

# נתיבות עולם

עמדו על דרכים וראו ושאלו לנתיבות עולם ירמיהו טז

"THE OLD PATHS."—Jer. vi. 16.

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THAT the people, at present scattered over the whole world, and known by the name of Jews, are descendants of the chosen people of God, we freely admit. That the Old Testament contains prophecies of their future return to the God and the land of their fathers, and their subsequent happiness and glory, we firmly believe: but, that the religion which they at present profess is the religion of Moses, we confidently deny. Modern Judaism has not retained the doctrines of Moses; no not even with respect to the fundamental article of religion, the nature of God. Our last number showed how widely the rabbies have departed from the Scripture representation of the divine character, and the number preceding proved that the Jews have not retained even the outward form of the Mosaic edifice. Indeed we know not any problem more difficult of solution than, to assign a reason, why the Rabbinic Jews profess any respect at all for Moses, when they have rejected both the form and the substance of his teaching. If they boldly denied his authority, or asserted that the Mosaic law was long since abrogated, and the Rabbinic precepts given in its stead, we could at least give them credit for consistency; but at present we cannot possibly divine their motives for professing attachment to the lawgiver of their forefathers. Their conduct for ages would appear to indicate a fixed determination to get rid and keep clear of every thing Mosaic, and that for the mere purpose of having something else; for no one can pretend, that the new law and the new teachers, that they have chosen, can lay any claim to superior excellence or antiquity. Of the value of the Rabbinic teaching we have given many proofs; and now think of examining a little the *novelty* of the Rabbinic order. It is certain that the word, rabbi, does not occur in the law of Moses nor the prophets; it is, therefore, clearly not Mosaic. This one fact does in itself go far to shake the authority of modern Judaism and the oral law. There we cannot go a step without hearing of the rabbies—Rabbi Eliezer said this, and Rabbi Bar Bar Chanah said that. The whole oral law is made up of the sayings of the rabbies, and yet neither their name nor their order was so much as known to Moses our master. The other favourite appellation of the Talmudic doctors חכם *Chacham*, or wise man, does

indeed occur, and it appears from the prophets, that there were some even in their time who laid exclusive claim to that epithet, but unfortunately the prophets bring against them the very same charge, which we prefer against their successors, namely, that they had forsaken the law of Moses.

איכה תאמרו חכמים אנהו חחרת יהוה אתנו אכן הנה לשקר עשה עש שקר סופרים: הושיעו חכמים דתו וילכו הנה ברבר יהוה מאסו חכמת מה להם:

“How do ye say, We are wise (*Chachamim*) and the law of the Lord is with us? Lo certainly in vain made he it; the pen of the scribes is in vain. The wise men (*Chachamim*) are ashamed: lo, they have rejected the word of the Lord; and what wisdom is in them?” (*Jer. viii. 8—9*.) The rabbies will scarcely acknowledge that they have succeeded these persons in their office, and yet if they give up such passages as these, they must abdicate all claim to antiquity. Indeed some of them plainly acknowledge that the rabbies are a new order of men, and that the word rabbi was not heard of until less than a century before the destruction of the second temple. Thus the *Baal Aruch* says—

הדורות הראשונים שהיו גדולים מאד לא היו צריכין לזרזם לא ברבן ולא ברבי ולא ברב לא להכמי בבל ולא להכמי ארץ ישראל שהיו הלל עלה כובל ולא נאמרה רבנות בשמו ובנביאים היו השונים שאמר חגי הגויא לא עלה עזרא כובל ואין מרברבין אורה עם הוכרת שמוותיהן ולא שמענו כי התחילו זו אלא בנשיאים מרבין נמליאל הזקן ורבן שמעון בנו שנדרג בהרבין בית שני ורבן יוחנן בן זכאי כולן נשיאים ואף רבי התחיל מסמכנים מאורה שעה צדוק רבי אליעזר בן יעקב נפשם הירב מהלמידי רבן יוחנן בן זכאי והלל:

“The first generations, which were very great, did not require the titles of *Rabban*, or *Rabbi*, or *Rav*, wherewith to honour the wise men of Babylon, or the wise men of the land of Israel; for behold Hillel went up from Babylon, but the title of *Rabbi* is not added to his name. There were honourable persons amongst the prophets, for it is said, *Haggai* the prophet—*Ezra* did not go up from Babylon—and at the mention of their names the title of *Rabbi* is not added: neither have we heard that this was begun until the Princes *Rabban Gamaliel* the elder, and *Rabban Simon* his son, who was killed at the destruction of the second temple, and *Rabban Johannan ben Zakkai*, who were all princes.

