

נתיבות עולם

עמדו על דרכים וראו ושאלו לנתבות עולם ירמיה ו' טז

"THE OLD PATHS."—Jer. vi. 16.

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THIS season of the year naturally draws away our thoughts from the subject last under consideration, and reminds us of a remarkable difference between Jews and Christians. The latter are now about to commemorate the birth of the Messiah. In two days more the voice of praise and thanksgiving will ascend to the Creator and Preserver of men from every part of the world. On the frozen shores of Labrador, and the glowing plains of Hindostan—in the isles of the sea, and on the continents of the old and new worlds, millions of Christians will lift up their hands and voices to thank the God of heaven for his unspeakable gift, and this shall be the burden of their song, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." (Isaiah ix. 6.) But amongst the followers of the oral law not a sound of sympathy will be heard. Not a single heart will beat with joy, not a tongue offer up the tribute of praise. Here is a great and striking difference, that should naturally lead both Jew and Christian to inquire, Who is in the right: Those who believe that Messiah is born, and joy in the remembrance of his nativity; or, those who refuse to join in the general rejoicing, and deny that the Redeemer has appeared? The question is, Whether there is reason to believe that the Messiah was born eighteen hundred years ago? and there are several ways in which it can be satisfactorily answered. An appeal may be made to the predictions contained in the Old Testament, or to the evidence for the truth of the Christian Scriptures—or, it may be shown that the Jewish rabbies have plainly confessed that the time for the birth and appearance of the Messiah is long since past; and this is the mode which we shall adopt at present. The Jews now deny that Messiah is come, and consequently believe that Christians are mistaken as to the time of his appearing. If they had always said so—if they had always assigned a time for the coming of the Messiah different from that in which Christians think the Messiah was born, their present assertion would have at least the merit of consistency, and the Jews of the present day might urge that their present belief has

been inherited from their fathers, and that Christians have adopted a notion unknown to the nation at large. But, if it should appear that the ancient Jews expected the coming of Messiah at the very time, when, as Christians say, he did actually come, then the ancient Jews testify that Christians are in the right, and that modern Jews are in the wrong, and this is really the state of the case. In the first place, the Talmud contains a general declaration that the time is long since past.

אמר רב לוי כל דקצין:

"Rav says, The appointed times are long since past" (Sanhedrin, fol. 97, col. 2), where it is to be noted that the word קץ is taken from Daniel, and literally signifies "End," as it is said,

עד מתי קץ השלימה:

"How long shall it be to the end of these wonders;" and again,

וארהו לך לקץ ותנוח ותעמוד לנהרך לקץ הימים:

"But go thou thy way till the end be, for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days." (Daniel xii. 6—13.) Rav was therefore of opinion that the period appointed by Daniel the prophet was past. But is it possible to believe that the God of truth would suffer the time, which he had appointed, to pass away without accomplishing what he had promised? When the time which God had fixed for the deliverance from Egypt had arrived, not a single day was lost. "It came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the self-same day,

בצום היום הזה:

it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt." (Exod. xii. 41.) When the period fixed for the return from Babylon was come, we read, "In the first year of Cyrus, King of Persia (that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished), the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation through all his kingdom." (2 Chron. xxxvi. 22.) And can we think that the Lord God, who so graciously fulfilled his word on these occasions, should break it with reference to the coming of the Messiah? Rav is either right or wrong. If he be right, then the time fixed by God is long since past, and as God cannot break his word, the Messiah must have come long since. But if, to get out of a difficulty, the

Rabbinists say, that Rav was wrong, then we have another proof that no reliance is to be placed on the doctors of the oral law; indeed we have a proof that the Rabbinists themselves do not believe it, except when they like; and that therefore they are not thoroughly in earnest about their religion.

But, secondly, the ancient Jews not only believed that the time for the coming of the Messiah was past; they also fixed the exact period.

הנא רבי אליהו ששה אלפים שנה היה עלמא שני אלפים תתרו שני אלפים תורה שני אלפים ימות המשיח:

“Tradition of the school of Elijah. The world is to stand six thousand years. Two thousand, confusion. Two thousand, the law. Two thousand, the days of Messiah.” (Sanhedrin, fol. 97, col. 1.) Upon which Rashi remarks—

שלאחד שני אלפים תורה הוה דינו שיבא משיח וחבלה מלכות דרשעה ויבטל השיעור מישרא:

