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RELIGIOUS DISPUTATIONS IN THE TALMUD: THE PERIOD OF THE TANNAIM

By

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Bibliography	1-- 2
Introduction	3-- 12
The subject Defined 3-5	
The Authenticity of the Disputations 5-10	
The General Significance of the Disputations, etc. 10-12	
Part One: Disputations with Heathens.	13-- 89.
Introductory 13-15	
The Intellectual Character of the Heathens 15-17	
Disputations upon the General Contents of the Bible 17-54	
<i>Contradictions in the Bible 18-23.</i>	
<i>The Justice of the Jewish Law 23-28</i>	
<i>The Ceremonial and Ritual Law 28-48</i>	
<i>Mythological Elements and Absurdities</i>	
<i>in the Bible 48-52</i>	
<i>Non-Polemical Discussions 53-54</i>	
Disputations upon the Jewish God-Conception 55-75	
Disputations on Resurrection 76-81	
Disputations on the Relation between Israel and God 82-89	
Part Two: Disputations with Minim or Jewish Heretics	90-- 103

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Note: Any abbreviations I have used in the body of the Essay will be noted in parentheses beside the title of the Book.

The abbreviations which I have used for Talmudic and Midrashic works are the usual ones and too evident to need special listing. I have designated Jerusalmi by J., and omitted any special designation for Babli.

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Practically every unit of the entire Talmudic and Midrashic Literature is referred to, so that special listing is unnecessary.



*"No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper,  
And every tongue that shall rise in judgment against thee  
shalt thou condemn.*

*Thine is the heritage of the servants of the Lord,  
And their due reward from Me, saith the Lord.*

*Isalah, LIV, 17.*

## INTRODUCTION

## The Subject Defined

Scattered here and there throughout the pages of the Talmudic Literature there occur ~~many records of conversations~~ between the Rabbis representing authoritative, traditional Judaism, on the one hand, and heathens, and members of heretical Jewish sects, on the other. These conversations are of general historical interest as indicating the social relations between Jews and heathens and as depicting the cultural atmosphere of the Talmudic period. They are of special religious or theological interest as indicating the spiritual reaction of the Rabbis to the various thought-movements proceeding within the Jewry of their time and in the world about them. This Essay is devoted chiefly to the latter aspect of these conversations. It therefore limits itself to those conversations in which a difference in religious viewpoint is brought out, that is, to those conversations which may be termed *Religious Disputations*.

This Essay is further limited to disputations with opponents who first gain prominence in the Talmudic Literature after the period of the destruction of the Jewish State by Titus in the year 70 C.E. We shall thus leave out of consideration the comparatively long-standing disputes with Sadducees or Samaritans. We shall also exclude from our range the conversations between the Rabbis and proselytes, even though these come within our period, for the reason that these cannot afford us that insight into the clash between Judaism and other thought-systems which is our main interest.

The disputations in which we are interested begin historically with Johanan ben Zakkai's <sup>replies</sup> to the strictures of the Roman officer or Hegemon, and are recorded of nearly every prominent Palestinian teacher to the close of the Talmudic period. In this Essay we have limited our range of study to the

Talmudic period, which begins with the compilation

Tannaitic period, which closes with the compilation of the Mishnah and the death of Rabbi Judah HaNasi, Our period is, then, 70--220 C.E.

On the whole, the disputations of this period may be said to represent the Greek spirit in conflict with the Jewish spirit. Judaism, having lost its political and territorial body at the hands of the Roman inheritors of Greek civilization, must now fight to preserve its very soul against the fatal charm of Greek philosophy which inspired alike the intellectual heathen and the Jewish Christian and Gnostic.

We cannot help but observe that the writers of the Graeco-Jewish Literature had fought practically the same battle. The following differences may be noted, however, as to method and result:

1. The Graeco-Jewish writers began with an admiration for Hellenism, which led to compromise with it and to seek a reconciliation between Jewish thought and Greek thought. The Rabbis, on the contrary, resisted the encroachments of Hellenism to the utmost, and yielded to it, if at all, with the utmost reluctance.

2. The Graeco-Jewish writers composed what might fairly be termed a *systematic apologetics*, while the Rabbis have left us only desultory and scattered fragments of their work as apologists.

Dr. David Neumark, in his "Geschichte des juedischen Philosophie des Mittelalters." (Vol. I, pp. 69-95), states his view that in *מעשה מרכבה* and *מעשה בראשית* we have philosophical disciplines, cultivated by the Rabbis for the purpose of counteracting the Hellenistic doctrines introduced by Christianity. Thus the Merkabah was a Rabbinic Emanation theory intended to neutralize the Christian theory of Mediatorship, and Maaseh Bereshith was a Rabbinic Theory of Ideas intended as a counterpoise to the Christian Logos doctrine. This is by far the most definite and convincing description of these disciplines yet evolved. But the limits which the Talmud itself has set to our knowledge of them are inexorable. In the very sentence in which we are told of their

existence, we are also told that they are esoteric. Only the vaguest hints are furnished us as to their content. Therefore, if these disciplines did constitute a systematic apologetics, we are in no position to claim any accurate knowledge of it.

The disputations, however, do not constitute the only source for the study of Rabbinic Apologetics. The other sources are:

1. Within the Talmud itself, sayings, legends, homilies, exegetical remarks, and even laws, in which a polemic note can frequently be recognized. Dr. Neumark (op.cit. 44) points out the extreme importance of the evidence of silence. The omission of all reference to angels in the Mishnah is in itself a powerful stroke of apologetics.

2. The Patristic Literature contains not only polemical statements but also accounts of actual disputations between Rabbis and the early fathers of the Church. The most familiar disputation so recorded is that between Justin Martyr and a certain Tryphon.

In this Essay, the disputations proper shall be our primary interest and point of departure; the other sources will be used only for purposes of corroboration, illustration, emphasis or the provision of supplementary information.

