נתיבות עולם

עמדו על דרכים וראו ושאלו לנתיבות עולם · ירמיה ו׳ טז׳

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HAVING, by the help and mercy of God, brought these papers to the last number, we propose here to sum up their contents, and to give a review of the arguments which have been urged. The topics discussed have been very various, but the object in all has been the same—To show that Judaism, or the religion of the oral law, is not the old religion of Moses and the Prophets, but a new and totally different system, devised by designing men, and unworthy of the Jewish people. That Judaism is identical with the religion of the oral law, was proved in the first number by an appeal to the highest possible authority, the Prayer-book of the synagogue, which is not only formed in obedience to the directions of the oral law, but declares expressly that the Talmud is of Divine authority. So long, therefore, as that Prayer-book is the ritual of the synagogue, the worshippers there must be considered as Talmudists, believers in all the absurdities, and advocates of all the intolerance of that mass of tradition. That this is no misrepresentation and no unfounded conclusion of our own, appears from the latest book published in this country by a member of the Jewish persuasion. Joshua Van Oven, Esq., has, in his "Introduction to the Principles of the Jewish Faith," a chapter, headed JUDAISM, which begins thus:—"The Jewish religion, or Judaism, is founded solely on the law of Moses, so called from its having been brought down by him from Mount Sinai. With the particulars of these laws he had been inspired by the Almighty during the forty days he remained on the mount, after receiving the Ten Commandments; these he afterwards embodied in the sacred volume, known and accepted as the written law, and called the Pentateuch, or the Five Books of Moses, contained in the volume we term the Bible. *We also, from the same source, receive, as sacred and authentic*, a large number of traditions not committed to writing, but transmitted by word of mouth down to later times; without which many enactments in the Holy Bible could not have been understood and acted upon; these, termed traditional or oral laws, were collected and formed into a volume called the 'Mishna,' by Rabbi Jehudah Hakodesh, A. M. 4150. In addition to this, *we are guided* by the explications of the later schools of pious and learned rabbies, *constituting what is now known by the name of the Talmud or Gemara.*" *

Nothing can be more explicit than this avowal. A learned and pious Jew of the nineteenth century honestly avows that Judaism is the religion of the Talmud: and upon this principle we have examined Judaism, and compared it with Moses and the Prophets, and the result of this comparison is—

I. THAT JUDAISM IS A FALSE RELIGION.

The premises, from which we draw this conclusion, are—

1. *That the oral law is altogether destitute of external evidence.* To establish the authority of the oral law, it is absolutely necessary to prove a succession of Sanhedrins from the time of Moses to that of Rabbi Jehudah, or at the least an unbroken chain of tradition. But it has been proved, in Nos. 43 and 44, that there was no such thing as a Sanhedrin until after the Greek conquest of Judea, and in No. 45, that there is no continuous chain of tradition. The only evidence therefore which could beget faith in the mind of a reasonable man is wanting.

2. *The oral law itself is full of manifest fables.* This has been proved almost in every number, but particularly from Nos. 17—21, where the fables selected are such as are particularly noticed in the prayers of the synagogue. No one can doubt that the stories about Leviathan and Behemoth—of Adam's singing the 92d Psalm after a conversation with Cain—of the river Sambation—of the experiment made by Turnus Rufus to raise his father—of Mount Sinai having been turned, like a tub, over the Israelites—of the descent of 600,000 angels to crown the Israelites—of the people's travelling 240 miles backwards and forwards during the delivery of the Ten Commandments, &c. &c.—are all downright fables, not a whit more authentic than similar stories contained in the Koran, or the Arabian Nights' Entertainments. Any one fable would be sufficient to overturn the credit of the oral law, but what are we to think of the host of downright falsehoods here enumerated?

3. *It is directly subversive of the state of things established in the written law.* Moses

* A Manual of Judaism, by Joshua Van Oven, Esq., M.R.C.S.L. London, 1835. Page 22.

appointed the priests, the sons of Levi, as the religious teachers of Israel. The oral law has ousted them altogether from their office, as was shown in No. 41.