“After the two thousand years of the law, according to the decree, Messiah ought to have come, and the wicked kingdom should have been destroyed, and Israel’s state of servitude should have been ended.” Here, then, it is expressly stated, that Messiah ought to have come at the end of the fourth thousand years, that is, according to the Jewish reckoning, fifteen hundred and ninety-seven years ago; or, according to the Christian reckoning, about eighteen hundred and thirty-six years ago—that is, at the very time when Jesus of Nazareth did appear. We do not quote this tradition, because we believe that it is really a tradition of the school of Elijah, but to show what was the opinion of the more ancient Jews, and this it certainly does. If the general expectation of the Jews at that time had not been that Messiah was to appear at the end of the four thousand years, this tradition, whether genuine or forged, could never have obtained currency nor belief. If it be a genuine tradition from Elijah, then the Messiah is certainly come. But if it be fictitious, then it shows the general belief of the Jews at the time, and in every case proves that the modern Jews do not hold the doctrines of their forefathers, but have got a new doctrine of their own. And it further shows, that Christians do not hold any new or peculiar opinion about the time of Messiah’s coming, but that they believe as the ancient Jews believed, that the end of the fourth thousand years is the right time of Messiah’s coming.

The only answer that the Jews have, is, that the promise of Messiah’s coming was conditional upon their repentance, but that evasion has been long since refuted in the Talmud as contrary to Scripture.

רבי אליעזר אומר אם ישראל עשין תשובה נגאלין ואם לאו אין נגאלין א”ל ר’ יהושע אם אין עשין

תשובה אין נגאלין אלא הק”דה מעמיד להן מלך שגורו חיו קשות כהמן ישראל עשין תשובה וכוהיון למושב תימא אידך דר’ אליעזר אומר אם ישראל עשין תשובה נגאלין שטאמר שובו בניי שובביי ארשא מסותרכם אמר לו ר’ יהושע הלא כבר נאמר חנם נמטרם ולא בכסף תגאלו חנם נמטרם בעגודה וזה ולא בכסף תגאלו לא בתשובה ומעשים טובים אמר לו ר’ אליעזר לר’ יהושע הלא כבר נאמר שובה אלי ואשובה אליכם א”ל ר’ יהושע הלא כבר נאמר כי אנכי בעלתי אתכם ולקחתיו אתכם אהוד מעיר ושנים ממספחה דומאיו אתכם ציון אמר לו ר’ אליעזר הלא כבר נאמר שובה ובנות חושעין אמר לו ר’ יהושע לר’ אליעזר הלא כבר נאמר כה אמר יי’ גואל ישראל וקודשו לבנה נפש למחצב גוי לעבד מושלים מלכים יראו קמו שרים ושתחוו אמר לו ר’ אליעזר הלא כבר נאמר אם תשוב ישראל אלי תשוב אמר לו רבי יהושע הלא כבר נאמר ואטמסו את האיש לבוש הברים אשר סיכעל למימי היאר וים ימינו ושמאלו אל השמים ישבע בדי עולם כי למועד מועדים הוצי וכלתה נפש יד עם קודש תכלינה כל אלה וגו’ ושחק ר’ אליעזר:

“R. Eliezer said, if Israel do repentance they will be redeemed, but, if not, they will not be redeemed. R. Joshua replied, if they do not repent they will not be redeemed: but God will raise up to them a king whose decrees shall be as dreadful as Haman, and then Israel will repent, and thus he will bring them back to what is good. Another tradition. R. Eliezer said, If Israel do repentance, they shall be redeemed, for it is said, ‘Turn, O backsliding children; I will heal your backsliding.’ R. Joshua replied, But was it not said long since, ‘Ye have sold yourselves for nought; and ye shall be redeemed without money.’ (Isaiah lii. 3.) Where the words ‘sold for nought’ means, for idolatry; and the words ‘redeemed without money,’ signify, not for money and good works. R. Eliezer then said to R. Joshua, But has it not been said long since, ‘Return unto me, and I will return unto you.’ (Mal. iii. 7.) R. Joshua replied, But has it not been said long since, ‘I am married unto you, and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion.’ (Jer. iii. 14.) R. Eliezer said, But has it not been written long since, ‘In returning and rest ye shall be saved.’ (Isaiah xxx. 15.) R. Joshua replied to R. Eliezer, But has it not been said long since, ‘Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship.’ (Isaiah xlix. 7.) R. Eliezer said to him again, But has it not been said long since, ‘If thou wilt return, O Israel, return unto me.’ (Jer. iv. 1.) To which R. Joshua replied, But has it not been written long since, ‘I heard the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand

unto heaven, and swore by Him that liveth for ever, that it shall be for a time and times and half a time; and when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished." Whereupon R. Eliezer was silent." Here then, on the showing of the Talmud itself, the opinion that the coming of the Messiah is dependent upon Israel's repentance, is false; and consequently it is true, that Messiah was to come unconditionally at the time appointed; and therefore, as the time is long since past, the Messiah must have come. But the ancient rabbies do not leave us to reason upon their words; on the contrary, they tell us expressly that Messiah was born about the time that the temple was destroyed. In the Jerusalem Talmud R. Judan tells us a story of a Jew who actually went and saw him.

