



[Pesiqta de Rav Kahana 5:7 \(ha-?odesh ha-ze, pisqah 7\)](#)

Rome enlists soldiers from all nations under its rule

Date: 5th CE

Place: Syria Palaestina

Language: Hebrew

Category: Jewish

Literary genre: Midrash

Title of work: Pesiqta de Rav Kahana

Reference:

5:7 (ha-?odesh ha-ze, pisqah 7)

Commentary:

Several passages in Genesis Rabbah note that Rome enlists troops from all nations (see commentary on [Genesis Rabbah 42:4](#)). However, Pesiqta de Rav Kahana, which was presumably edited slightly later in the fifth century (on the dating of these midrashim, see, for example, Avigdor Shinan, “The Late Midrashic, Paytanic, and Targumic Literature,” who dates Genesis Rabbah to ca. 425 CE, and Leviticus Rabbah and Pesiqta de Rav Kahana to ca. 450 CE), incorporates this tradition in a different and more detailed context (cf. [Genesis Rabbah 42:4](#)). This source presents two possible origins for this teaching: Rabbi Eliezer the son of Rabbi Yosi Ha-Glili, a fourth-generation tanna who was active in the mid-second century, who is cited by Rabbi Yudan, a fourth-generation amora who was active in the fourth century; and, Rabbi Eliezer ben Ya’aqov, probably a fourth-generation tanna who was active in the mid-second century, who is quoted by Rabbi ?unah (or Rav Hunah), likely the fourth-generation Babylonian-born amora who immigrated to the Land of Israel and was active in the first half of the fourth century (although other sages also had this name). For both options, a fourth-century sage transmits this tradition in the name of a second-century rabbi. Nevertheless, our source is better suited to an amoraic setting (cf. Krauss, *Persia and Rome*, p. 180, who dates this midrash to the second century). For example, the phrase King Messiah (or, the messianic king; *melekh ha-mashia?*) which appears frequently in amoraic midrashim, but rarely (if ever) before the fifth century. In earlier writings, both components of this title appear separately (namely, *mashia?* or *melekh*).

Our text is placed in a passage that discusses the future deliverance of Israel within the context of God’s instruction to this people, through Moses and Aaron, upon their rescue from Egypt: “This month shall be your beginning of months” (Exodus 12:2, NKJV). However, this source opens with a verse from the Song of Songs: “The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes [leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills]” (2:8, NKJV), explaining that this voice symbolizes the messianic king when he proclaims to Israel, upon his arrival, that they will be delivered during the coming month. Since Exodus 12:2 was included in the additional scriptural reading for the Shabbat that immediately precedes (or begins) the month of Nisan, and our chapter of this midrash is understood to have been composed in association with that special reading, our text conveys a thematically relevant message of imminent redemption. However, in this midrash, Israel cannot believe this pledge, for they know that deliverance will only follow their subjugation by seventy nations. The concept that the world is comprised of seventy nations (*shiv'im umot*) also appears in Genesis Rabbah 39:11 and 66:4 (Theodor-Albeck edition, p. 373 and 748), and Leviticus Rabbah 2:4. Some tannaitic texts state that there are seventy languages, perhaps representing those seventy nations without directly making that link (for example, Mishnah Sheqalim 5:1; Sotah 7:5; Tosefta Sotah 8:6-7; for more on the origin of the idea that seventy gods or angels supervise the seventy nations, see Ayali-Darshan, “The Seventy Bulls”). However, the notion that Israel cannot be delivered until they are ruled by seventy nations seems to be a rabbinic concept that is first found in amoraic midrashim (see also Genesis Rabbah 63:10, Theodor-Albeck edition, p. 693). This idea seems to contradict the model of four kingdoms that originated in the famous vision of Daniel (7:2-7; more on this theme in the commentary on [Leviticus Rabbah 13:5 \[part one\]](#)). While the view that four kingdoms will precede Israel’s redemption – as implied by Josephus (*Jewish Antiquities* X.210) and articulated in tannaitic texts (see, for example, [Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael be-?odesh \[Yitro\], parasha 8](#)) – in fifth-century amoraic midrashim, this paradigm appears together with the subsequent image of seventy nations (although the earlier tradition remained prevalent). Thus, in our midrash, for Israel, their divinely ordered subjugation by seventy nations is a prerequisite to their liberation; therefore, they would naturally respond with skepticism to a promise of impending deliverance by the messianic king.



