

נתיבות עולם

עמדו על דרכים וראו ושאלו לנתבות עולם. ירמיהו טז.

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THE Sanhedrin is, as we said in our last number, the foundation-stone on which the authority of the rabbies, and the whole fabric of tradition rests. Take away this, and not the shadow of an argument remains to justify the Jews in their rejection of the Mosaic religion, and their demolition of the Mosaic constitution. But this we have done. Enough has already been said to make it probable that the Sanhedrin, with its Greek name, was invented and established by the idolatrous Greeks; and to make it certain that it is subservive of the Supreme Council established by Moses, and that, for that reason, it was not one of his institutions. We have already disposed of one of the passages which the rabbies quote from the Pentateuch, to prove the Divine authority of the Sanhedrin; but, as they have, with much difficulty, found two, we now proceed to consider the second. It is quoted in the following manner:—

כמה בתי דינים קבועין יהיו בישראל וכמה יהיה מנין קבוען בתחילה ב' הגדול במקדש. הווא הנקרא סנהדרין גדולה ומניינם ע'א. שנאמר אספה לי שבטים איש מוקני ישראל ומשה על גבהן שנאמר יהויצב שם עמד הרי ע'א;

“How many councils (or tribunals) ought to be established in Israel, and of how many members ought they to consist? *Ans.* The great council in the temple, called the Great Sanhedrin, ought to be established first, and the number of its members ought to be seventy-one; for it is said, ‘Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel;’ and to them Moses is to be added, as it is said, ‘And they shall stand there with thee.’ (Numb. xi. 16.) This makes seventy-one.” (Hilchoth Sanhedrin, c. i. 2.) Here the rabbies have certainly found the number seventy-one; but to prove that this was the Sanhedrin, they ought first, to show, that these seventy-one persons were not to be scattered through the tribes, but always to remain together as one council; and, secondly, that this council was to be permanent; and, thirdly, that this council did really exist from the time of Moses to the destruction of Jerusalem; and, fourthly, and most important of all, that this was the *Supreme* Council; for even if the other three points could be made out, they would be insufficient without this. The Sanhedrin claims to be the Supreme Council, and, therefore, if it cannot be shown, that the

assembly of the seventy elders is identical with the Supreme Council appointed by Moses, this passage is of no more use than the former one. Now, respecting the three first points, nothing whatever is said, either in the Law or the Prophets. And respecting the fourth, even if we grant the three first, we can show that these seventy elders did not constitute the Supreme Council of the nation. We have proved in our last paper, that the supreme power was vested in an exclusive council composed of the priests, together with the judge השופט, but the seventy elders, here spoken of, were to be chosen promiscuously from the tribes of Israel, and therefore cannot be identical with that exclusive assembly; and therefore did not compose the Supreme Council; and therefore had nothing of the nature of the Sanhedrin, which pretended to be supreme over all. Thus it appears on examination, that there is not one text in the whole law of Moses, which authorises the establishment of such a council as the Sanhedrin; but that, on the contrary, it stands in direct opposition to that order of things prescribed by Moses.

We can, however, go farther, and show that all the particulars which the rabbies detail concerning it are manifest falsehoods; and that, if the Jews choose to believe what the oral law says concerning the Sanhedrin, they must not only give up Moses, but renounce all the other inspired writers of the Old Testament. The particular and exclusive duties of the Sanderrin are thus detailed:—

אין מעמידין מלך אלא על פי בית דין של ע'א. ואין עושין סנהדרין קטנה לכל שבט ושבט הלכל עיר ועיר אלא על פי בית דין של ע'א. ואין דנין לא את השבט שהורח כלו ולא את בניא השקר ולא את כהן גדול בדיני נפשות אלא בבית דין הגדול. אבל דיני ממונות בשלושה. וכן אין עושין זקן ממרא ולא עושין ער הנידחת ולא משקין את הסוסה אלא בבית דין הגדול. ואין מוסיפין על הדין ועל העדות ולא מוציאין למלחמת הרשות ולמידת החולל אלא על פי בית דין הגדול. שנאמר כל הדבר הגדול יביאו אלך:

“A king is not to be appointed except by the decision of the Great Council of Seventy-one. The minor councils through the tribes and towns are not to be established except by the Council of Seventy-one. Judgment is not to be passed on a tribe that has been entirely seduced, nor upon a false prophet, nor upon a high priest in capital cases, except by the

