ASTORIA CENTER OF ISRAEL
Judaism With Open Arms

Parashat Toledot: Brothers at War

Rabbi Joshua Rabin, Astoria Center of Israel, Astoria, New York[1]

Bereishit 36:1	
וְאֵלֶּה תֹּלְדוֹת עֵשָׂו הוּא אֱדוֹם:	This is the line of Esau—that is, Edom.

1. **Esau = Edom = Rome = Christianity**

Bereishit 36:43	
אַלּוּף מַגְדִּיאֵל אַלּוּף עִירָם אֵלֶּה	אַלּוּפֵי אֱדוֹם לְמוֹשְׁבֹתָם בְּאֶרֶץ אֲחֻזָּתָם הוּא עֵשָׂו אֲבִי אֱדוֹם:	Magdiel, and Iram. Those are the clans of Edom—that is, of Esau, father of the Edomites—by their settlements in the land that they hold.

Rashi on Bereishit 36:43	
מגדיאל. הִיא רוֹמִי:	**מגדיאל**— This is Rome

Yerushalmi Taanit 4:5:12	
תַּנֵּי. אָמַר רִבִּי יְהוּדָה בִּירִבִּי אִלָּעַאי. בָּרוּךְ רִבִּי הָיָה דוֹרֵשׁ הַקּוֹל קוֹל יַעֲקֹב וְהַיָּדַיִם יְדֵי עֵשָׂו. קוֹלוֹ שֶׁלְיַעֲקֹב צָוַוח מִמָּה שֶׁעָשׂוּ לוֹ יָדָיו שֶׁלְעֵשָׂו בְּבֵיתְתֵּר.	**“Beitar was taken”...**It was stated: Rebbi Jehudah ben Rebbi Illai said, Baruch my teacher used to preach, *the voice is Jacob’s voice but the hands are Esau’s hands*. Jacob’s voice cries out about what Esau’s hands did at Beitar.

Midrash Bereishit Rabbah 63:7	
שְׁנֵי גוֹיִם בְּבִטְנֵךְ, שְׁנֵי גֵאֵי גוֹיִם בְּבִטְנֵךְ, זֶה מִתְגָּאֶה בְּעוֹלָמוֹ וְזֶה מִתְגָּאֶה בְּמַלְכוּתוֹ. שְׁנֵי גֵאֵי גוֹיִם בְּבִטְנֵךְ, אַדְרְיָאנוֹס בְּעוֹבְדֵי כּוֹכָבִים, שְׁלֹמֹה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל.	**“Two peoples [*goyim*] are in your womb”** (Genesis 25:23) – two of the proudest of peoples are in your womb. This one is proud of his world and that one is proud of his empire. Two of the proudest of peoples are in your womb – Hadrian among the idolaters and Solomon in Israel.

Bavli Avodah Zarah 11b	
אָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה אָמַר שְׁמוּאֵל: עוֹד אַחֶרֶת יֵשׁ [לָהֶם] בְּרוֹמִי, אַחַת לְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה מְבִיאִין אָדָם שָׁלֵם,	**Rav Yehuda says** that **Shmuel says: They have another** festival **in Rome: Once every seventy years they bring a man** who is **whole** and free from any defect **and have him ride on a lame man,** to symbolize the healthy Esau ruling over Jacob, who

[1] All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.