4. *The oral law encourages those heathen superstitions expressly forbidden by Moses and the Prophets*, such as magic, astrology, amulets, and charms, as is shown from Nos. 22—26.

5. *The oral law loosens the moral obligations.* It teaches men how to evade the Divine commandments, as was shown in Nos. 11, 14, and 15. It allows dispensation from oaths, as proved in Nos. 56 and 57. It allows men to retain what they know does not belong to them, if it only belongs to a Gentile (p. 18), or to an unlearned Jew, as appears from No. 59. It sanctions the murder of the unlearned.

6. *It leads men to put trust in mere external acts as a compensation for moral delinquencies.* The washing of hands (No. 10)—the external sanctification of the Sabbath (No. 29)—the blowing of the cornet at the new year (No. 34)—the rite of circumcision (No. 58), &c. &c., are represented as sufficient to save wicked men from the just punishment of their misdeeds.

7. *Though called an oral law, because not written with ink, it is really written in blood.* For the most trifling offences it sentences the offender to be flogged (Nos. 13 and 53)—for the transgression of the Rabbinic commands respecting the Sabbath, it awards the sentence of death (No. 27)—and, by its laws respecting the mode of killing and cooking meat (Nos. 49—54), it prevents the poor from getting food for themselves and their children.

8. *It degrades the female sex*, by permitting polygamy (No. 47)—by permitting divorce on the most trifling pretext (No. 48)—by declaring women incompetent to give evidence—by excluding them fronr the public worship of God—and by teaching that they are under no obligation to learn the revealed will of their Creator (No. 3).

9. *It oppresses and insults slaves*, by forbidding them to be instructed in the law (No. 3), and by placing them, when dead, on a level with brutes (No. 55).

10. *It is a persecuting and intolerant system.* It gives every rabbi the power of excommunicating the Jews (No. 31), and it commands the conversion of all the Gentile nations by the sword (No. 6).

11. *It forbids the exercise of the commonest feelings of humanity to those whom it calls idolaters.* It will not permit a drowning idolater to be helped, nor a perishing idolater to be rescued, nor an idolatrous woman in travail to be delivered (Nos. 4 and 5).

12. *It leaves those Gentiles who are not idolaters without religion.* It teaches that they are not commanded to love God, and breaks up all the happiness of domestic life, by asserting that amongst Gentiles there is no such thing as marriage (No. 8). For these and other reasons, which might be adduced, we believe that Judaism is contrary to the religion of Moses and the Prophets—that it has not proceeded from God, but is the mere invention of men, and therefore false.

II. From these premises we have concluded, secondly, THAT JUDAISM HAS FOR ITS AUTHORS WICKED MEN, UNWORTHY OF CREDIT. One of the most daring acts of wickedness that can be committed is to invent laws and principles, and pass them off as the laws of God. Every degree of wilful falsehood is sinful; but to forge Divine laws, and impose upon the consciences of men is the most daring of all wickedness, for it not only deceives men, but it dishonours God. The Divine Being is represented as the author of principles and practices which are abhorred by the good even amongst men. Is it possible that those men could be good, who invented the fables of which we have spoken above—or who overturned the Mosaic constitution for the purposes of personal aggrandizement—or who teach that oaths may be broken with impunity—or that men may keep what does not belong to them—or that unlearned men may be murdered without ceremony—or that it is lawful to look upon the agonies and pain of an idolater without rendering him any assistance or feeling any pity? If falsehood, perjury, dishonesty, cruelty, and inhumanity constitute men wicked, then the authors of the oral law are wicked men, and altogether unworthy of credit. And therefore we conclude—