Great Council. (In mere money matters the tribunal of three is competent.) In like manner an elder is not declared rebellious, nor a city dealt with as seduced,* nor the bitter waters administered to the suspected adulteress, except by the Great Council. Neither is an addition made to the city nor to the courts. Neither are armies led forth to the wars of permission; nor the elders led forth to measure in the case of a slain person (Deut. xxi. 1, &c.), except by command of the Great Council, for it is said, 'Every great matter they shall bring to thee.' (Exod. xviii. 22.)" (Hilchoth Sanhedrin, c. v. 1.) Such is the power and jurisdiction attributed by the rabbies to the Sanhedrin, and which we have now to consider. The mere reading over of these details is sufficient to convince any reasonable man that the whole affair is a waking dream of some man or men, intoxicated with the love of dominion. No man in his senses can believe that God could be the author of a despotism so dreadful over the minds and bodies of men. In the first place, here is an aristocracy of seventy persons, described as having supreme jurisdiction over the King, the High Priest, the Prophets, and the people—possessing the power not only to judge individuals, but to pass sentence on whole cities and tribes, and utterly to destroy them if they pleased—and this without any other law or precedent to guide them than their own will—and, inasmuch as they were self-elective, subject to no controul whatever, either of the king or the people. We have heard much of corrupt corporations lately, but any thing at all equal to the self-elective corporation of the Sanhedrin we never heard of, excepting another college of seventy-one, the grand council of another oral law of later date. It is vain to say that this body was controuled by the law of Moses. When the Sanhedrin existed there was no law of Moses, but their own will. They expounded the law as they liked; and as we saw in our last, were not bound even by the decisions of their predecessors; and if any man dared to think for himself or to dispute their interpretation, he was strangled.

כל חכם שמונה על דבריהם מיתרו בהגן :

"Strangulation was the mode of execution for any learned man, who rebelled against their words." (Hilchoth Mamrim, c. i. 2.) They had thus the power to make the law say what they liked: and there was no power on earth to controul them. If they had been appointed by the king, or elected by the people, they would have been responsible for the abuse of their power; but they elected their members, and could be deposed by none but themselves. A despotism so complete and so dreadful, so inimical to personal security, and

* Compare Deut. xiii. 13, and Hilchoth Accum, c. iv.

so subversive of all liberty of conscience, could never have been created by God, but must necessarily be the offspring of the dis-tempered brain of man. We can hardly believe that many Jews, except the Talmudistic zealots, who might hope to be made members, wish for the restoration of the Sanhedrin; and yet, if they do not, they do not believe in the Jewish religion, for the re-establishment of that Great Council is the consummation of Judaism: and if they do not believe in this religion, can they consider themselves honest men in professing it?

But we must proceed to consider on what authority the rabbies make these claims to such extensive jurisdiction. One would expect to find some distinct command of God, expressly addressed to the council; but no, their only authority is the words of Jethro to Moses, "Every great matter they shall bring to thee;" a plain confession that there is in the whole Bible nothing to warrant their pretensions, or they never would have taken refuge in words so totally irrelevant. Indeed, we are rather surprised that they appealed to the Bible at all, for such an appeal is fatal to all their pretensions. Just let us examine some of the particulars detailed above, by the light of God's Word. The first pretension is, that "A king is not to be appointed except by the decision of the Great Council of Seventy-one." Now is this true? Is it possible to show that any one of the Kings of Israel was appointed by the Sanhedrin? Not one; but it is possible to prove of many that they were appointed without any reference whatever to any such Council. Take, for instance, Saul, the first king of Israel; what had the Sanhedrin to do with his election to the kingly office? Nothing at all. So far as man was concerned, Samuel, and Samuel alone, was the instrument of his election. When the people wished a king, they did not go to the Sanhedrin, but to Samuel. He dissuaded them, "Nevertheless, the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel." Would they have ventured to do so if he had been president of so dreadful a Council as the Sanhedrin? When Saul was anointed, it was not by the Sanhedrin, nor by their command. No man was present but the king elect and the prophet. "Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not because the Lord hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance?" (1 Sam. x. 1.) And when Saul was solemnly confirmed before the people, Samuel was still the sole agent. "Samuel called the people together unto the Lord to Mizpeh, and said, Now therefore present yourselves before the Lord by your tribes and by your thousands; and Saul the son of Kish was taken." (xi. 17—21.) It