#### The Authenticity of the Disputations

Before we proceed to treat the disputations in the Talmud as a genuine phase in the history of Jewish thought, we must take into consideration the fact that the historical authenticity of these conversations has been questioned. The doubt as to their historicity rests on the following grounds:

1. Conversations between a Jewish Rabbi and a Roman emperor such as the dialogues of Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah and Hadrian, or Judah HaNasi and Antoninus smack of legend\* (This is the view of Dr. Gotthard Deutsch).

\*This is the view of Dr. Gotthard Deutsch as expressed in class lectures.

a). Rabbi and emperor are too intimate:

They invite each other to meals. (Esther R.I, 16; Sab. 119a).

They discuss the most intimate topics. (Ecc. R. X, 7).

The emperor asks the Rabbi for political advice. (Ab. Zar. 10a; Mech. to Ex. XV, 7).

b). The case of Judah and Antoninus does not tally with the facts of Roman history, as Graetz himself proves (Gesch. IV, 485), though he attempts a readjustment by crediting the disputations to a later Rabbi Judah.

2. Some disputations stamp themselves at once as legendary by the miraculous means which the Rabbi is represented as employing for convincing his opponent. (Chul. 59b; 60a).

3. Religious disputations, when recorded by one of the parties to the dispute, are naturally under suspicion of being either altogether manufactured, or so put as to make the opposing side appear absurd. Under this suspicion rest the disputations between Jews and Christians found in the Patristic writings. Under this suspicion rest also the conversations which are recorded in the Letter of Aristeas as having been held between the Translators and the Alexandrian sages. Unless there is strong evidence to the contrary, such a suspicion might rest also on the Talmudic disputations.

As to the first and second objections, it is to be noted that Graetz offers a possible solution. In dealing with the dialogues of Hadrian and Joshua (IV, 450), he first establishes the historical possibility of a meeting between the two. That they were contemporaries is certain. Now he finds that in one of his letters Hadrian speaks of having met a Jewish patriarch in Alexandria. In Nidda 69b there is a record of some intercourse between Joshua and certain Alexandrians. This makes it possible for the two to have met in Alexandria. This much established, Graetz intimates, he would

now examine each disputation individually, upon its own merits, according to its internal evidence, and adjudge some legendary and others authentic. Thus he concludes that the disputation in the presence of Hadrian between Joshua and a Min on the subject of the rejection of Israel is an authentic one. (Chag. 5b). The writer would add to this method that even where the disputations contains matter which is plainly legendary, it may still be analyzed with a view of discovering as to whether it does not *reflect* some plausible viewpoint, if it does not accurately record the expression of it. Illustration of this principle will be duly noted in the discussion of such legendary disputations in the body of the Essay.

It should also be kept in mind that only a part of the disputations in the Talmudic literature are attributed specifically to famous personages. In a large number of disputations, the opponents of the rabbis are altogether anonymous. It would hardly be logical to adjudge the latter unhistorical because of the shortcomings of the former.

The writer's own view is that the precise identity of the co-disputant is unimportant. It is what he represents that really matters. Thus, if Hadrian and Antoninus represent the heathen reaction to Rabbinic Judaism, it becomes gratuitous, at least for the purposes of this Essay, to inquire whether it could really have been the emperor himself who ~~honored the Rabbi with an interview.~~

But here enters the third objection: Has the other side in these disputations been fairly recorded? And this objection, let it be remembered, would apply as well to the anonymous disputants. The writer thinks that the disputations in the Talmud are fairly representative of both sides of any question at issue. The considerations that favor such a conclusion are as follows:

1. As will appear from the disputations themselves, there is rarely any attempt made to make the co-disputant appear ridiculous. On the contrary, his question is always taken seriously, and answered with an evident painstaking

application of thought, either through parable, or experiment or citation of appropriate Biblical verses.

2. That the co-disputants asked questions which could not have been considered absurd or trivial is proven by the frequent recurrence in the accounts of the disputations of a demand on the part of the pupils of the Rabbi for a better answer than the one originally offered the co-disputant:

רבי למה דחית בקנה, לנו מה את משיב

"Teacher, him you thrust aside with a mere reed, but us what can you answer?"

By "thrusting aside with a reed" is meant merely an answer in simple terms. The fact that the pupils were not satisfied with the answer indicates that the point at issue had been of difficulty to them, too, and shows that the opponents of the Rabbis were credited with broaching question of real importance.

3. We find a number of instances where the Rabbis admit that their opponents are in the right. Thus, in a disputation which we shall consider in more detail further on, certain Roman emissaries charge that the Jewish Law permits the robbing of a heathen (Precisely what they meant will be discussed in connection with the disputation itself). No sooner had the Romans stated their contention than Rabban Gamaliel admitted that they were in the right. For the disputation closes with the words:

באחרי שעה נזר רבן גמליאל על גזילתם נכרי שיהא אסור מפני חילול השם.

"Immediately Rabban Gamaliel decreed that 'the robbing of the heathen' shall be prohibited as a form of blasphemy." (J. Ba. Ka. 4b).\*

At the close of a discussion between Rabbi Judah and Antoninus on the question as to when the soul first enters the body, we find the statement,  
 \* This decision of Gamaliel's assumed great importance as is evidenced by the fact that it is given anonymously in Tos. Ba. Ka. in a reinforced form: It is a more serious offense to rob a heathen than to rob an Israelite on account of the character of blasphemy possessed by the former act.

"Said Rabbi, 'This thing did Antoninus teach me'."

Evidently, then, the attitude of the Rabbis toward their co-disputants was neither prejudiced nor deliberately derogatory.

4. Another indication of the approximate veracity of the accounts of the disputations is presented by J. Bergmann in his "Juedische Apologetic im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter." He finds that in a number of instances the writings of the Christian Fathers against heathen philosophers yield exact parallels to the Rabbis' disputations with heathens. The discussion as to whether the soul enters the body at conception or at birth, to which we have just referred, is found to have been taken up also by Tertullian and the Stoics, the Christian taking the same position as Antoninus. The disputation between Gamaliel and the philosopher who argues that God made the world out of several original materials mentioned in the Biblical text is also paralleled by Tertullian's polemic upon Hermogenes, who denied the doctrine of Creation out of Nothing. (p. 6).