עברא דהוה בחד יודאיה דהוה קאים דרי געט
תורחיה קטווי עבר דוד שביי ושמע קלה' א"ל בר
יודא בר יודא שרי תורח ושרי קנקנ דהא זריב
ביח מוקדש' געט זמן תנייח' א"ל בר יודא יודא
קטור תורח וקטור קנקנ דהא ליד מלכא משיחא
א"ל מה שמיח מנחם' א"ל ומה שם דאבוי א"ל
זוקד' אמ' ליה מן הן הוא' א"ל מן בידח מלכא
דביח לחם יודאיה :

"It happened once to a certain Jew, who was standing ploughing, that his cow lowed before him. A certain Arab was passing and heard its voice; he said, O Jew, O Jew! unyoke thine ox, and loose thy plough-share, for the temple has been laid waste. It lowed a second time, and he said, O Jew, O Jew! yoke thine oxen, and bind on thy plough-shares, for King Messiah is born. The Jew said, What is his name? Menachem. He asked further, What is the name of his father? The other replied, Hezekiah. He asked again, Whence is he? The other said, From the Royal residence of Bethlehem of Judah." (Berachoth, fol. 5, col. 1.) The story, then, goes on to tell us how he went and saw the child, but when he called the second time, the mother told him that the winds had carried the child away. We are quite willing to grant that this story is a fable. We do not quote it because we give it the slightest degree of credit, but simply to show that the more ancient Jews were so fully persuaded that the right time of Messiah's advent was past, that they readily believed also that he was actually born. The Babylonian Talmud, also, evidently takes for granted that Messiah is born, as appears from the following legend: ר' יהושע בן לוי אשכחיה לאלדו דהוי קיימי אשכחיה דמטרתא דרבי שמעון בן יודי א"ל אימנא לעלמא דמתי א"ל אם רצה אדון דהוה אמר ר' יהושע בן לוי שנים ראיתי וקול ג' שמעתי א"ל אימנא מתי כשיח א"ל ויל שיליה לדידה דוימא יתיב אשכחיה דרוכי ומאי סימניה יתיב בני עמי סובלי הלאים וכולן שרו ומסיר בחד ומנא אידו שרי דוד ואהיו דוד אמר דילמא מבעינא דלמא איצטב אול לגביה אמר ליה שלום

עליך רבי ומתי אמר ליה שלום עליך בר לויא א"ל
לאימנא מתי כר אמר ליה היום :

"R. Joshua, the son of Levi, found Elijah standing at the door of the cave of R. Simeon ben Jochai, and said to him, Shall I arrive at the world to come? He replied, If this Lord will. R. Joshua, the son of Levi, said, I see two, but I hear the voice of three. He also asked, When will Messiah come? Elijah replied, Go, and ask himself. R. Joshua then said, Where does he sit? At the gate of Rome. And how is he to be known? He is sitting amongst the poor and sick, and they open their wounds and bind them up again all at once: but he opens only one, and then he opens another, for he thinks, perhaps I may be wanted, and then I must not be delayed. R. Joshua went to him and said, Peace be upon thee, my master and my Lord. He replied, Peace be upon thee, son of Levi. The rabbi then asked him, When will my Lord come? He replied, To-day (alluding to the words of the Psalm, To-day, if ye will hear his voice)." (Sanhedrin, fol. 98, col. 1.) This is evidently a fiction, and a proof how little those doctors regarded truth; but it shows that he who invented it, and those who received it, all equally believed that Messiah was born, and ready waiting to come forth for the redemption of Israel. It does, indeed, confirm the common idea, that Messiah's advent depends upon the repentance of Israel, for it makes the Messiah say that he would come this very day, if Israel would only hear his voice. But if the Messiah may any day, when they repent, come and save Israel, then it is plain that he must have been born long since. The testimony of the ancient Jews, then, goes to establish these points—First, That the time for Messiah's advent has been long past; Secondly, That the end of the fourth thousand years was the time when he ought to have come; and, Thirdly, That at that time he did really come; for about that time, they say, he was born in Bethlehem of Judah. Fourth, That he was taken into Paradise, as Rashi explains the gate of Rome to mean the gate of Paradise opposite Rome; and, Fifthly, That he is waiting to return to this earth for the redemption of his people. Now who is there that does not see at once, that this agrees in the main with the Christian doctrine? We believe that, at the end of the fourth thousand years, the Messiah was born, and at this season of the year we rejoice at the remembrance of the Saviour's birth. The Jews refuse to join with us, but who has the greatest show of right? Not now to speak of the prophecies, and of the historical evidence which we have, we have the testimony even of our opponents to show that we are in the right. The most ancient Rabbinical writings unanimously confess, that the time