cannot be pretended that the Sanhedrin had any thing whatever to do with the matter. But let us try another instance. Let us look at the election of David; was he chosen by the voice of the Sanhedrin? Just as little as Saul. Samuel was again the sole agent. "The Lord said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill thine horn with oil and go; I will send thee to Jesse, the Bethlehemite; for I have provided me a king among his sons." And so Samuel went and anointed him, without any intervention whatever of the Sanhedrin, or any one else. These two cases are sufficient to prove the falsehood of the Rabbinic pretensions; but there is one more decisive still, and that is the case of Solomon. Adonijah had made himself king, and Bathsheba, by the advice of Nathan the prophet, took measures to make her son Solomon king. But to whom did Nathan advise her to go? Did he tell her to go to the Sanhedrin and to seek justice? No, but to go to David the King, and to him she accordingly went, and found him not in council, or surrounded by the members of the Sanhedrin, but with Abishag, the Shunamite, ministering to him; and David, without asking any advice, swore unto her, "Assuredly Solomon, thy son, shall reign after me." The Sanhedrin had nothing whatever to do with the matter. The assertion, then, that "Nothing was appointed except by the authority of the Sanhedrin," is a gross falsehood, and very evidently made by ambitious men, grasping after power to which they had no right.

In like manner, we might appeal to history to show, that the tribe of Dan was judged, and that Saul, David, and the other kings of Israel, waged wars without once consulting the Sanhedrin; but there is one of these pretensions so directly opposed to the plain letter of the Mosaic law, that we prefer noticing it. The oral law says, that the waters of jealousy were not administered except by the authority of the Sanhedrin. But what says Moses? When the spirit of jealousy comes upon a man, does he tell him to bring his wife to the Sanhedrin? No, but to the priest—"Then shall the man bring his wife unto the priest," &c. (Numb. v. 15.) What then is the priest to do? Is he to go first to the Sanhedrin, and get its sanction? No; as soon as the man has brought his wife, and the offering of jealousy, the priest's business is to bring her before the Lord—"And the priest shall bring her near, and set her before the Lord,"—and is then to proceed with all the prescribed rites; and the whole ends with these plain words, "And the priest shall execute upon her all this law." There is not only no mention of the Sanhedrin, but immediate power is

unequivocally given to the priest, yea he is commanded to proceed without awaiting the decision of any other tribunal. Here again, then, the pretenders of Rabbinic tradition are in direct opposition to the plain commands of Moses, and are therefore unfounded. It is unnecessary to enter into more of these particulars. The two which we have examined are contrary to truth; and two falsehoods are quite enough to shake the credit of any claims. The only possible way of establishing the authority of the Sanhedrin, in answer to this argument, is, to deny the authority of the Bible. There is no other alternative—either the authors of the Pentateuch, the books of Samuel and Kings, are mistaken, or the jurisdiction of the Sanhedrin is a mere fiction. Moses commands a very different institution, and the historical books represent a very different form of government. He who receives these books as inspired, must renounce the authority of the Sanhedrin, whilst he who maintains it must give up the sacred books.

There is, however, another tribunal mentioned in the above-quoted passage of the oral law which it is necessary to notice, and that is the minor Sanhedrin, or council of twenty-three. It is said, "The minor councils through the tribes and towns are not to be established except by the council of seventy-one;" and elsewhere we read—

ומעמידן בכל עיר ומשואל שיש בה ק"ג או יותר כנהדר קטנה—ונכמה יהיה מינין כ"ג דינים :

"In every city of Israel that contains one hundred and twenty Israelites or more, a minor Sanhedrin ought to be appointed—and of how many members ought it to consist? Of twenty-three judges." (Hilchoth Sanhedrin, i. 3.) Now this is another innovation for which there is no warrant whatever in the law of Moses. "Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And they judged the people at all times." (Exod. xviii. 25, 26.) This is the provision which Moses made for the administration of justice, but he says not a syllable about the appointment of minor Sanhedrins of twenty-three, so that in this we have another instance of the effort, which the rabbies made, to get rid of all the Mosaic institutions, and to substitute their own. And also another proof that the laws of the Sanhedrin were not given by Moses, for they require this Council to appoint minor courts, contrary to his ordinances. It appears, then, from what has been said in these two papers, that the Sanhedrin was altogether an unlawful tribunal, and that therefore the oral law can receive no support from its approval: and it appears, further, that modern Judaism has entirely subverted that order of things established by Moses. He ordained the priests, the Levites, as the