וּמַרְכִּיבִין אוֹתוֹ עַל אָדָם חִיגֵּר, וּמַלְבִּישִׁין אוֹתוֹ בִּגְדֵי אָדָם הָרִאשׁוֹן, וּמַנִּיחִין לוֹ בְּרֹאשׁוֹ קַרְקִיפְלוֹ שֶׁל רַבִּי יִשְׁמָעֵאל,	walked with a limp after his fight with the angel. **And they dress him** in the **garments of Adam the first** man **and place on his head the scalp [*karkifelo*] of Rabbi Yishmael,** which the Romans skinned.
וְתָלוּ לֵיהּ [בְּצַוָּארֵיהּ] מַתְקָל [מָאתַן] זוּזָא דְּפִיזָּא, וּמְחַפִּין אֶת הַשְּׁווּקִים בְּאִינָךְ, וּמַכְרִיזִין לְפָנָיו: סַךְ קִירִי פְּלַסְתֵּר, אֲחוּהּ דְּמָרָנָא זַיְיפָנָא. דְּחָמֵי חָמֵי, וּדְלָא חָמֵי לָא חָמֵי, מַאי אַהֲנִי לְרַמָּאָה בְּרַמָּאוּתֵיהּ וּלְזַיְיפָנָא בְּזַיְיפָנוּתֵיהּ? וּמְסַיְימִין בַּהּ הָכִי: וַוי לְדֵין כַּד יְקוּם דֵּין.	**And they hang gold on his neck weighing two hundred dinars, and cover the markets with onyx, and announce before him: The calculation [*sakh*]** of **the master [*kiri*]** Jacob with regard to the time of the redemption is **fraudulent [*plaster*]; the brother of our master,** i.e., Esau, **a forger.** They further announce: One **who witnesses** this festival **witnesses** it, **and whoever does not witness** it will **not** witness it ever. **What purpose does deceit serve for the deceiver, and forgery for the forger? And they conclude in this** fashion: **Woe unto this** one, Esau, **when that** one, Jacob, **will arise,** as this will cause Esau's downfall.

Rashi on Bavli Avodah Zarah 11b	
אָדָם חִגֵּר - כְּנֶגֶד יַעֲקֹב צוֹלֵעַ עַל יְרֵכוֹ. כְּלוֹמַר עֲדַיִן עֵשָׂו שׁוֹלֵט עַל יַעֲקֹב:	**"A lame man"—** corresponding to Jacob, who limped because of his injured hip. In other words, Esau still holds power over Jacob.

2. Brothers At War

Ramban on Bereishit 32:4	
…וְיֵשׁ בָּהּ עוֹד רֶמֶז לְדוֹרוֹת, כִּי כָּל אֲשֶׁר אֵרַע לְאָבִינוּ עִם עֵשָׂו אָחִיו יֵאָרַע לָנוּ תָּמִיד עִם בְּנֵי עֵשָׂו, וְרָאוּי לָנוּ לֶאֱחֹז בְּדַרְכּוֹ שֶׁל צַדִּיק, שֶׁנִּזְמִין עַצְמֵנוּ לִשְׁלֹשֶׁת הַדְּבָרִים שֶׁהִזְמִין הוּא אֶת עַצְמוֹ, לִתְפִלָּה וּלְדוֹרוֹן וּלְהַצָּלָה בְּדָרֶךְ מִלְחָמָה לִבְרֹחַ וּלְהִנָּצֵל.	…There is yet in this section a hint for future generations, for everything that happened to our father with his brother Esau will constantly occur to us with Esau's children, and it is proper for us to adhere to the way of the righteous by preparing ourselves in the three things for which he prepared himself: for prayer, for giving him a present, and for rescue by methods of warfare, to flee and to be saved.

Avraham Grossman, *Rashi*, 199
In Rashi's commentaries…the nations of the world, especially Christendom, are portrayed as beasts of prey lying in wait to attack and devour the Jewish people. Rejoicing over the Jews' misfortune, they are hypocritical, cruel, thieving, corrupt, wallowing in lust, and involved in idolatry, sexual immorality, and bloodshed...Rashi viewed the nations of his time as the heirs of Israel's great biblical enemies, carrying on in their ways. That is especially true of Christians, whom he regarded as the descendants of Esau…

Dr. Malka Z. Simkovich, "Esau the Ancestor of Rome," TheTorah.com
Readers of the midrashic texts quoted above might assume that the rabbinic association of Esau with Rome points to God's unequivocal rejection of Rome and Christianity. Just as Esau was the rejected son who received no covenantal inheritance from God, so too were Rome and Christianity rejected by God in favor of a relationship with Israel. But if the rabbis meant to suggest that Rome and Christianity deserved nothing but scorn and rejection, it would have made more sense to associate them with antagonists who had no familial relationship with Israel…
Perhaps the most significant aspect of the rabbinic association of Esau with Rome and Christianity is that when we last see Esau in the Hebrew Bible, he has reconciled with his brother Jacob, and they live near one another, if not among one another, in peace.