Our position as to the authenticity of the disputations may now be summed up in this way: The account given of any one disputation may be inaccurate in various ways. The names of the disputants may at times be inaccurate, and the wording may not be exact. Nevertheless the fact that so many disputations have been recorded in every stratum of the Talmudic literature establishes it that such disputations were at least *imagined* to have taken place, that such were the subjects imagined to have been discussed and such the answers given by the Rabbis. But even such imaginary disputations could be relied upon to reflect the point at issue between the Rabbis and their opponents. The imagination, in such a case would be quite decidedly fettered. It might run wild as to the identity of the co-disputants but it could not go far afield as far as the content of the disputations is concerned. And it is the content alone that we are interested in. The disputations may, therefore, be



properly be used as a means of reconstructing the scattered apologetics of the Rabbis.

### The General Significance of the Disputations

How seriously the Rabbis took these disputations is strikingly demonstrated by the following statement:

רבי אלעזר אומר הוה שקור ללמוד תורה ודע מה שחשוב לאפיקורוס

"Rabbi Eleazar said, 'Be watchful in the study of the Torah and know what an answer to give to the unbeliever!'" \* (Aboth II, 19).

The Torah, evidently, was to be studied with special care in order that the attacks of heathen and heretic might find a ready answer. The disputations afforded a special stimulus to study, and especially to the study of the Bible itself. Abahu, an Amora of the beginning of the fourth century, is recorded as having once recommended to the Minim or Jewish heretics a certain Babylonian teacher. He tells them that the Babylonian is an expert only in Mishnah, that is, in the oral tradition of the law, but that he is not expert in the interpretation of the Scriptures. In the latter, only Palestinians may call themselves expert. Asked to explain this circumstance, he answers:

אנן דשכיחינן גבייכון רמינן אנפשינן למעיינותו אינהו לא מעייני

"We Palestinians who come into frequent contact with you unbelievers are given an incentive to make a special study of the Bible, while the Babylonians (since they do not come into contact with the unbelievers) do not make any special study of it." (Ab. Za. 4a).

In both of the above quotations the suggestion is compellingly made that it was in order to be equipped for these disputations that the Rabbis searched the Scriptures. In order to be able to formulate genuinely Jewish

\* That the term "Epicuros" refers to heathen as well as to Jew is evident from San. 88b, where a distinction is explicitly made between a heathen and a Jewish "Epicuros".

principles of religion that shall stand out in bold relief against the insinuating twilight of Hellenistic quasi-rationalism and mysticism, they took inventory of all their resources, including not only the Scriptures but also mind and heart and tradition. Dr. Neumark (op.cit.) believes that not only did these contacts with outer thought-movements stimulate the development of peculiarly Jewish systems of philosophy and mysticism, but that they actually provided the chief impetus for the compilation of the Mishnah or the Oral Code. Judah HaNasi compiled the Code in order that Judaism itself might appear in an unmistakably definite and concrete form, around which its loyal sons might rally, as it faced the onslaught of Hellenism. And, as has already been mentioned in another connection, he omitted all mention of angels in order to deny heathenism, gnosticism, and Christianity, whose philosophical systems had so much to do with mediatory powers, a foothold within the bounds of articulate, authoritative Judaism. Thus through clashing with foreign viewpoints, Judaism itself became crystallized. The Rabbis did not establish a theology but through their repeatedly expressed reactions to the opposing systems, they made Judaism a knowable positive quantity. In this lies the chief significance of the Religious Disputations in the Talmudic Literature.

#### Method of Classification

In dealing with the disputations, I have concluded that there is nothing to be learned from a chronological statement of the disputations. There is not sufficient material available for tracing any form of progress in the reactions of the Rabbis to any of their opponents. The most that can be noted is that disputations with heathens are the most frequent in the Tannaitic period, after which they disappear entirely and give place to disputations with Minim. There are comparatively few disputations with Minim in the Tannaitic period, but those few are highly important.

I have, therefore, thought it best to classify the disputations first according to the religious systems represented, which are heathenism and Minuth. Under each of these headings, the disputations are further classified according to the subjects in dispute, such as the God-conception, Resurrection and the like.

#### Texts Used

The censors, who made so many changes in the more recent editions of the Talmud were especially active in the passages containing the disputations, making a use of the more common editions impossible for our purposes. The term Min was invariably replaced either by צדוקי or כוזרי, and the term Caesar by כופר. As the identification of the co-disputant's religious allegiance is vital to this Essay, the writer has throughout made comparisons either with the Munich Codex in the Hebrew Union College Library or with the פירוש קדוש of R. Rabinowicz. In the case of the Midrashim I have used the First Edition, in the Hebrew Union College Library.

# PART ONE

## DISPUTATIONS WITH HEATHENS

### Introductory

Conversations of a controversial nature between Rabbis and heathens occur very abundantly in the Tannaitic Period. On the side of the Rabbis the leading disputators are:

Rabban Jochanan ben Zakkai  
 Rabban Gamaliel II  
 Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah  
 Rabbi Akiba ben Joseph  
 Rabbi Meir  
 Rabbi Jose ben Chalafta  
 Rabbi Joshua ben Korcha  
 Rabbi Judah Hanasi

This list, it will be noted, includes the most prominent Rabbis of each generation of Tannaim. The only disputator of comparatively minor importance as a teacher would seem to be Joshua ben Korcha. On the leaders of each period fell the responsibility of defending the good name and demonstrating the worth of Judaism. A number of instances are found where a number of teachers at one time are called upon to reply to the attacks of heathens. Further on it will be shown that all these instances are various phases of one great occasion. The Rabbis are there referred to as זקנים, "elders", and the group consists of Gamaliel, Joshua, and Akiba, who are given in our list, and also Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah, of whom no record is given as an individual disputator.

