

Power War Redemption Ethics #3

Purim Zionism

1. A (Partial) Religious Taxonomy of Zionisms

Michael Walzer - *Exodus and Revolution* (Basic Books, 1985), Chapters 3 and 4

Do the children of Israel reach the promised land? Well, yes, they do; though the land was rosier in the promising than in the getting. Or, better, the promise turned out to have qualifying clauses... The promise, in fact, had a complex twofold character: God said, "I will bring you into a land flowing with milk and honey," and He also said, "Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." The land is the opposite of Egyptian bondage: free farming instead of slave labor.... The kingdom is the opposite of Egyptian corruption: holiness instead of idolatry. Both these promises require human cooperation. God brings the Israelites out of Egypt, but they themselves must make the trek across the desert and conquer Canaan and work the land. And God gives the Israelites laws, which they must learn to live by

... What is the meaning of "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation"? The second promise is closely tied to the first.... What is required of a holy nation is that its members obey divine law, and much of that law is concerned with the rejection of Egyptian bondage. In such a nation, then, no one would oppress a stranger, or deny Sabbath rest to his servants, or withhold the wages of a worker. A kingdom of priests would be a kingdom without a king (God would be king); hence it would be without pharaohs and without taskmasters... The prophets, defending the idea of a holy nation, repeatedly denounce political tyranny and social injustice; once again, these two are hard to separate. I needn't quote any passages: these are probably the most familiar parts of the Bible...

Messianism derives from Exodus but stands radically apart from it. Not only is the messianic promise unconditional, as Saadya Gaon argued, but its content is utterly new... History will stop - an idea entirely alien to the Exodus texts, which almost seem designed to teach that the promises will never definitively be fulfilled, that backsliding and struggle are permanent features of human existence...

We can [set Exodus Zionism] against messianic Zionism.... Exodus Zionism involve[s] what the novelist A. B. Yehoshua has called "an act of renunciation - a renunciation of messianism, religious salvation, and the vision of the End of Days."

The strongest opposition to the political messianism of right-wing Zionists came from the greatest scholar of Jewish messianism, Gershom Scholem.

I absolutely deny that Zionism is a messianic movement.... The redemption of the Jewish people, which as a Zionist I desire, is in no way identical with the religious redemption I hope for in the future.... The Zionist ideal is one thing and the messianic ideal another, and the two do not meet except in the pompous phraseology of mass rallies.

We must accept the decree of history without a utopian cover. And, obviously, one must pay for that. One encounters others who have... interests and rights... [and must] succeed in coming to terms with them. If the dream of Zionism is numbers and borders, and if we can't exist without them, then Zionism will fail.

This is the authentic prophetic voice, remembering the Egypt of bondage and exile, hoping that Canaan, now Israel, will turn out to be a better place.

2. Purim is the Anti-Pesah

Exodus 12

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first of the months of the year for you... You shall keep watch over it until the fourteenth day of this month; and all the assembled congregation of the Israelites shall slaughter it at twilight.

They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs... ¹⁴This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to God; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance

שמות יב

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אַהֲרֹן
בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר
הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם רִאשׁוֹן הַחֹדָשִׁים רִאשׁוֹן
הוּא לָכֶם לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשָּׁנָה וְהָיָה לָכֶם
לְמִשְׁמֶרֶת עֵד אַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר יוֹם
לַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה וְשִׁחֲטוּ אֹתוֹ כָּל קֶהֱל
עַד־תִּישָׂרְאֵל בֵּין הָעַרְבָּיִם
אֲכֹלוּ אֶת הַבָּשָׂר בַּלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה צְלִי אֵשׁ
וּמִצּוֹת עַל מַרְרִים יֹאכְלֶהוּ: ¹⁴וְהָיָה
הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לָכֶם לְזִכְרוֹן וְחֻגְתֶּם אֹתוֹ חֹג
לִיקְוֹן לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם חֻקַּת עוֹלָם תִּחְגְּגֶהוּ:



Esther 3:12

¹²Then the king’s secretaries were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and an edict, according to all that Haman commanded, was written to the king’s satraps and to the governors over all the provinces and to the officials of all the peoples, to every province in its own script and every people in its own language; it was written in the name of King Ahashverosh and sealed with the king’s ring.

