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*"A light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel."*

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## THE JEWS; THEIR PAST.\*

BY REV. LOUIS MEYER, D. D.

### INTRODUCTION.

One preliminary remark concerning my use of the words Jews and Israelites or Hebrews. Literally and originally Jews, which is a contraction of the word Judah-praise, were the members of the tribe of Judah, then members of the kingdom of Judah which included the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin or Levi. In later days in Esther, in New Testament or Apocalypse, as now, the term is applied to all Hebrews or Israelites. *Hebrew* (1), a patronymic of Abraham; (2) from preposition ehber, beyond, the other side, Abraham having come from the land beyond Euphrates; (3) from noun ehber, the country beyond; (4) from verb ehber, the man who crossed over Euphrates; (5) from Eber, an ancestor of Abraham, Gen. 11:26; (6) from the land of Eber, Num. 24:24. *Israelites*, descendants of Jacob or Israel. Even after the kingdom of Israel was divided into the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah, the kingdom of Judah was called Israel (2 Chron. 11:3; 12:6), and the name was still sometimes applied to the restored

people after the return from Babylon.

The Jews are a part of Israel; Israel includes the Jews; but the kingdom of Israel should be distinguished from the kingdom of Judah and the Jews should be carefully distinguished from those who come under the general title Israelites. We do not intend to allude, except occasionally, to the Ten Tribes. We thus speak of the people who kept Jerusalem as their capital and became subservient to David's family and became a separate, small and favored kingdom.

A JEW! A name replete with interest. A singular name! Strange and opposite feelings it excites; passions most various; thoughts most profound; ideas most absurd. The little monosyllable Jew has caused and will continue to cause deeds most appalling to be perpetrated. It has called into exercise for near four thousand years contempt and reverence, hatred and compassion, malice and compunction—in short, every sentiment of the human heart and every faculty of the human mind.

A Jew! Philosophers call him a riddle; infidels dread the fact of

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his existence. He is the marvel of history, the anomaly of nations, the wonder of ages, heaven's great witness on earth of earth's righteous King in heaven. Empires have risen and fallen, nations which have been and are not, generations which have appeared after generations—all have found themselves confronted with the ever-present Jew and in all ages the world has gazed wonderingly at the mysterious Jew. Who is this Jew? What is his history?

It requires peculiar qualifications rightly to understand the history of the Jewish people. The wisdom of this world is utterly insufficient to discover the principles on which it is to be explained and to guide us in the application of these principles, when discovered, to the remarkable events with which it is enriched. We must have recourse to the fountains of divine truth that are laid open to us in Holy Scripture if we would attain to any sound knowledge of the subject, and that, too, not in strength of carnal reason, nor under the impulse of vain curiosity. For against inquirers who come to these fountains under the influence of such a spirit they are firmly closed. The only guide who is competent to lead us is the Spirit of God, by whose inspiration their history has been recorded and who in it, as in the whole body of Sacred Scripture, does design to glorify God the Son Incarnate as the deliverer who turns away iniquity from Jacob and brings salvation unto the ends of the earth.

The Gifts and Calling of God are without repentance (Rom. 11:29).

The key to the history of the Jews is found in Deut. 7:6-8. Usually nations have their origin in the apparently accidental associa-

tion of small tribes, their conquest of their weaker neighbors, their consequent increase in numbers and power and their slow and gradual advancement to wealth and influence. The origin of the Jewish people cannot be traced to such causes. It is to be found in the sovereign purpose of divine love, the grand and original spring of all the good that is to be found in the universe, and it is closely and inseparably connected with the redemption of a lost world by the incarnation, obedience and death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore from first to last the history of the Jews runs parallel with the stream of divine prophecy, as it embraces an epitome of the history of the world from the fall of man to the coming of the Messiah in humiliation and sorrow and onward to His return in power and glory.