III. THAT THEIR TESTIMONY AGAINST CHRISTIANITY IS OF NO VALUE. Many Jews of the present day reject Christianity simply because the rulers of the nation rejected the Lord Jesus Christ. But the discoveries which we have made of the principles and practices of these men show, that there is no force whatever in this argument. Their testimony against Jesus of Nazareth is not to be trusted any more than Mahomet's testimony against the fidelity of the Jewish nation in preserving the Scriptures. This impostor says, that the Jews have corrupted the Old Testament, but no one believes the charge, because he has been convicted himself of forging revelations and laws. The authors of the oral law have been convicted of the same offence, and their testimony must be rejected for the very same reason. They have passed off their own inventions as Divine laws—they have taught their absurd legends as undoubted matters of fact—they are plainly convicted of falsehood, and the only alternative is to say

that these falsehoods are wilful, and then the men who witness against Christianity are wilful liars—or to confess that the authors were mad, and therefore incompetent to give any testimony. In every case they must be regarded as propagators of falsehood. But falsehood is not the only trait in their character; they were interested in their testimony against Jesus; they were his personal enemies, because he opposed their pretensions and condemned all their inventions. They had therefore a strong motive for condemning him, and there is nothing in their character to lead us to suppose that their love of justice would prevail over their private feelings. When the general tenour of a man's conduct is evidently the result of upright principle, it is possible to believe that he would be just even to an enemy. When a man's whole life has been distinguished by tender compassion, it is possible to believe that he would not be cruel even to a foe. But neither supposition holds good with respect to the authors of the oral law. They do not even profess integrity, for they teach that it is lawful to defraud an unlearned man—they declare, by their permission to kill an amhaaretz, that they had no value for human life. If they were capable of murdering in cold blood a man who had never offended them, simply because he did not belong to their party, is it to be wondered at that they should endeavour to destroy one who was a direct opposer? The condemnation of the Lord Jesus Christ by such men is not only no argument against his character or claims, but even an argument in his favour. It is a decisive proof that he did not belong to their party, and that therefore there are not the same objections to his testimony as to theirs. The Jews of the present day, therefore, must find some other reasons for rejecting Jesus of Nazareth. The conduct of their great and learned men at the time can supply no warrant for unbelief at present: it is on the contrary a sort of presumptive evidence that He was a good man. And this presumption is much strengthened by comparing the oral law with the New Testament, whereby we learn—

IV. That in all those points, where the oral law is weak, the New Testament is strong. In the first place, it is entirely free from all fabulous additions to the Old Testament history. It recognizes the authority and frequently cites the writings of Moses and the Prophets, but it is never, like the Talmud, guilty of forgeries. Neither Jesus, nor his disciples pretended to have an oral interpretation of the law, unknown to the people at large, and therefore capable of being twisted to their own purposes. They referred simply to the written word, and by it desired to have all their doctrines judged. In the second place, it is free from all superstitious doctrines concerning magic, astrology, and other heathenish arts. It does not allow absolution from oaths, nor mark out any class of society as the lawful victims of fraud and violence. It is merciful to the poor and to slaves. It teaches that the souls of women are as precious in the sight of God as those of men. It forbids polygamy, and allows divorce only in one case where it is necessary, and thus protects the weaker sex, and guards the sacredness and the happiness of domestic life. It differs especially from the oral law in its estimation of external rites, and thus gives the strongest evidence of its Divine origin. If there be one sign of true religion more satisfactory than another, it is the placing of holiness of heart and life as the first great requisite, at the same time that it does not undervalue any of God's commands. Now this mark Christianity has, and Judaism wants. The former teaches expressly, That without holiness no man shall see the Lord, and that for the want of it no external ceremonies can compensate. Further, Christianity knows of no violent methods of propagating the truth. It nowhere tells its followers, when they have the power, to compel all men to embrace its doctrines, or to put them to death if they refuse. It has not a criminal code written in blood, and prescribing floggings of rebellion, or even death, for a mere ceremonial offence. It does not allow each individual teacher to torment the people by excommunication and anathema at his pleasure. And, lastly, it does not misrepresent God as an unjust and partial judge, who confines the benefits of revelation to one small nation, and sentences the overwhelming majority of mankind to unholiness and unhappiness. If ever Judaism should attain to universal dominion, and the principles of Judaism be brought into action, the whole Gentile world would be doomed to misery and ignorance. By pronouncing that amongst Gentiles there is no marriage-tie, it would rob them of all domestic peace. By sentencing every Gentile reader of the Bible to death, it would deprive them of all the consolations and instructions of the Word of God, and by forbidding them to keep a Sabbath, it would, so far as it could, annihilate every token of God's care and loving-kindness. The triumph of Christianity, on the contrary, and the full development of all its principles, would fill the world with peace, and joy, and happiness. The fundamental principle of Christianity, namely, that the Messiah has died for the sins of the whole world, sets forth God as the tender father who cares for all his children, and therefore teaches all men to regard one another as fellow-heirs of the same eternal salvation. It does not deny that Israel has peculiar privileges as a