teachers of Israel. Modern Judaism has turned them out of their office, and substituted the rabbies. Moses ordained a Supreme Council, consisting of the priests and the judge. Modern Judaism has destroyed that Council, and established the Sanhedrin in its place. Moses appointed rulers over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. Modern Judaism has put an end to that order, and erected new tribunals of twenty-three. In fact, if it were possible for the Jews to realize all the commands of the oral law in their own land, and Moses were to come amongst them again, he could never recognise them as his disciples. He would not find one of his institutions remaining as he left it. It is quite absurd, and if the subject were not so grave, it would be ludicrous to hear the Rabbinites exclaiming that the law of Moses is unchangeable, when they themselves have changed all its main provisions, and made an entirely new religion. But to the Jews it ought to be a matter of very serious inquiry, whether the Mosaic law is unchangeable or not. If the law be unchangeable, then no Rabbinical Jew can entertain a reasonable hope of salvation, for he professes a religion which has effected the most extensive changes. In his creed he denies the lawfulness of change, and in his practice he changes without scruple. If the law be unchangeable, it is the bounden duty of every Jew to give up at once the new religion of the rabbies, and to return with all haste to the institutions of Moses. But if he believe that the law is changeable at pleasure, then he ought to renounce that article of his creed which teaches its immutability. In so serious a matter as religion, he ought to endeavour to be consistent, and not halt between two opinions. If Moses be his lawgiver, then let him serve him. But if he be determined to continue in the new religion of the rabbies, he ought to inquire into their character, and the authority and motives which led them to overturn the religion of their forefathers. Is the religion of Moses a bad religion, which it was necessary to renounce? Or, was it only given for a certain period, and when that period had expired, exchanged for a new one? Had the rabbies Divine authority for the changes which they made, or did they change it for their own convenience and interest? The nature of the changes looks very suspicious—they all added to their influence and power. As long as the law of Moses was observed, the rabbies had no power either in Church or State. But by the changes which they made, they became absolute despots over the bodies and souls of all Israel. They had, thus, every possible temptation to reject the

one and adopt the other. But is this a reason why the Jewish people should also reject the law of Moses? They gain nothing, and lose every thing, both for time and eternity, by the change. By adopting the new religion of the rabbies, they give the use of that most precious gift, their reason, in all that regards the law and service of God. A Jew, who receives the oral law, can have nothing but a blind faith. He has lost the privilege of considering what God requires of him, and must simply receive what the rabbies choose to prescribe as his duty: and if they should even go so far as to tell him that his left hand is his right, and his right hand his left, he must believe in the decision, and reject the evidence of his senses. Or, if he should dare to doubt, where Judaism reigns triumphant, he must be strangled. There is certainly nothing very inviting in this system, nothing that should tempt a man to prefer it to the just, and equitable, and rational religion of Moses. He gives the law of God into the hands of the Israelite, and says, "Behold I have set life and death before you, choose ye." He deals with men as rational beings, and requires implicit obedience, not to the word of man, but to the oracles of God. He established a supreme council, but did not permit that council to pass off their own opinions as infallible, but commanded them to inquire of Him who alone is free from error. It is truly astonishing that so large a portion of the Jewish people should still prefer the religious despotism of the oral law; and it is more astonishing still, that they should be deluded to believe, that a system, which has subverted all the institutions of Moses, is the Mosaic religion. But the most astonishing circumstance of all is, that those Jews who have detected the grossness of the delusion and have themselves renounced the practice of the oral law, should feel so indifferent about the welfare of their brethren, and so reckless of the interests of truth, as to look on in silence; or even appear to countenance error by joining in the rites and ceremonies of tradition. Even the tribe of Levi itself has lost its zeal, and abdicated the sacred office committed to it by God. For eighteen hundred years there has not appeared in Israel one single person zealous for the law of Moses. All have been content with calling Moses their master, and there the matter ends. The priests and the people all unite in violating his laws, and trampling upon the ruins of his institutions, and then expect other people to believe that they are the faithful disciples of Moses.

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