is past, and that the Messiah has been long since born, and thus testify the correctness of our faith respecting the time of Messiah's advent. Christians, however, go on consistently and believe further, that God did not break his word, but performed his promise, and therefore we rejoice. The Jews do not believe, because they are so engrossed with the temporal deliverance of the nation, that they cannot see that another and a greater redemption was necessary. We do not, by any means, wish to deny that Israel is to be restored to the land of promise, and to inherit all the blessings promised in the prophets. On the contrary, we fully believe that the Messiah, who visited this earth for a short season, will return and re-establish the Theocracy which was once the glory of Israel, and that, in a much more glorious form than Israel ever saw under any of their kings. We heartily wish Israel the enjoyment of every blessing promised; but we cannot help remembering that Messiah has another and more important office than that of restoring the kingdom to Israel, and that is the redemption of the human race. The highest pitch of national glory and earthly prosperity would be as nothing, and less than nothing; unless the children of men were delivered from the effects of Adam's sin, and made partakers of a good hope of everlasting life. Even the gathering of Israel from all the ends of the earth would appear but a very insignificant business, if it did not stand in immediate connexion with the eternal welfare of all nations. Many of the sons of men have appeared as conquerors and heroes, and have raised their country to a high degree of glory, and conferred upon them much temporal prosperity; but if Messiah was to be nothing more, we confess we should not think him worth the having. We think of the Messiah as the Being, in whom all the families of the earth shall be blessed, as the restorer indeed of Israel, but also God's salvation unto the end of the earth. This is the doctrine which Christianity teaches, and which is confirmed by the law and the prophets; and therefore we rejoice that this great Deliverer has been born—that He came at first in great humility to bruise the serpent's head, and to lay down his life a ransom for many. We remember that this blessed news, these glad tidings of great joy, were brought to us by Jews; and, therefore, feeling our deep obligations, we would desire to show our gratitude by inviting Israel to come and partake in our joy. We feel assured that our joy is no illu-

sion. Even the rabbies themselves bear witness that the Messiah ought to have been born, and was born at the very time in which we believe the Messiah to have been born. But if he was born, who was he? What other person can make any claim to the Messiahship, but He whom we acknowledge? Is it reasonable to believe, as the rabbies do, that God actually sent the Great Deliverer down into this wretched world, and then took him away again, without permitting him to accomplish his work? No; if ever he visited this earth—and that he did visit it, both the ancient Jews and Christians assert, he could not have left it again without bestowing upon its inhabitants a remedy for their woes. The ancient Rabbies and the Christians both agree as to the time of Messiah's birth, and the fact of his birth in Bethlehem. Indeed the whole nation practically showed their agreement with Christians, as to the time of Messiah's advent, by readily following every military adventurer who laid claim to the character of Redeemer. Even before the destruction of the temple, multitudes had suffered by their credulity; but immediately after the desolation, the people and the Rabbies with one accord followed Bar Chochba, and thereby showed the reality of their belief, that that was about the time when Messiah ought to appear. Judaism, therefore, teaches this doctrine—that God promised the Messiah, that God fixed a time, that that time is past, and yet that God did not keep his promise. Christianity, on the contrary, acknowledges the promise, recognises the time, believes that Messiah was born, but believes further that God fulfilled his word—that Messiah was not carried away into Paradise, until He had accomplished the work that was to be done at his first advent. Then, indeed, we acknowledge that He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at God's right hand, from whence He will come again for the final redemption of his people, and the establishment of the reign of righteousness. The only real difference between us is, as to the VERACITY of God. We believe that God did not, and could not, break his word. Modern Judaism teaches that God broke his promise. It is for rational beings to decide which doctrine is most agreeable to the Divine character. For our own parts, we will rejoice in God's unchangeableness, and say, in the remembrance, that "His truth endureth for ever."

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