I shall use the term "co-disputant" to designate the opponents of the Rabbis. The heathen co-disputants are designated in a variety of ways. The most general description is the word גוי, which is generally taken to be the equivalent of "heathen". Another designation is רומיים, or "Romans". Still another general term is פלוסופין or פלוסופים, "philosopher". Graetz in his "Gnosticismus und Judentum" would have us identify the "philosophers" with Christians. Graetz and after him Z. Frankel and W. Bacher and R. T. Herford—all

underestimate the amount of interest that the heathens displayed in Judaism and the degree of knowledge they had of it. In some disputations the term פלסופוס is undoubtedly equivalent to מין or "heretic", but in other disputations, as will appear when we treat the disputations themselves, the term as/ certainly refers to a heathen.

The later editions of the Talmud contain the term כופר, or "denier", in connection with several disputations. Such a term would suggest that the co-disputant was a Jewish heretic. However the Munich Codex gives in every such instance the term קסר instead, thus identifying such co-disputants as heathens.

In the case of some co-disputants merely their official or military rank is used to designate them. Such are קיסר, הנמון, קונטרקוס, and סרדינות. These may be rendered to read Caesar, (in some instances this term refers definitely to Hadrian), ἑκατον, centurion, and στρατιώτης. No attempt will be made here to investigate any further the precise meaning of these military and official ranks.

Some disputants are specified by their proper names. Of these the most prominent are: אדריאנוס, or Hadrian, who is recorded as engaged in many disputations with Joshua ben Chananiah, and אנטונינוס, or Antoninus, who is recorded as engaged in many disputations with Judah Hanasi, and טורנוסוס, or Turnus Rufus who is reported in a number of disputations with Akiba. Beyond what has already been said in the Introduction about the authenticity of the disputations with Hadrian and Antoninus, no attempt will be made here to identify historically the disputants who are mentioned by their proper names. Other proper names given are:

אגניטוס הנמון, Agnitus.

אגריפס שר צבא, Agrippas

אריוס, Arius

זנון, Zonon

אבניסוס הנררי

פרוקלוס בן פילוסופוס,

Proclus, the philosopher

חלמי המלך, King Ptolemy.

We name last a woman who appears as a disputant in the cause of heathenism. She is called מַטְרוֹנָה, or "matron", in all the texts, no further identification being even suggested. She argues exclusively with Jose ben Chalafta. Frankel in his "Zur Geschichte der jüdischen Religionsgespräche", in the Monatschrift IV, p. 207, argues from her question regarding Chanoch that she must be of Christian tendency. Bacher in the "Agada der Tannaiten, II", supports the argument by pointing to the disputations on Circumcision and Israel's downfall. (p. 170, note 2) But as will be shown later, all these questions were of as great importance for heathens as for Christians. Impossible from our point of view is also Bacher's suggestion that the Matrona's easy acquaintanceship with the Bible is an indication of her identity as a Christian. Decisive for the whole problem of her religious point of departure should be the statement of her form of worship which she herself makes in one of the disputations:

בשעה שראה את הנחש שהוא אלהי

"When Moses saw the snake, who is my god, etc." (Ex. R. III, 16)

Snake-worship is not an uncommon form of idolatry. The question: Does God select, which has also been taken as an indication of her Christianity is not stated definitely enough to permit of relating it with any early Christian belief as to God's method of selection. As it stands the question is of general religious interest. (Num. R. III). We shall therefore treat the Matrona as a heathen throughout.

#### The Intellectual Character of the Heathen Disputants

In the simple language in which the Talmud records the disputations there lies the danger that the reader would reach the hasty conclusion that these heathens were naive, unthinking, idol-worshippers, to whom Judaism was simply the cult of a vanquished foe, and who asked their questions in a domineering tone and for no other purpose than to see the conquered people win since its god is defied. Such an impression of the character of the heath-

en disputants can only be the result of a superficial reading of the disputations. While it may be true that the disputations are partly motivated by racial antipathy as well as by religious difference, they certainly go deeper than mere expressions of contempt on the part of the heathen. In this Essay the questions of the heathens shall be taken seriously as expressions of a genuine intellectual viewpoint. The heathens involved are all men who have intellectualized heathenism, and have sought to find for it an ultimate philosophical sanction. They are of the Stoic and Neo-Platonic schools of Greek philosophy. It was one of the tasks which these schools of philosophy had set themselves to furnish an intellectual basis for Greek religion and mythology. Synchronously with the period of the Tannaim this phenomenon was taking shape in Greek and Roman life that the common people were beginning to lose all faith in the old gods. To the ruling classes in Rome this was an alarming situation indeed. The entire state was founded upon the worship of the gods. Current morality drew its sanctions from it, and it was one of the chief instruments of discipline for the vast submerged classes in the empire. Therefore the philosophers tried to put new spirit into the old faith by interpreting it in terms of the metaphysical principles of Plato and Aristotle, whose names carried the stamp of unquestioned authority. The heathens who engaged in disputations with the Rabbis were disciples of these Greek theologians. In coming into contact with Judaism, they felt the impact of a rival system of thought. Their reaction to it was double. In the first place, they were stimulated to study the faith which made such high claims for itself. In the second place they were challenged to contest it. Purely intellectual, however, their motive cannot be said to be. They feared the spread of Judaism not because it was different from their own faith, but because it was too similar. For with monotheism, the first principle of Judaism, they could have no real quarrel, since, basing their thought as they did on the metaphysics of Plato

and Aristotle, they had gone as far as monotheism themselves. They saw in Judaism, then, a religion in which resided the potentiality of some day sweeping away their allegorized gods, and with them the Roman-Greek civilization. They studied, Judaism, then, for the purpose of finding fundamental flaws in it, of finding it subject to the same shortcomings as the faith in the old Greek gods, of exposing it as inconsistent and of discrediting Israel's claim, supported on the words of the prophets, of being the carrier of the final religious truth to mankind. At the same time their racial antipathy toward Judaism is indicated by inuendos upon Jewish separatism, and by charges of the injustice of the Jewish law toward the heathen.

We shall treat the disputations with heathens under the following headings:

Disputations upon the general contents of the Bible.

Disputations upon the Jewish God-conception.

Disputations on Resurrection.

