished from the *nochri*, i.e., the outsider, in that the *ger* is to be given the meat for free, while the outsider is to be charged; that is, the Israelite has social responsibility for the *ger*, but not for the *nochri*.

We may deduce from the fact that the LXX translates *ger* here as *paroikos* that the translators use this term for foreigners who live among another group as a separate community, whether it is Israelites among foreigners or foreigners among Israelites. In contrast, *proselytos* refers to foreigners who live among Israelites *and join the community and share its commandments*. This is why the same rules apply to *gerim* and natural citizens, because they are one legal community.

In short, LXX understands what scholars call the Priestly *ger*as someone who has joined the Jews and is obligated to keep Jewish law, and extends this definition to as many (non-Priestly) passages about *gerim* that can sustain it.[21]

The *Proselytos* and the Convert

It is natural to assume that LXX’s *proselytos* is coterminous with the Rabbinic Judaism’s convert. In fact, the Greek *proselytos* (via Latin) is the source of the English word proselyte. But the matter is not so simple, and we must be wary of anachronistically translating *ger* as “convert” in the LXX because of how the rabbis eventually understood the term *ger*.[22]

In fact, during the Second Temple period, becoming a Jew did not involve crossing the sharp, binary gentile/Jew divide through a specific, legislated, instantaneous ritual that transformed the gentile into the Jew. Instead, as Shaye Cohen meticulously shows, during this period there is a continuum, rather than a dichotomy, between various levels of identifying with and as Jews.[23]

Even Josephus, at the end of the first century C.E., is still aware of this continuum, and does not describe a specific conversion ritual, but rather the coexistence of different models to becoming a Jew, as we see from his discussion of the conversion of King Izates of Adiabene.[24] The rabbis, however, put an end to this fluidity of identity and ritual.

Introducing the Rabbinic *Ger*

The rabbis divide the references to *ger* in the Torah in the same way as the LXX did hundreds of years earlier:

1. גר תושב (*ger toshav*)—meaning “the *ger* who is a sojourner,” this refers to a gentile who remains a gentile, but lives under Jewish sovereignty and fulfills some commandments.
2. גר שנתגייר (*ger she-nitgayyer*)—meaning, “the *ger* who has converted,” this refers to a gentile who undergoes circumcision (if male) and ritual immersion (both male and female) and thereby becomes a Jew. This category is also referred to as גר צדק (*ger tzedek*), meaning “a righteous *ger*.”

On the face of it, the division of sojourner vs. convert seems the same as LXX’s division between *paroikos* and *proselytos*. Like the LXX, the rabbis understand the vast majority of the Torah references to a *ger* living among Israelites as referring to those who join the community and reserved the term גר תושב only for those cases which cannot be read as referring to a convert.

As for LXX, the classic example of such an exception was the verse in Deuteronomy about giving a carcass to a *ger*.[25] In fact, the rabbis sometimes use this verse as a distinguishing mark of the *ger* who is *not* a real proselyte, calling him גר אוכל נבלות, “a carcass eating *ger*.”[26]

And yet, the distinction between the types of *gerim* in rabbinic literature is sharper than anything we find in Second Temple literature. The gradations of Jewishness possible in Second Temple times for the *proselytos* who wishes to join the Jewish people was erased in rabbinic literature and replaced with ritual conversion.

The rabbinic view does demonstrate some continuity with Second Temple practices, since we learn from certain Second Temple sources how males who wanted to become Jews to the fullest extent underwent circumcision. Yet, the rabbis preserved only this most extreme option of full integration.

For the rabbis, a convert is someone who becomes fully Jewish. In their view, ethnic identity is for the most part, binary: a person is either a gentile or a Jew.[27] An individual changes from the former to the latter through rituals of conversion, namely immersion, plus, for men, circumcision.

The Rabbinic Conversion Revolution

The transformation of the *ger* into a convert and the consequent marginalization of the sojourner in rabbinic literature is part of a broader move of eradication of the intermediate positions in the Jewish-gentile continuum. Even if it is built upon the Second Temple reality that outsiders can join Jews to various degrees, the rabbinic systematic transformation of biblical *gerim* into full-blown converts is revolutionary.