#### I. FROM EGYPT TO CANAAN.

The history of the Jews properly begins in a remote yet historical part of the world. There, in Ur of the Chaldees, Abram was living among his kindred and surrounded by all the characteristics of paganism. The distinguishing and electing love of God commanded him to leave the land of his birth, his father's house and his kindred, and to journey to a distant and unknown land (Gen. 12:1-3). Readily and cheerfully the patriarch obeyed, and he became thus what the Apostle calls "the heir of the world" (Rom. 4:13), although at that time he was childless. The promise that in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed was now confirmed by God by a solemn and irrevocable Covenant (Gen. 15:9-17), and Abram, who was eventually to bear the honored titles of "the father of the faithful" and "the

friend of God," became the father of the Jewish race. From him does their distinction from all the other families of the earth date its commencement.

In the time of Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, the Jews had increased to seventy souls, when famine compelled them to remove from the land of Caanan into Egypt, where, through the influence of Joseph, they had possessions, and grew and multiplied exceedingly. No conditions could be more unfavorable to the life of a people or to their allegiance to the faithful worship of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob than those by which they were surrounded in the land of Egypt. The idolatry of the Egyptians allured them and many yielded to the temptation. They were subject to the most humiliating and cruel treatment. Yet they multiplied and grew, for divine protection surrounded them.

Four hundred years they were oppressed by the Egyptians, as the Lord had said to Abraham 300 years before (Gen. 15:13, 14). Then came the hour of deliverance, when the gods of Egypt were proved to be utterly impotent to save themselves or their worshipers, when the spirit of a haughty monarch was crushed and his boasted might utterly overwhelmed. Towards the land of Canaan, under the conduct of Moses, who again was under the special guidance of the Angel of the Covenant, they proceeded, only to find themselves in a situation of most imminent danger. They saw the Red Sea rolling its waste of waters before them and the hosts of Egypt, led by Pharaoh in person, in hot pursuit behind them. They as yet knew little of their divine deliverer and of the way in which He leads His

people and therefore yielded to utter despondency. But the arm of the Lord opened a path for them in the midst of the sea and it prepared a watery grave for their enemies. The song of triumph with which Mariam led the matrons and maidens of the Jewish hosts was the echo of God's declared will concerning this people whom He had separated from all nations to be His own peculiar people and whom, through evil as well as good report, He would keep as the apple of His eye.

We follow the people as they journey through the valleys and plains of the Sinaitic peninsula. We listen to the thunderings and voices which resound from the mount of God. We behold the most wonderful of all inscribed records, the tables of the Ten Commandments, written with the finger of God. The lawgiver, Moses, calls to their remembrance all that the Lord had done on their behalf and he inquires (Deut. 4:33-36) and then (v. 37) affirms the grounds on which this exceptional manifestation of divine grace was exercised. He shows (Deut. 7:6-8) that the divine estimate of fitness for this great vocation was in contrast, and not in harmony, with the counsels of men. After the lapse of 1500 years the echo of these words is heard when the Apostle, speaking by the Spirit of God, affirms that they are still "beloved for the fathers' sake" (Rom. 11:28). Observe that by this memorable transaction at Mount Sinai the children of Abraham, now grown up into a nation, were nationally recognized as the people of God.

Their rebellion and unbelief in the wilderness received just punishment, and the rebels wandered forty years in the desert, not one of those who came out of the

land of Egypt being permitted to enter Canaan but Caleb and Joshua. But God remained faithful to His promise. At last they stood on the borders of the promised land and once more Jehovah affixed the divine seal to His unchangeable purpose concerning the seed of Abraham. Balaam, the apostate prophet, speaks the mind of God (Num. 23:9-23) soon after the Jordan was crossed, and in the course of eight years the tribes were settled in the country, as Jacob had foretold in Gen. 49.