nation, but fully acknowledges that "they are still beloved for the fathers' sakes," and that they are yet to be the benefactors of the human race as they were of old. But it asserts, at the same time, that God is not the God of the Jews only, but of the Gentiles also, and thus makes it possible for Jew and Gentile to love each other. The only foundation for the peace and unity of all nations is the recognition of God as the Father of all, and this foundation is the very corner-stone of Christianity, whilst it neither does nor can form any part of the fabric of Judaism. Christianity teaches that the first and great commandment is, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart; and that the second is, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself; and teaches, at the same time, that all men are our neighbours. Judaism teaches that circumcision is the greatest of all the commandments, and that none but Jews and proselytes are neighbours. Thus Judaism divides, whilst Christianity tends to unite all the children of men in the bands of peace. It has only one principle of God's dealings to men, and that principle is love; and one principle for the guiding of man's conduct to men, and that is love also. Let not the Jewish reader think that we Gentiles wish to ascribe any merit to ourselves, as if by our own wit or wisdom we had found out a religious system superior to any thing that Israel had been able to devise. Far from it; we acknowledge again, as we did in the first number, that we are only disciples of one part of the Jewish nation. From the Jews Christianity came to us. It has been a light to lighten us Gentiles, but we acknowledge its Divine Author as the glory of his people Israel. All we mean by instituting the comparison is, to show those who still adhere to the oral law, that there is another Jewish religion infinitely superior, and more like that of Moses and the Prophets. And we appeal confidently to every reader of these papers to decide whether the New Testament or the Talmud is the better book, and to say which is most agreeable to the will of God as revealed to their forefathers. We earnestly call upon them to make the decision, and to deliver themselves from that unmerited weight of odium which has rested upon them for centuries; and from that still more dreadful evil, the displeasure of Almighty God, which has followed them ever since they forsook the Old Paths wherein their fathers walked.

It is time for those, at least, who profess to abhor certain parts of the Talmud and oral law, to justify their professions by consistent conduct. If they wish people to believe them when they profess love and charity towards all men, they must begin by repudiating the authority of the oral law, and renouncing the worship of the synagogue. How can we possibly believe that those are sincere in their professions to men, who declare that they are insincere in their worship of the heart-searching God? Every man who uses the prayers of the synagogue, there confesses himself to God as a believer in the oral law, and consequently ready to execute all its decrees of cruelty, fraud, and persecution—ready, when he has the power, to convert all nations with the sword. That is his profession in the synagogue; when, then, he comes forth from the solemn act of Divine worship, and tells me that he is liberal and charitable, and that he abhors persecution, how can I possibly believe him? There is falsehood somewhere, and the only possible mode of removing this appearance is by a public renunciation of the oral law, and an erasure of those passages in the public prayers which affirm its Divine authority. This all truly liberal-minded Jews owe to themselves, to the Christian public, to their brethren, and, above all, to their God. To themselves they owe it, because so long as their words and their deeds contradict each other, a mist hangs over them. To the Christian public they owe it, for they must naturally desire to know the principles of those with whom they are connected. To their brethren they owe it, for this is the only way of delivering the nation from the calamities of centuries. To their God they owe it, for by the blasphemies of the oral law, His character is misrepresented and His name blasphemed.

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