While Second Temple Judaism still allowed for gradations of Jewishness, the rabbis created a fully binary model of a Jew vs. gentile.[28] In so doing, the rabbis standardized the position of the *proselytos*, turning the *ger* into a full Jew, and legislating the rituals required in order to accomplish this transformation.

Thus, for the rabbis, the gentile who circumcised himself to eat of the paschal lamb was a full-fledged Jew, who had the responsibility to observe all the *mitzvot* (commandments) that were incumbent on Jews, rather than a foreigner who had to go through a particular ritual just to eat from the sacrifice, as the Bible envisions it. The biblical *ger*, who lives among the Israelites and thus may eat the paschal lamb with them, was transformed by the rabbis into a full convert, in accordance with their new, comprehensive binary structure.[29]

[View Footnotes](https://www.thetorah.com/article/in-the-torah-is-the-ger-ever-a-convert)

1. Editor’s note: For a discussion of who these biblical Hittites are supposed to be, see Yigal Levin, [“Who Was Living in the Land when Abraham Arrived?”](https://thetorah.com/abraham-goes-to-canaan/) *TheTorah.com* (2013).
2. Scholars debate which is the better translation for the term *chatat*. See, Jacob Milgrom, “Sin-Offering or Purification-Offering,” *VT* 21 (1971): 237–239; *ibid*., *Leviticus 1–16*(Anchor Bible; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 253–254; Yitzhaq Feder, *Blood Expiation in Hittite and Biblical Ritual: Origins Context and Meaning* (Atlanta: SBL, 2011), 99–108.
3. See, for example, the view of Jose E. Ramirez Kidd,

[T]he term *ger* is immigrant in the earlier references (JE); resident alien in the Covenant Code and Deuteronomy, and proselyte in the Holiness code and P.

Jose E. Ramirez Kidd,*Alterity and Identity in Israel: The ger in the Old Testament* (Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 1999), 2-3.

1. Editor’s note: The law codes in the Torah have different concepts of what the tithe is for, and the rabbis tried to make sense of this by categorizing them as different tithes. See discussion in, Zev Farber, [“Making *Ma’aser* Work for the Times,”](https://thetorah.com/making-maaser-work-for-the-times/) *TheTorah.com* (2015); Isaac Sassoon, [“Tithes: Supporting the Priests vs. Sustaining the Poor,”](https://www.thetorah.com/article/tithes-supporting-the-priests-vs-sustaining-the-poor) *TheTorah.com* (2015).
2. In the Sabbath commandment (Deut 5:13; cf. Exod 20:9) the *ger* appears as part of another group; that of the household, alongside one’s children, slaves and livestock.
3. A common approach to D’s treatment of gerim is to assume that it reflects straightforward realia, that in D’s time and place, the *ger* was a displaced immigrant in need of protection. Some scholars have even tied this to possible waves of immigration following the exile of the Northern Kingdom, i.e., that the northern Israelites are *gerim*living in southern Judah. (See discussion in, Mark R. Glanville, *Adopting the Stranger as Kindred in Deuteronomy*[Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018], 5-14.) Nevertheless, we should be wary of naively reconstructing reality out of textual presentation. Instead, one can equally argue that this presentation is an ideological move tailored to include the *ger*in the sphere the Israelite’s responsibility without undermining the differences between the two. As Saul Olyan writes,

…Deuteronomistic materials – if I read them correctly – cast dependency as the route to integration in Israel. The resident outsider who participates in cultic life is always presented in Deuteronomistic texts as a client of an Israelite household head.

See, Saul Olyan, *Rites and Rank: Hierarchy in Biblical Representations of Cult* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 80. Olyan’s analysis is unique in reading, justly in my mind, the *ger’s*dependency in the Deuteronomistic law as an inclusive tactic rather than as a simple mirror of a social state.