Rabbi also began with those who were promoted at the same time, Zadok and R. Eliezer, the son of Jacob, and the thing spread from the disciples of Rabban Johannah ben Zakkai onwards." (Aruch in אמ.) We need not wonder, then, that Moses knows nothing of rabbies, for here is a plain confession, that the name was never heard of until a few years before the last dispersion. It may, however, be said, that the office itself existed, though the name did not, and this is in fact asserted by Rambam, when he says:—

ומשה רבינו סמך יהושע ביד שנאמר וסמך דיו עליו ויצהרו וכן השבטים וקנים משה רבינו סמכם ושדרה עליון שבינה ואותן הוקנים סמכו לאחרים ואחרים לאחרים ונמצאו הסמוכן איש מפי איש עד בית רינו של יהושע ועד בית רינו של משה רבנו :

"Moses our master promoted Joshua with his hands; for it is said, 'And he laid his hands upon him, and gave him a charge.' (Numb. xxvii. 23.) And in like manner with regard to the seventy elders, Moses our master promoted them, and the Shechinah rested upon them; and these elders promoted others, and they again others; and thus we have a succession of promoted persons, until the council of Joshua, and until the council of Moses our master." (Hilchoth Sanhedrin, iv. 1). And so he tells us that

ידד המלך סמך שלשים אלף ביום אחד :  
 "King David promoted thirty thousand persons in one day." According to this statement, it would appear that there had been always a class of persons qualified to be teachers and judges, and a pretty numerous class too, from the time of Moses; but it is very extraordinary that their office should have continued fifteen hundred years without a name, and that the nation should never have felt the inconvenience, nor remedied it until the last few years of their existence; and it is more extraordinary still that so large and important a body should never once be mentioned in the law or the prophets. The land must perfectly have swarmed with them. Thirty thousand would have been a large proportion to the population of the land of Israel; but David made this number in one day; and we cannot suppose that he exerted his right only once in his life, nor that all the other doctors neglected the duty of raising up disciples; and the oral law tells us that before the time of Hillel every one thus promoted had the right of promoting others.

בראשונה היה כל מי שנסמך סומך לתלמידיו וחכמים הולקו כבוד להלל הזקן החקינו שלא יזא אדם נסמך אלא ברשות הנשיא וכו' :

"At first every promoted person could promote his disciples; but the wise men gave the honour to Hillel the elder, and ordained that no man should promote except by permission of the prince (the Na-i)." According to this, the number must have been very great; and

yet that they should have continued so long without a name, and without any mention whatever by any of the inspired writers, is perfectly incredible. But there are in the account itself various particulars which excite suspicion. David's extensive work of promotion in one day entirely exceeds the limits of probability, no matter how the promotion took place, whether by laying on of hands, or by command or by letter: for if we grant that he devoted the entire four-and-twenty hours of that day to the work, still, in order to make up the number of thirty thousand, it will be necessary to believe that he promoted at the rate of twelve hundred and fifty an hour, or twenty in every minute. One such notorious untruth discredits the whole account in which it is found. But, further, the admission that the right of conferring the dignity of doctor was taken from those who had possessed it, and restricted to those who obtained permission from the prince, shows that the ordinance of promotion was not derived from Moses, but was an invention of men. If it had been of Moses, the wise men could have had no authority to take it away, neither is it at all likely that the numerous possessors of the right, and least of all, the disciples of Sham-mai, would have quietly resigned it. We must suppose either that the wise men altered an ordinance of Moses, and thereby committed a great sin, or that the ordinance of promotion was a mere human invention. By the latter supposition the whole story of the continued existence of this class of doctors is given up; and by the former supposition the charge of disregard for the law of Moses is fixed upon the wise men, and the value of their testimony taken away. Lastly, the account of the manner of promotion is at variance with the above-quoted assertion of the Baal Aruch. The oral law says that the doctors were promoted in the following manner:—

לא שיסמכו ידיו על ראש הזקן אלא שקורין לו רבי ואומרים לו הרי את סמוך ויש קד רשות לך ואילו ריני קנסות :