Disputations on the Relation between Israel and God.

#### Disputations upon the General Contents of the Bible

There can be no doubt but that numerous intellectual heathens read the Bible, even though Frankel, Bacher and Herford use an indication of knowledge of the Bible on the part of a disputant as proof that he was a Christian rather than a Heathen. It is merely necessary to mention such heathens as Celsus or Julian the Apostate to indicate the degree of Biblical knowledge of which heathens were capable, when they needed<sup>it</sup> in fighting for their faith. The Talmud itself, as will appear from the disputations, credits them with detailed knowledge of the Biblical text. In one of the first disputations we shall quote we shall find a statement to the effect that the Roman government itself sent emissaries to the Rabbis with orders that they be taught the entire Jewish law-Mishnah, Talmud, Halacha and Agadah. Nor is it by any means an



improbability that the Roman government should desire a thorough and first-hand investigation into the law and literature and theology of one of its most recalcitrant provinces. Here, then, we may take it, we have a class of heathens who read the Bible in Hebrew. For all other intellectual heathens, the Bible was available in the Septuagint translation. The large number of Roman proselytes to Judaism, of whom we hear much in the Tannaitic period (Graetz IV, 109) may be said to point to a currency of the Bible among the educated classes of Roman society. Therefore the familiarity of a co-disputant with the Biblical text need never prejudice us either as to the authenticity of the disputation or as to the identity of the co-disputant as a heathen.

*I. Contradictions in the Biblical Text.* It was but natural for the heathen to glow over the discovery of a contradiction in the Biblical text. All of Judaism's claims of superiority as a religion were based upon its Bible. To substantiate such a claim, argued the heathen, that Book ought to be perfect. The discovery of a flaw in it was fatal to it. And what more damaging testimony against its divinity could be conceived than that it is inconsistent, contradicting its own words?

a). In J. Sanhedrin and in B. Bechoroth we have the same account of a Roman official finding such a contradiction. We quote from the Babylonian version as the clearer one:

*Kuntrukus Ha-Sar (an official title) asked Rabbi Joohanah (ben Zakkai): "Where the Levites are enumerated by families (Nu. III, 22, 28, 34), you find that they numbered 22,300; where their number is given as a tribe (Nu. III, 39), you find that they numbered only 22,000. Where have the 300 gone?"*

*He answered: "The 300 were first-born; and one first-born cannot redeem another first-born." (B. Bechor. 5a; J. Sanhed. 19c; Nu. R. IV, 7.).*

It is a real problem in Biblical criticism which the Roman puts, and the

actual answer is most likely that in the latter instance the text intended to give only round numbers. However, Jochanan's answer serves to solve the difficulty. In Nu. III, 11-13 we read that the Levites were consecrated to God as substitutes for the first-born of Israel who belong to Him. Now when they are enumerated according to their families the purpose in view is merely to know their numbers. Therefore the complete figures are given. But when their total number as a tribe is given, the purpose in view is to state the extent to which the Levites can be used as substitutes for the first-born of Israel. Therefore the 300 first-born Levites, who cannot be used as substitutes for other first-born, are left out of the account.

b). Another contradiction in the Biblical text is the subject of a disputation in which both disputants are anonymous. Rashi conjectures that the disputants are Gamaliel and a Roman official, while Tosaphoth insists that the disputants are Jochanan and the same Roman official who asked the question given above:

And again he asked him: "One verse says, 'And God said, Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures and flying birds'; this proves that fowl were created out of water (Gen. I, 20). Another verse says, 'And out of the earth the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air'; this proves that they were created out of earth (Gen. II, 19).

He said to him, "They were created out of mud."

He saw his pupils looking about at one another, so he said to them, "This seems difficult in your eyes that I have thrust my enemy aside with a reed. The fowl really were created out of water, and as for the statement in Gen. II, 19 that they were brought before the man, that was only for the purpose of naming them, (and has nothing to do with their manner of creation--Rashi)."

Some authorities say that it was the latter answer which he gave to his pupils and the former to the officer, for it is written in the second verse "and he created", (therefore he could not have said "and he created").

reference: H. H. H.

וַיֵּצֵא, "and he created", (therefore he could not have told his pupils that that verse had nothing to do with creation--Rashi).

We cannot help but note the perspicacity of the heathen as displayed in this question. He has struck upon what is now admitted to be a palpable contradiction in the biblical text, namely the double account of creation in the first two chapters of Genesis. Of course, he does not speak in terms of literary criticism, and has no interest in suggesting the probability of dual authorship. His aim is achieved when he has found in the one chapter a different account of the creation of birds than in the other chapter. Nevertheless, despite his extremely favorable opportunity for finding contradictions between the first and second chapters of Genesis, the one that he does point out is rather forced. In the first chapter, the word וַיֵּצֵא must be construed as the subject of a new clause. There is thus nothing said in the verse about birds being created out of water. It is only by translating the expression וַיֵּצֵא וְעוֹפֵי הָאָרֶץ, "and flying birds", that the heathen's contention is made at all plausible. Or it may be that the heathen adopts the rabbis' own methods of exegesis, and argues from the mere proximity of the statement about the creation of birds to that of the creation of creeping things out of water, that birds, too, were created out of water. But this very alternative suggests the possibility that this disputation is not literally authentic, for one suspects the whole depiction of the heathen to amount to an attempt at reading into the heathen mind a form of reasoning which is primarily characteristic of the rabbinic mind. On the other hand, making for the authenticity of the disputation is the plain confession which the text itself makes that the heathen's argument is strong. The Rabbi never questions the correctness of the heathen's translation. He sets out at once to reconcile the contradiction. In the art of reconciling contradictions the Rabbis were certainly at home. They were themselves finding contradictions in the Bible and reconciling

them to their satisfaction. The reply that the birds were made out of mud is certainly a fine example of cleverness at harmonizing. But, our main text goes on to tell us, Jochanan's pupils considered the answer as no more than a piece of cleverness, and wanted a real solution to what seemed to them a real problem. His answer to them is certainly unconvincing--indeed, unconvincing to such a degree that the report of the whole disputation is questioned, and "some authorities say" that it was the latter answer which he gave to the heathen and that it was the "mud" solution which he gave to his pupils.