אסתר ג:יב

¹²וַיִּקְרְאוּ סֹפְרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן בְּשִׁלְשֹׁמֶה עֶשְׂרֵי יוֹם בּוֹ וַיִּכְתֹּב כָּכָל אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה הַמֶּן אֶל אֲחֻשְׁוֶרְשָׁי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאֶל הַפָּחוֹת אֲשֶׁר עַל מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה וְאֶל שָׂרֵי עַם וְעַם מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה כְּכַתְבָּהּ וְעַם וְעַם כָּל־שׂוֹנוֹ בְּשֵׁם הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחֻשְׁוֶרֶשׁ נִכְתָּב וְנִחְתָּם בְּטַבַּעַת הַמֶּלֶךְ:

Esther 4:15-17

¹⁵Then Esther said in reply to Mordecai, ¹⁶“Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. After that I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish.” ¹⁷Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

אסתר ד:טו-יז

¹⁵וַתֹּאמֶר אֶסְתֵּר לְהַשִּׁיב אֶל מָרְדֳּכָי: ¹⁶לֵךְ כְּנוֹס אֶת כָּל הַיְהוּדִים הַנִּמְצְאִים בְּשׁוֹשַׁן וְצוּמוּ עִלַּי וְאֶל תֹּאכְלוּ וְאֶל תִּשְׁתּוּ וְשִׁתּוֹ נִשְׁלֶשֶׁת יָמִים לַיְלָה וַיּוֹם גַּם אֲנִי וְנַעֲרֹתַי אֲצוּיִם כֵּן וּבָכֵן אֲבֹא אֶל הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר לֹא כִדָּת וְכִאֲשֶׁר אֲבַדְתִּי אֲבַדְתִּי: ¹⁷וַיַּעֲבֵר מָרְדֳּכָי וַיַּעַשׂ כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר צִוְתָהּ עָלָיו אֶסְתֵּר:

Talmud Bavli Megillah 15a

“And Mordecai went/transgressed”—
Rav said: Since he spent the first day of Passover fasting

תלמוד בבלי מגילה טו.

ויעבר מרדכי - אמר רב: שהעביר יום ראשון של פסח בתענית.

2. How Things End (or don't)

Esther 10:1-3

King Ahasuerus imposed tribute on the mainland and the islands.
All his mighty and powerful acts, and a full account of the greatness to which the king advanced Mordecai, are recorded in the Annals of the Kings of Media and Persia. For Mordecai the Jew ranked next to King Ahasuerus and was highly regarded by the Jews and popular with the multitude of his brethren; he sought the good of his people and interceded for the welfare of all his kindred.

וַיִּשֶׂם הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשֵׁרֶשׁ [אַחֲשֻׁרְוֶשׁ |] מִס עַל־הָאָרֶץ וְאֲזֵי הַיָּם וְכֹל־מַעֲשָׂה תְקֵפוֹ וְגִבּוֹרָתוֹ וּפְרָשָׁת גְּדֻלַּת מָרְדֳּכָי אֲשֶׁר גִּדְּלוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ הַלּוֹא־הֵם כְּתוּבִים עַל־סֵפֶר דְּבָרַי הַיָּמִים לְמַלְכֵי מְדִי וּפְרָס כִּי | מָרְדֳּכָי הִיְהוּדִי מְשֻׁנָּה לְמֶלֶךְ אֲחֻשְׁוֶרֶשׁ וְגִדּוֹל לְיְהוּדִים וְרָצוּי לְרַב אֲתִיו דְּרִישׁ טוֹב לְעַמּוֹ וְדִבֵּר שְׁלוֹם לְכָל־זֶרְעוֹ

Vs Exodus 15:30-31

Thus the LORD delivered Israel that day from the Egyptians. Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the shore of the sea.