1. Some attribute all these inclusive statements to the Holiness School. See Israel Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 21. Knohl also notes that the only place where the *ezrach* appears without the *ger* is in the festival of Sukkot (Lev 23:42) where the restriction is explicated in vs. 43 as coming from the special historical reasoning of the commandment.
2. Scholars debate whether the equation clause is to be restricted only to those places where it is stated explicitly, or whether we should deduce from it a more general principle. Thus, for example the *ger* is not included explicitly in the decree on Israelites to be holy (Lev 19:2) but he is included in several specific commandment that seem to come from this general decree (e.g. Lev 17:8; 20:2). For a minimalistic approach, that sees the *ger*as included only in those commandments which state this explicitly, see Christophe Nihan, “Resident Aliens and Natives in the Holiness Legislation,” in *The Foreigner and the Law: Perspectives from the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East,*Rainer Albertz, Jakob Wöhrle, and Reinhard Achenbach, eds., Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Für Altorientalische Und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte 16 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011), 111–34.
3. See e.g., Nihan, “Resident Aliens,” 129-31; Rainer Albertz, “From Aliens to Proselytes: Non-Priestly and Priestly Legislation Concerning Strangers,” in *The Foreigner and the Law: Perspectives from the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, ed., Rainer Albertz, Jakob Wöhrle, and Reinhard Achenbach (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011), 53–69; Kidd, *Alterity and Identity*, 7. If we assume, however, that the client-like status of the Deuteronomistic *ger*is an ideological construct, these evolutionary approaches confuse cause and effect. See Ophir and Rosen-Zvi, *Goy*, 27–33.
4. The tight connection between the nature of the *ger* and the dating of the priestly sources (and the layers therein) has been described by Kidd, *Alterity and Identity*, 7. Kidd himself reads the move from the Deuteronomistic model to the Priestly one as a transition from “protection” to “membership” (ibid, 130).
5. Kenton L. Sparks, *Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Israel: Prolegomena to the Study of Ethnic Sentiments and Their Expression in the Hebrew Bible* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1998), 244, 252.
6. Reinhard Achenbach, “Ger – Nokhri – Toshav-Zar,” in *The Foreigner and the Law: Perspectives from the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, ed., Rainer Albertz, Jakob Wöhrle, and Reinhard Achenbach; Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Für Altorientalische Und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte, 16 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011), 29.
7. Indeed, the parallel commandment in Num 9:14 does not bother to mention circumcision specifically when discussing the *ger*, but simply says: “according to the statute of the Passover and according to its rule, so shall he [=the *ger*] do.” This is thus part of the general rules of Passover, and is not specifically tailored for the *ger*.
8. Tannaitic literature turns the Passover sacrifice into a case study for conversion. Thus, for instance, M. *Pesahim* 8:8 reads:

גר שנתגייר בערב פסח בית שמאי אומרים טובל ואוכל את פסחו לערב ובית הלל אומרים הפורש מן הערלה כפורש מן הקבר:

If a proselyte was converted on the eve of Pesah; the house of Shammai says: “he should immerse himself and [then] eat his Pesah offering in the evening.” But the house of Hillel says: “One who separates himself from an uncircumcised state is like one who separates himself from the grave.”

Nevertheless, we should not mix this Midrashic reading of the circumcision in Exodus 12 as a conversion ceremony (compare MekhY, Pisḥa 15, Lauterbach, vol. I, p. 87) with the plain meaning of the verses, where nothing like a conversion is narrated. On the various explanations offered to the Hillelites’ ruling in this Mishnah see Vered Noam, “Another Look at the Rabbinic Conception of Gentiles from the Perspective of Impurity Laws,” in *Judaea-Palaestina, Babylon and Rome: Jews in Antiquity,* Benjamin Isaac and Yuval Shahar, eds. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012) ,89-110 (esp. 94-97).