In the preceeding two disputations we have seen the heathen finding contradictions for the contradictions' sake, so to speak. The heathen was content to find merely a technical flaw in a book which ought either to be flawless or renounce its title to divine authorship. We have also seen that the Rabbis met this form of attack with the same weapons of combat which they used in grappling with the difficulties they themselves found in the holy text, which they themselves sincerely believed to be perfect. Now we come to disputations which, while they might well come under the heading of contradictions, do yet go beyond the mere discovery of a technical imperfection. The heathen attempts through the contradiction to bring discredit upon some one of the principal characters of the Bible.

c). *Discrediting Moses.* Moses, in the eyes of the cultured heathen, stood in the same relation to Jewish knowledge as did Plato or Aristotle or Pythagoras to Greek philosophy. Through divine inspiration Moses claims to have laid down the ultimate moral law and the final religious truth. But Moses was also a man of affairs, a governor of a people. What a felicitous stroke the heathen must have complimented himself upon when he thought he had discovered in the Books of Moses themselves a confession that in practical matters Moses did not himself live up to the high standards of conduct which he taught. And the indictment of the founder of the faith is of course an indictment of the faith itself.

Again I have selected for translation the Babylonian version of the disputation because of its comparatively greater clearness. In the Palestinian version the disputant is named, "Antignas Hegemon", whereas in the Babylonian version he is unnamed. He is either the same man or of the same group as the co-disputant in the preceding disputations, of Rabbi Jochanan.

And again he asked him, "In the collecting of the money (for the Tabernacle) you find that it amounted to 201 Kikar and 11 Maneh, as it is written, 'A beka a head, that is, half a shekel, after the shekel of the sanctuary, .i.e. for 603,550 men.'" (Ex. XXXVIII, 26.)

(Moses received  $1/2 \times 603,550 = 301,775$  Shekel. Now 25 Shek. = 1 Maneh and 60 Maneh = 1 Kikar. Therefore Moses collected 201 Kikar and 11 Maneh.).

But in Moses' report of the expenditure of the money, you find only 100 Kikar as (it) is written, 'And the hundred Kikar of silver were used for the casting of the sockets of the sanctuary'. Moses, your Master, was either a thief or a swindler, or a bad mathematician. One half he gave to the sanctuary, the other half he kept, and he did not give a complete account." (Ib. 27.)

He answered, "Moses, our Master, was a faithful treasurer and a good mathematician. The Maneh of the sanctuary has double the value of the ordinary Maneh." (Thus the 100 Kikar which Moses reported amounts actually to the 200 which he had collected on the basis of the ordinary Maneh. The one kikar and 11 Maneh that remain are provided for in the next verse where they are reported as used for hooks). Bechor, 5a; J. Sanhed. 19d.

In the Jerusalem version the calculations are much more complex, the charge of thief being maintained even under the supposition of various valuations of the Kikar. There is nothing in the text to justify any suspicion against the authenticity of this disputation. It shows, then, how minutely the heathen searched the text in his anxiety to cast suspicion upon Moses, the great rival of Plato. The Rabbi's answer is forced. It is challenged by the

authorities who report it. From the Jerushalmi version, however, it would appear that it satisfies the heathen completely.

From the pointing out of contradictions in the text and the indirect attempt at discrediting the entire Torah through the discrediting of its founder, we pass on to disputations which present direct attacks upon the justice of the laws contained in the Books of Moses. Even though we are under the heading of "Disputations Upon the General Contents of the Bible", we shall take the liberty of including in our consideration of disputations upon the Law also those which involve attacks upon Rabbinic legislation.

II. *The Justice of the Jewish Law.* In Ex. XXI, 29, there is stated the law that an ox, of whose goring propensities the owner has been warned, shall upon the next offense be stoned; and his owner, too, must be put to death. Now in matters of civil law the cultured Roman naturally felt himself a master. He had a sense of the vast Roman achievements in the fields of government and law. Rome's ambition for complete world-empire had made all of her intellectual sons take a special interest in the problems of governmental organization and civil law. The fact that in their constant march outward from Rome, Roman officials came into contact with many and diverse systems of law and custom made them keen judges of legal principle. The fact that despite their haughty air as conquerors Roman governors had to adapt their rule to prevailing local law and custom made them experts in the study of laws. Moreover, they had always a keen interest in seeing to it that local law shall not be permitted to remain wherever it should prove prejudicial to Roman sovereignty, or wherever it should prove provocative of even local quarrels. But they were not content with a hit-or-miss practical adaptation of the law to peculiar local circumstances. It lay in the genius of the Roman to make a science and a philosophy of the law. The *Ius Gentium* was intended as a universal law code, which would appeal to the reason of all men, regardless of local customs or prejudices; and this law was at bottom a concrete expression of the moral philoso-

phy of the Stoics. (Encyc. Brit., Roman Law, H. Goudy). If the Romans desired to attack Judaism from a point of vantage, the field of the civil law, both Biblical and Rabbinic, offered them their greatest opportunity.

The Rabbis, on the other hand, were convinced of the absolute justice of the Biblical law. Was it not the law of God? Wherever the literal rendering of the civil or criminal law of the Pentateuch seemed to be incompatible with current notions of justice, the Rabbis re-interpreted those laws so as to adjust them to the best standards of their own time. A familiar instance is the interpretation of the "eye for an eye" law to mean the *value* of an eye for an eye (Ex. XXI, 24), (Baba Kamma 84a). In many of their decisions, too, the Rabbis conceded the validity of Roman law, and allowed themselves to be influenced by it. They seem to have been well acquainted with it, as will appear from the disputation below. In the disputations with regard to the justice of the law, heathen and Rabbi face each other as equals. (Jewish Encyc., Talmudic Law).

#### a). The Goring Ox.

Angittas Hegemon asked Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai, "So the ox is stoned and the owner, too, is put to death!" (Referring in a tone of surprise to the law in Ex. XXI, 29.)