And when Israel saw the wondrous power which the LORD had wielded against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD; they had faith in the LORD and His servant Moses.

וַיֹּשַׁע יְהוָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל
מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם וַיֵּרָא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־מִצְרַיִם
מֵת עַל־שַׁפַּת הַיָּם
לֹא־וַיֵּרָא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַיָּד הַגְּדֹלָה
אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יְהוָה בְּמִצְרַיִם וַיִּירָאוּ
הָעָם אֶת־יְהוָה וַיֹּאמְרֵינוּ בְּיַהוָה
וּבְמֹשֶׁה עַבְדּוֹ

Bavli Megillah 16b

“By the majority of his brethren,” but not by all his brethren. This teaches that some members of the Sanhedrin rejected him [Rasi: because he became a government official and neglected his studies.]

Rav Yosef said: Studying Torah is greater than saving lives, as initially, Mordecai was mentioned after four other people, but at the end he was listed after five. At first it is written: “Who came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan” (Ezra 2:2); but in the end it is written: “Who came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahmani, Mordecai, Bilshan” (Nehemiah 7:7).

וְרַצוּי לְרֹב אֶחָיו לְרֹב אֶחָיו וְלֹא
לְכָל אֶחָיו מִלְּמַד שְׁפִירְשׁוּ מִמֶּנּוּ
מִקְצַת סְנֵהֲדֵרִין [רש"י לפי
שְׁנַעֲשָׂה קְרוֹב לְמַלְכוּת וְהָיָה בְּטֵל
מִתְלַמְּדוֹ:]
אָמַר רַב יוֹסֵף גְּדוֹל תְּלַמוּד תּוֹרָה
יוֹתֵר מִהַצֵּלַת נַפְשׁוֹת דְּמַעֲיַקְרָא
חֲשִׁיב לִיָּה לְמַרְדֵּכִי בְּתַר אַרְבַּעַה
וּלְבַסּוֹף בְּתַר חֲמִשָּׁה מַעֲיַקְרָא
כְּתִיב אֲשֶׁר בָּאוּ עִם זְרוּבָבֶל יִשׁוּעַ
נְחֵמְיָה שְׁרָיָה רַעְלִיָּה מְרַדְכֵי בִלְשָׁן
וּלְבַסּוֹף כְּתִיב הַבָּאִים עִם זְרוּבָבֶל
יִשׁוּעַ נְחֵמְיָה עֲזַרְיָה רַעְמִיָּה נְחֵמָנִי
מְרַדְכֵי בִלְשָׁן





“He’s all right. I just wish he were a little more pro-Israel.”

Contrasting Pesah and Purim

	Pesah	Purim
Motion	Egypt → Israel	None/stasis
Mechanism of salvation	Miracles	Politics, coincidence
God	Present, active	Hidden, absent
Do readers know the end?	Yes	No
Government’s status	Decimated	Strengthened
Narrative Unity	United	Divided



3. Rava Realized That Purim, not Pesah, is our world - Bavli Megillah 14a

Rabbi H_iyya bar Avin said in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Kor_hah: "Since we celebrate the passage from slavery to freedom [in Egypt], how much more should we celebrate salvation from death to life?!"

If so, shouldn't we also recite Hallel [Psalms of praise sung on joyous holidays] on Purim [as is done on Passover]?...

Rava responded: "There [on Passover] it makes sense to say 'Give praise, servants of God' (Psalm 113:1) [the first verse of Hallel]—and not servants of Pharaoh. But here [on Purim, can we say] 'Give praise, servants of God'—and not servants of A_hashverosh]? We are still servants of A_hashverosh!"

אמר רבי חייא בר אבין אמר רבי יהושע בן קרחה: ומה מעבדות לחירות אמרינן שירה - ממיתה לחיים לא כל שכן? - אי הכי הלל נמי נימא!...

רבא אמר: בשלמא התם "הללו עבדי ה'" - ולא עבדי פרעה, אלא הכא - הללו עבדי ה' ולא עבדי אחשוורוש? אכתי עבדי אחשוורוש אנן.