The midrash then presents two possible answers that the messiah will give to the people of Israel: First, since Israelites were exiled to various regions around the world, a nation that ruled over any part of Israel was considered one of these nations; thus, the number seventy could be reached more quickly. As examples, the midrash cites Barbaryah and Sarmatiah, which seem to represent places or peoples beyond Roman dominion (at least in that era) where Israel was also exiled, to illustrate additional nations that subjected Israel to foreign dominion while other Jews were under Rome.

Second, given that the Roman army consists of many nations, Roman rule is considered oppression by multiple nations. In response, the messianic king states that “this evil kingdom also enlists recruits (*tironin*; from the Greek *tir?n*) from each and every nation.” While this line appears several times in Genesis Rabbah (as noted above), Pesiqta de Rav Kahana goes further to affirm that Israel can be delivered without having been ruled by seventy nations, as supported by this example: “[If a] Samaritan (*kuti*; who is a Roman soldier or officer) comes to subjugate (lit. and subjugates) a Jew, it is as if his entire nation had subjugated [Israel].” Some scholars contest this reading, suggesting other peoples, for instance, Krauss offers “Galati” (*Persia and Rome*, p. 179, note 39); Goth has also been posited (Hadas-Lebel, *Jerusalem against Rome*, p. 234); yet, MS Oxford, Bodleian Library 151:1 and MS Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, 3122[701] both read *kuti* (another MS reads *kushi*, meaning Cushite, which rabbinic literature interprets as a dark-skinned man). Despite its inclusion of this statement, our midrash does not focus on Rome or the nature of its rule, but rather on resolving the problem of how Israel can be delivered in the near term while maintaining that this cannot occur until seventy nations have ruled over them (by contrast Hadas-Lebel, *Jerusalem against Rome*, p. 235, who concludes on the basis of this text that: “Jews did not welcome the wholesale barbarisation of the Roman army, an ever-growing tendency from the 2nd century on”).

In conclusion, these two answers aim to prove to Israel that they may be delivered soon although they had not literally been the subjects of seventy nations. These explanations also seek to resolve the tension between the paradigms of the four empires versus the seventy nations. Moreover, they may have provided Israel hope for a speedy redemption, perhaps even in the upcoming month of Nisan, thus positioning Rome (or Christian Rome) as the final kingdom, even if seventy nations are required.

Keywords in the original language:

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Thematic keywords in English:

- [anointed king](#)
- [Barbarya](#)
- [Cushite](#)
- [deliverance](#)
- [exile](#)
- [four kingdoms](#)
- [Galatians](#)
- [Goths](#)



- [Messiah](#)
- [Messiah King](#)
- [nations](#)
- [Nisan](#)
- [Rabbi Eliezer ben Ya'aqov](#)
- [Rabbi hunah](#)
- [Rabbi Yudan](#)
- [Rav Hunah](#)
- [recruits](#)
- [Roman army](#)
- [Samaritan](#)
- [Sarmatia](#)
- [Sarmatians](#)
- [seventy languages](#)
- [seventy nations](#)

Bibliographical references: Ayali-Darshan, Noga, "[The Seventy Bulls Sacrificed at Sukkot \(Num 29:12-34\) in Light of a Ritual Text from Emar \(Emar 6, 373\)](#)", *Vetus Testamentum* 65 (2015) : 9-19

Hadas-Lebel, Mireille, [Jerusalem against Rome](#) (translated by Robyn Fréchet; Leuven: Peeters, 2006)

Krauss, Samuel, [Persia and Rome in Talmud and Midrash](#) (Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 1948)

Other sources connected with this document: Text

[Genesis Rabbah 42:4](#)

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