He answered him, "The accomplice of the highwayman is like the highwayman, 'he is legally like the highwayman'."

When he (the Roman) went out, his pupils said to him, "O master, him didst thou thrust aside with a reed, us what can you answer?"

He said to them, "It is written, 'The ox shall be stoned, and the owner, too, shall be put to death'. This means that the execution of the ox shall be as the execution of the owner would be. The verse draws an analogy between the execution of a man and the execution of the ox. Just as the execution of a man would be possible only after trial and investigation by the twenty-three judges, so the execution of the ox is permissible only after trial and

*investigation by twenty-three judges." (J. Sanhed. 19b)*

Evidently it seemed unjust to the Roman that the owner of the goring ox shall be put to death along with the obnoxious animal. Rabbi Jochanan quieted his protest with an appeal to a principle of Roman law, namely that the accomplice deserves the same punishment as the culprit himself. (Bacher, *Ag. Tan. I*, 40). The Roman flattered no doubt by this evidence of esteem for Roman legal principle is satisfied. The schoolmen are not so easily put off. They see the weakness of the defence. Warning or no warning, there seems to be something decidedly unjust from an advanced viewpoint in putting a man to death for the blood shed by his beast. The Rabbi now resorts to the familiar hermeneutics of the Rabbis by which Pentateuchal laws no longer tenable were interpreted in a new light. He employs the principle of *qan* or analogy of circumstance. Thus the clause, "and the owner shall be put to death" is shorn of positive content and rendered into a *circumstantial clause*. The law is made to read, "The ox shall be stoned, but the death sentence shall be imposed only through the same process of trial as the owner would receive had he committed a capital offense". The death-sentence for the owner is altogether abrogated. This interpretation of the law was or then became the accepted Rabbinic interpretation, as is evident from *Mishnah Sanhedrin I*, 4.

In the preceding disputation we have, then, an instance of a Roman challenge of the standards of justice revealed by the criminal law of the Pentateuch in its general application. In the ensuing disputation we shall witness a Roman criticism of the Rabbinic law as tribal, as imposing unfair disabilities upon non-Jews.

#### *b). Heathen Disabilities in Jewish Law.*

This disputation is found in three different versions which supplement one another in various respects. I shall quote only the Jerusalem version in full, supplying the additional information from the other sources by partial quotations.



It happened that the (Roman) Government sent two emissaries (אסטרטוגים) to study Torah under Rabban Gamaliel and to learn from him the Scriptural text, the oral traditions, both legal and non-legal,

קרא משנה חלמוד הלכות ואגדות

At the end they said to him, "Your entire law is proper and praiseworthy, except for the following two things:

You say a Jewess may not serve as a midwife for a heathen woman whereas a heathen woman may serve as a midwife to a Jewess. A Jewess may not nurse the son of a heathen woman, whereas a heathen woman may nurse the son of a Jewess with the latter's permission.

The "robbing of an Israelite" is prohibited, while "the robbing of a heathen" is permitted." (Glosses added)

At once Rabban Gamaliel pronounced a decree against the robbing of a heathen as an act of blasphemy. (J. Ba. Kam. 4b; Ba. Kam. 38a; Sifre to Deut. XXXIII, 3.)

In the Babli version the Romans condemn but one law--a different one from those given in the Jerusalemi::

You say that the ox of an Israelite which has gored the ox of a heathen is free of guilt, whereas the ox of a heathen which has gored the ox of an Israelite must pay, no matter whether the ox is a Tam (unused to goring) or a Mud (known to be a gorer). They go on to confirm their objection to the law by applying Rabbinic hermeneutics to the Scriptural text of the law concerning the goring ox. (Ex. XXI, 35-37). No answer is attempted by the Rabbis according to this version. The Romans close their statement with the words: But this thing we shall not report to the government.

Both Jerusalemi and Sifre give Rabban Gamaliel as the man to whom the Romans addressed themselves. Babli gives the indefinite sages of Israel. Rabban Gamaliel is of the second generation of Tannaim (90--130 B.C.), and successor to Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai as head of the Rabbinical School at Jabneh. Both in the eyes of Jews and Romans he was regarded as the highest autho-

rity in Judaism of his day. He was in a position, therefore, to be best able to instruct the Romans in Biblical and Rabbinic law and to use his power to correct any genuine faults the Romans might find. Graetz in his examination of these passages (Monatschrift 1881, p. 493 ff.) comes to the conclusion that only the objection to the "robbing of a heathen" is authentic. His answer to the puzzling question as to what the "permissibility of robbing a heathen" could possibly mean is that the Rabbis had not condemned as an illicit act evasion of the payment of Roman taxes. This evasion, it seems, was accomplished by Jews feigning to be heathens. Hence the expression in Gamaliel's decree, "The robbery of a heathen is prohibited as *blasphemy*."

This disputation is important not only as a definite instance of the admission on the part of the Rabbis that the criticism of their heathen opponents was just, as well as trenchant, but it is important also as revealing the circumstances under which a large number of the disputations with heathens must have taken place. The Roman government itself and in its own interest sent its representatives to the Rabbinical School. Evidently they demanded a thorough education in Jewish law, religion and lore. The information gained was to be used for governmental purposes. The Sifre version of our disputation has the Roman government instruct the emissaries thus: *Go and pretend to be proselytes*. This may have been one of the methods used by these emissaries for gaining the confidence of the Rabbis and thus receive unreserved instruction. Bacher (Ag. Tan. I, pp 81-82) makes the conjecture that all the disputations between Jochanan and the heathens on the contradictions in the Biblical text and on the nature of the Biblical law took place under the circumstances described in our disputation. They took place in the School itself with the heathen in the role of a pupil. This would throw light on the expression we meet so frequently in the disputations with heathens: *When the heathen went out, the pupils asked*. It had been in the presence of the entire School that the heathen had asked his questions, and the pupils had had to wait till

the heathen went out before expressing their dissatisfaction with the answer offered by their teacher. They were too happy to see the heathen satisfied to question the Rabbi any further in his presence. In corroboration of this view we may quote also the fragment of a conversation between Rabban Gamaliel and Agnitus Hegemon:

*Agnitus Hegemon asked Rabban Gamaliel, "How many laws were given to Israel?"*

*He answered, "Two, one written, the other oral."*

This, says Bacher, (*ibid.*), may be taken to be the introduction to a course of study in Jewish law and lore, some of the results of which are disclosed in the disputations of Jochanan and Gamaliel.