"They not only laid their hands upon the head of the elder, but also saluted him with the title, Rabbi, and said to him, Behold thou art promoted, and hast authority to judge, even in cases of mulct." Here the conferring the title of Rabbi is made an integral part of the act of promotion, whereas the Baal Aruch says that the title of Rabbi was not in use until after the time of Hillel. The assertion, therefore, that the office of rabbi existed without the name, even from the time of Moses, is not only unsupported by any proof from the inspired writings, but is inconsistent with other assertions of the rabbies themselves; and is, besides, found very close to a palpable untruth, and is therefore unworthy of credit. Thus the antiquity of the rabbinic office is destroyed,

and appears to be a comparatively new invention : so that those who profess the religion of the rabbies cannot pretend to have the religion of Moses or of their forefathers, but that of a new set of teachers, who did not arise until a very few years before the destruction of the second temple. One of the common objections of modern Jews against Christianity is, its novelty. They say that we have got a new religion, whereas they have the ancient religion; that we follow a new teacher, but that they follow Moses. The foregoing examination shows how little ground they have for such a boast. If novelty be a valid objection, they must confess that the religion of the rabbies is false. If the distance of time that elapsed between Moses and Jesus of Nazareth constitute a fair ground of objection, it is as valid against the rabbies as against the Lord Jesus. Nay, if supposed novelty be the reason why they reject Christianity, they must now reject the religion of the rabbies, and embrace that of Christ. We have proved that the religion of the rabbies is a novelty, and every one knows that one peculiar feature in the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth was, that he opposed the Rabbinic doctrines, that is, he opposed novelty: this opposition, therefore, is presumptive evidence that the Lord Jesus retained the ancient religion, and has on that very account a claim upon all those who profess to venerate antiquity. At all events the charge of novelty can be as fairly urged against Rabbinism as against Christianity, and every Jew who urges it, is, if he be in earnest about truth, bound to compare Christianity with the law and the prophets, in order to ascertain whether it be a new religion or not. One thing is certain, that the ordinances of no religion can be farther from the Mosaic appointment than those of Rabbinism. The Rabbinists have rejected the religious teachers appointed by Moses, and have chosen others, who cannot pretend even to any degree of antiquity; and not only so, but even when the possibility of having regularly appointed rabbies ceased, they preferred those, who in fact have no authority at all, to those teachers appointed in the law. The oral law makes promotion necessary to the exercise of the Rabbinical office, and limits the ceremony of promotion by two conditions, first, that it be conferred with the consent of the נשיא, as we have seen above, and, secondly, that it be performed in the land of Israel.

אין סומכין וקנים בחוצה לארץ והאן על פי שאלו  
הסומכין נסמכו בארץ ישראל . אפילו היו הסומכין  
בארץ והנסמך חוצה לארץ אין סומכין :

“Elders are not promoted anywhere, except in the land of Israel; even although the promoters should have been promoted there themselves. Yea, though the persons conferring the promotion be in the land, if the person to

be promoted be outside the land, the promotion is not to take place.” Now it is plain that these conditions cannot be fulfilled. The great majority of the present rabbies have never been in the land of Israel; and even if they had been, there has not been a נשיא Prince for many a century. For centuries, therefore, there has not been a rabbi promoted to the office as the oral law requires; and yet the Jews, rather than have the priests, the the sons of Levi, still keep up the shadow of the Rabbinical office. A more determined opposition to the institutions of Moses cannot be imagined. First, the Jewish people rejected the ordinance of Moses, and devised an order of teachers of their own, limited by certain conditions. Then God, in great mercy, made the fulfilment of those conditions impossible. He took away the Prince, he drove them out of the land of Israel, to give them as it were an opportunity, yea to compel them to return to his own appointment: but in vain. Although the Jews cannot fulfil the conditions of their own devising, and could fulfil God’s appointment, they refuse the latter, and have invented something newer still, and that is an order of religious teachers who have not even the qualifications required by the oral law. Truly this is to transgress, for the mere sake of transgressing. How, then, can the Jews pretend to be disciples of Moses, or assert that the Mosaic law is unchangeable? Now for near two thousand years they have lived in disobedience to one of Moses’ simplest commandments, and have changed one of the essential institutions of the law. The most superficial reader of the writings of Moses must see, that a charge of prime importance was assigned to the family of Levi, not only as respected the ministration in the temple, but also with regard to the instruction of the people. God in His providence has deprived them of the former. The Jews themselves, by rejecting the commands of Moses, have taken away the latter office, and thus have destroyed not only the interior, but actually demolished the external form of the Mosaic edifice. It is, therefore, as we have said, a most difficult problem to account for the profession which modern Jews make of zeal for the law of Moses, and one which well deserves the consideration of the Jews themselves. Why should they profess to be disciples of Moses, when they openly trample upon his commands, and reject both the substance and the form of his religion? If they really believe that obedience to the law of Moses is necessary to salvation, they ought instantly to reinstate the family of Levi in their office. But if they prefer the new religion of the rabbies to the old religion of Moses, then they ought honestly to say so; and not go on halting between two opinions.