## II. FROM SETTLEMENT IN CANAAN TO BUILDING OF TEMPLE.

For a considerable time the people adhered to the worship of God with much fidelity (Josh. 24:31), yet the leaven of unfaithfulness to God's Covenant began to spread until the anger of the Lord was kindled. He chastises His people for their iniquities, yet He did not utterly forsake them. For nearly 300 years they were, for their sins, delivered into the hands of their successive enemies, only to be rescued by means of faithful judges.

In the days of Samuel, who was an eminent servant of God and a faithful ruler in his house, the people began to demand a king to rule over them. God granted their request and caused Samuel to anoint Saul, the son of David, of the tribe of Benjamin, to be king over Israel. Saul's reign was not of long duration, and he was succeeded by David, the son of Jesse, of the tribe of Judah, who had been marked by divine appointment (1 Sam. 13:14). In his elevation to the throne of Israel we see the fulfilment of the prophecy that the tribe of Judah should have the dominion. We need not dwell upon the successful wars

which David carried on, nor upon the extensive conquests which he made and which added vast territory unto the kingdom. We call attention only to the confirmation of the faithfulness of the covenant with Abraham unto the royal race (Ps. 89:3, 4, 28, 34-36), and we hasten on to the reign of Solomon, which was far more glorious than that of his father David. To Solomon an extraordinary degree of wisdom was given from on high, and thus qualified and firmly seated upon the throne he set about the construction of the temple, according to the instructions which he had received from his father, to whom had been denied the honor of building it. At length it was completed, on a scale of magnificence which it is impossible to describe or even rightly conceive. It was consecrated and the Lord filled it with the cloud of glory, the constituted symbol of His presence. He promised, too, that His eye and His heart should be there continually and that if His people Israel walked in His testimonies and kept His judgments they should dwell in the land and He would dwell in the midst of them. The temple and its splendid worship pointed to Christ glorified, as the tabernacle in the wilderness and the sacrifice performed in it pointed to Christ in His humiliation and suffering.

In the days of Solomon the people of Israel had attained to the full possession of their inheritance and thus did many prophecies meet their accomplishment.

## III. FROM SOLOMON'S TEMPLE TO THE CAPTIVITY.

During the reign of Solomon already Israel's prosperity began to be clouded because he went

after the vanities of the heathen (1 Kings 11:5, 6). As soon as he was dead the symptoms of discontent and rebellion began to appear. In the days of Rehoboam the ten tribes revolted, made Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, their king, and thus became separate from the kingdom of Israel. The tribe of Judah only was left to the house of David, the tribe of Benjamin having been incorporated with it. Jeroboam set up two golden calves at once. Base and wicked princes succeeded him until, in the reign of Hosea, 721 years before Christ, the ten tribes were carried away captive by Shalmanezzer, king of Assyria, and placed in the cities of Assyria by Tiglath-Pileser. From that day to this day they have never been clearly identified. The house of Judah was no less wicked than the ten tribes, but in His gracious love, that He might preserve the family of David, God sent them some righteous kings whose reigns were marked as periods of reformation from the corruptions of idolatry, of humiliation before God on account of their sins and of renewal of the Covenant. Eminent prophets faithfully warned the people and earnestly besought them to turn from their evil ways, that iniquity might not be their ruin. But the tide of corruption continued to swell until a similar doom as had befallen the ten tribes came to Judah. The desolation came and they that had been wont to ride in the high places of the earth sat them down as captives by the rivers of Babylon, hung their harps upon the willows and wept when they remembered Zion. Thus a long train of prophecies, from Moses down to Jeremiah, met their accomplishment.