1. See discussion in David Frankel, [“Joshua Circumcises Israel in Response to Egypt’s Scorn,”](https://thetorah.com/joshua-circumcises-israel-in-response-to-egypts-scorn/) *TheTorah.com* (2018). In fact, this connection between circumcision and Pesach may be related to what appears to be a connection between circumcision and the exodus story in general. This independent connection is highlighted both in the Joshua circumcision story, which makes the claim that that the Israelites who left Egypt had been circumcised (v. 5), and in the narrative of the “bridegroom of blood” in which Moses’ son is circumcised in order to save Moses from being killed by YHWH on his way to free the Israelites from Egypt (Exod 4:24-26). For more on the bloody bridegroom passage, see Serge Frolov, [“A Murderous Bridegroom,”](https://thetorah.com/a-murderous-bridegroom/) *TheTorah.com* (2015).
2. Editor’s note: See Kristine Garroway, [“The Origins of the Biblical Pesach,”](https://thetorah.com/origins-of-the-biblical-pesach/) *TheTorah.com* (2015).
3. See, Aharon Shemesh, “Pesah zeh ʿal shum mah?“, *AJS Review* 21 (1996): 1-17. On the apotropaic role of the Passover sacrifice in rabbinic literature see also Mira Balberg, *Blood for Thought: The Reinvention of Sacrifice in Early Rabbinic Literature* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017), 142-182.
4. In two verses that have both terms together, גר ותושב, when *ger* is clearly not someone taking on Israelite behavior or identity, the translators still used *paroikos* for *ger*, avoiding the term *proselytos*, and created a neologism to translate *toshav*, *parepidymos* (παρεπίδημος), meaning “temporary sojourner” (Gen 23:4; Ps 38(39):13). In other cases, the pair is translated as “*proselytos* and *paroikos*” (Lev 25:23, 35, 47; Num 35:15).
5. In other words, this is not a term used by general, Greek speakers, but a Jewish idiom used to convey a concept relevant to that sub-group of Greek speakers.
6. In one case, referring to the prohibition of consuming leaven during the festival of Matzot (Exod 12:19), LXX uses the term *geioras* (γειώρας) for *ger*. This term is not Greek, but a transliteration of the Aramaic גיורא, a cognate of the Hebrew גר.
7. Only a handful of references to *gerim* in the Torah are true foreigners, since, in LXX’s view, this is what the Torah means by *toshav*.
8. See discussion in Matthew Thiessen, “Revisiting the Προσήλυτος in ‘the LXX,’” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 132 (2013): 333–350.
9. On this spectrum see Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*: *Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 140-162.
10. See the section on [circumcision](https://thetorah.com/queen-helena-of-adiabene-and-her-sons-in-midrash-and-history/#Circumcision) in, Malka Simkovich,[“Queen Helena of Adiabene and Her Sons in Midrash and History,”](https://thetorah.com/queen-helena-of-adiabene-and-her-sons-in-midrash-and-history/) *TheTorah.com* (2018).
11. For a detailed account of these cases see Adi Ophir and Ishay Rosen-Zvi, *Goy: Israel’s Multiple Others and the Birth of the Gentile* (Oxford: Oxford, University Press, 2018), 180-181.
12. Sifra Behar 5:1 [109b]; b. *Avodah Zarah* 64b.
13. For the rabbinic treatment of “in between” figures, like Samaritans (Kuttim), “Cannanaite slaves,” “apostates,” see Ophir and Rosen-Zvi, *Goy*, 180-197.
14. This dichotomizing process also brought the rabbis to erase the differences between various nations. While Deut. 23:4-8 allocate different attitude to different nations (Moabites, Egyptians, Edomites), the rabbis dismissed these differences, arguing that “Sennacherib mixed up all nations” (M. Yad. 4:4) and thus all gentiles are to be treated similarly. Tannaitic Aggada also turns the Egyptians into a model for all Gentiles. See, e.g., MekhY Beshalach 2, (trans. Lauterbach, modified, vol. I, p. 204), in which a verse dealing with Egypt, that could have been specifically tied to the Egyptian sphere, is associated in the homily with prooftexts regarding the Canaanites, Moabites, and Midianites, but not the Egyptians. Clearly, this Midrash views the biblical Egyptians as nothing more than a model for gentiles in general.
15. In our work on the birth of the Goy, Adi Ophir and I have argued that the elimination of the biblical *ger* in rabbinic literature, along with the removal of differences between different nations, is essential for the creation of a new Jew-Gentile binary model. But this is a long (and complex) argument. For our context suffice it to caution us not to read uncritically these revolutionary conceptual moves back into the Pentateuch.