And they ought to do this, not merely to avoid the charge of inconsistency before men, but to satisfy their own consciences before God. How can any man reasonably hope to be saved by a religion whose commands he constantly transgresses, and never intends to obey? And yet this is exactly the case of the Rabbiniſts with regard to the law of Moses. There have been attempts at reform amongst the Jews, but we have never heard of any who intended to restore the family of Levi to their office; and yet, without this, there is no return to the Mosaic institutions.

A disciple of the rabbies may perhaps think, that he can retort this argument upon the Christians, and say that Jesus of Nazareth was not of the tribe of Levi. Certainly he was not; but as the Messiah, the prophets foretold that he was to be of the tribe of Judah: and as the Messiah, promised and appointed of God, he has a right to the obedience of all, both Jew and Gentile. If he had been only an ordinary prophet, he would have had a divine right to teach the people and to require their obedience; for, besides the priests, God also appointed prophets, but to the prophetic office the rabbies do not lay claim. The Lord Jesus, on the contrary, claimed not only the prophetic character, but asserted that He was the Messiah, and proved the truth of His claims by exhibiting miraculous powers, and especially by his resurrection from the dead. As a prophet, therefore, and above all, as the Messiah, his teaching in no wise interfered with the office of the priests: and his conduct, as recorded in the New Testament, shows that, though in determined and constant opposition to the Pharisees, the advocates of the oral law, he never lifted up his voice against the office of the priesthood. On the contrary, when occasion offered, he showed a scrupulous regard for the commandments of Moses respecting the priests; as for instance when he healed the leper, he "said unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priests, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them." (Matt. viii. 4.) And this conduct is perfectly conformable to one professed object of the Lord Jesus, which was to

vindicate the authority of the law against the unauthorised additions of men. He professed himself the defender of the Mosaic law, and opposed the whole system of the Rabbiniſts, on the professed ground that they made it void by their traditions. The objections, therefore, which we have brought against the oral law, as overturning the institutions of Moses, cannot be applied to the doctrines or conduct of the Lord Jesus Christ. He never opposed the priests, never interfered with their office, never diminished aught from their authority. In these most important respects, the doctrine of Jesus of Nazareth is necessarily more agreeable to the law of Moses than the traditions of the Pharisees, who have forcibly altered that great institution of Moses, the Levitic priesthood, and have themselves usurped the office and the rights of the priests. Modern Judaism is directly in opposition to the Mosaic law, and has at present no excuse for its opposition. The Jews of the dispersion cannot possibly keep its requirements concerning the promotion of rabbies; their adherence, therefore, to that system has now the appearance of mere gratuitous and wilful hatred to the law of Moses. They profess to know the family of the priests, and could therefore restore them to their office, if they pleased. What is there to prevent them? Nothing but the want of love for Moses and his institutions. We are convinced that many of the Jews have never considered this matter, or they would not act as they do. The habits of thought induced by early education, the customs of their nation for two thousand years, have drawn a sort of veil over their understandings, so that they have not been able to see the palpable inconsistency of professing a zeal for Moses, whilst they do homage to principles which cut up his institutions by the roots. Until the priests be reinstated in their functions and their rights, as the divinely appointed teachers of religion, the Jews can have no ground whatever to pretend that they are disciples of Moses. They are, at present, nothing but partizans of the sect of the Rabbiniſts. And if they choose to persevere in their attachment to this sect, they are bound, as honest men, to renounce all profession of regard for the law of Moses.

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