#### IV. FROM THE CAPTIVITY TO THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM.

We have no time to dwell upon the history of the Jewish people during the years of captivity in Babylon, nor upon the remarkable story of Daniel, but turn at once to the return from the captivity after seventy years. Cyrus, the Persian, permitted Zerubbabel, the prince of Judah, and 50,000 of Judah and Benjamin, with some of the Levites and some few from Manasseh and Ephraim, to return to Jerusalem in the year 536 B. C. (1 Chron. 9:3). It was but a small portion of the Jews who thus refused and proved faithful. A vast multitude remained behind and to them belonged Mordecai and Esther. Those who returned erected an altar and observed the Feast of Tabernacles. In the next year the foundation of the second temple was laid amid the sound of triumph and cymbals, the voice of sacred song, though many who had beheld the first temple in all its glory could not repress their tears. After great difficulties the second temple was solemnly dedicated to the Lord, about 515 B. C. Then came the great religious revival under Ezra with its great moral reformation. But soon the tide of abuses began to flow again, and Malachi, whose prophecy closes the canon of the Old Testament, arose. Little is recorded in Jewish history till the rise of Alexander the Great in 335 B. C., who gained the mastery of the world and with it Judea. After his death Ptolemy of Egypt took Jerusalem from Laomedon and carried off no less than 100,000 captives into Egypt. Till 187 B. C. Judea enjoyed almost uninterrupted tranquility, though it changed masters again and again. Ambition, love of money, fearful crime,

impiety and apostasy, however, began to rear their head. Then came the miseries of the Jews under Antiochus in 170 to 168, and finally the Maccabees arose and for a time prospered, but there was no revival of religion (143 to 63 B. C.). And at the fall of the Maccabees Rome became the master of Palestine.

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THE MIRACLE.

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BY P. M. RASKIN.

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The *Rebe* tells his old, old tale,  
 The pupils seated round.  
 . . . . And thus, my boys, no holy oil  
 In Temple could be found.

The heathen left no oil to light  
 The Lord's eternal lamp.  
 At last one jar, one single jar,  
 Was found with High Priests' stamp.

Its oil could only last one day—  
 But wondrous are God's ways!  
 For lo! a miracle occurred:  
 It burned for eight whole days.

The tale was ended, but the boys,  
 With widely open eyes,  
 Stood listening still, as though they were  
 Expecting a surprise.

Just wait, my boys, permit me, pray,  
 The liberty to take,  
 Your *Rebe*—may he pardon me—  
 Has made a slight mistake.

Not eight days, but two thousand years,  
 That jar of oil did last. . . .  
 Its wondrous flames could never quench,  
 No storm, no flood, no blast. . . .

But it is not yet all, my boys,  
 The miracle just starts . . . .  
 This flame is kindling light and hope  
 In countless gloomy hearts.

And in one long and starless night,  
 Dispersing fog and mist,  
 It, like a beacon, points the way  
 To ever-shining East,  
 Where *light* will be our people's pride,  
 As in the days of old.

The miracle is greater, boys,  
 Than what your *Rebe* told.

— *Young Israel.*

BEILIS.

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HIS LIFE IN PRISON.

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The *Daily Telegraph* on Friday and Saturday printed the following from its New York correspondent:—

A despatch from Kieff published here gives a pathetic interview with Mendel Beilis, whose prosecution for ritual murder excited widespread indignation throughout America. Beilis, seated in the little parlour of his own home, lived over again his trouble and sufferings of the last two-and-a-half years. Sometimes he was so overcome by his memories as to break down and sob, necessitating a wait until he composed himself.

He stated that the body of Yuschinsky was found in the Brickworks where he was employed in March, 1911, and on the day of the funeral he heard that handbills were distributed saying that the "rotten Jews killed the boy." He did not pay much attention to the statement at the time, but three months later a prosecuting attorney called at his home, and also examined the brickworks.

"A day or two later," continued Beilis, "a lot of spies dressed as tramps, came to my house. They behaved like wild animals, talked about ritual murder, and tried to frighten me. Then I heard from friends that Vera Chebariak was telling everybody I had killed the boy. I received another visit from the prosecuting attorney, who again examined my house. He asked, "Why haven't you got a Mezuzah (Jewish talisman)? I replied that as I was employed in the brickyards, where a lot of Christians worked, I could not be