In his attack upon the Bible we have now seen the heathen point out its technical contradictions, attempt to discredit Moses, the author of the Torah, declaim against the general injustice of the Mosaic civil and criminal law, and complain of the narrow exclusiveness of the Rabbinic law based upon the Torah. We come now to consider the attitude they profess to hold toward the Jewish ceremonial law.

III. *The Ceremonial and Ritual Law.* Strangely enough the heathens profess not to understand the Jewish ceremonial and ritual law. Heathenism is itself so involved in ritual and formalism that one would think that if the heathens saw nothing else in the Torah they could understand and sympathize with, they could at least understand its ceremonial legislation. Yet in their references to Jewish ritual they assumed an attitude of contempt toward ritualism. A number of explanations may be offered for this phenomenon. First it may be suggested that the ritual of one's own religion acquires a certain plausibility through use. To one possessing any degree of enthusiasm for his religion, the formalisms of it are so replete with meaning as to transform themselves

The same question was also asked of Shammai and later on of Hillel by a heathen who wanted the information as preparatory to becoming a Jew. (*Sab. 81a*).

into spiritual entities. The ritual of another religion appears to the devotee totally meaningless and mechanical. He cannot feel the spirit in it, and so refuses to believe that there is any spirit in it. What is sublime in one's own religion becomes ridiculous when it is seen practiced by the followers of another faith. One does not challenge the ritual of a religion in which he has been brought up. One takes it for granted. But the rival religion is asked to apologize for its every detail.

Another possible solution to the heathen's attitude toward Jewish ritual is to be looked for in the fact that the heathen approached Judaism from a philosophical viewpoint. They had philosophized about their own faith. They demanded, then, a philosophical explanation of the elements of the Jewish faith. The simplicity of the Rabbis, their preference of corroboration from a text to illumination from a philosophical principle, disconcerted the heathen philosophers. They challenged the Jewish ritual, then, as untenable from a philosophic standpoint, as incapable of yielding any meaning.

The preceding two explanations may be looked upon as supplementary to one another. To these should be added what the writer considers the paramount clue to the the heathens' motive in their questions with regard to the Jewish ritual. Here as well as in other subjects of disputation they have in mind Judaism's claim of being the destined universal religion. Such a religion must stand the test of reason. Every part of it should be alive with meaning. And the meaning must be such as to appeal to all races of men. If the heathens could show that the ritual of Judaism contained such elements as witchcraft or that it was burdened with excrescences, inherited from past ages and possessing no present purpose, then they had definitely refuted the title of Judaism as a world-religion. Nay more, if they could show that Judaism's ritual lacked purpose and inspiration, then they had established a good reason for Jews to yield to the heathen majority whose teachers had already allegorized the cruder elements of the faith and made worship pos-

sible for the man of intellect.

If the foregoing are more or less theoretical statements of the motives of the heathens in assailing the Jewish ritual law, a distinctly practical one offers itself. It was stated in theoretical form in the preceding paragraph<sup>graph</sup> but deserves further emphasis as a practical proposition. To the heathen it appeared that it was the ritual which was the great obstacle to the assimilation of the Jew with Roman civilization. Practically the entire Near East had been Romanized or Hellenized. But at the gates of the Academy of Learning, as three centuries before at the gates of the Temple, the tide of Hellenism had been swept back. What made the Jewish ritual stand out as an object of ridicule and contempt was that it was actually unique. The rest of the world had adopted Roman and Hellenic institutions and were being fast assimilated. The Jews alone resisted both the charm and the force of them. Some of them—indeed, the Rabbis themselves—were students and admirers of Greek thought. As far as the heathen could judge there was a chance that spiritually they might yield to Hellenism and lose their group identity. But there, looming up to him as an eyesore, was the system of Jewish ritual practices, the outward sign of Jewish solidarity and of Jewish separateness. If he could only discredit or discourage these, heathenism would be safe against its most dangerous foe.

Theoretical and practical elements combine, then, to motivate the heathen attack upon Jewish ritual—the theoretical enterprise of refuting Judaism's boast of absolute purity and rationality as a religion and the practical incentive of doing something to destroy what constituted the great obstacle to the assimilation of the Jewish people with Hellenized heathendom.

We shall begin with the earliest recorded disputation on the ritual law. It is recorded of Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai and a <sup>heathen</sup> or heathen, whom Bacher

\* I refer to the gnostic propensities of the Rabbis such as are indicated, for instance, in the account of the four Rabbis entering the <sup>OT</sup> (Chagiga 14a)

identifies conjecturally with the emissaries of our preceding disputations. (Op. Git. p. 41). The disputation concerns itself with an element of the Temple ritual, and may, therefore, be regarded for the time in which it took place as purely theoretic. Yet it serves to bring out sharply both the attitude of the heathen and the position of the Rabbi.

a). *The Red Helper,*

A heathen asked Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai: "These things which you do appear as a species of witchcraft. You bring a cow, and you slaughter it and you burn it and beat it, and take its ashes. And when anyone of you becomes unclean because of contact with a dead body, you sprinkle it on him two and three times, and says 'You are clean'."

He said to him, "Has the spirit of possession<sup>a</sup> ever entered into you?" "Yes," he answered; "No."

He said, "Have you never seen a man in whom the spirit of possession had entered?"

(He said, "Yes").

He said, "And what do you do for such a man?"

He said, "We bring roots and we let them smoke where he stands, and we put water on him, and the spirit flees."

He said to him, "Why do you not let your ears hear what your mouth speaks? Here, too, we have the 'spirit of uncleanness', as it is written, 'And also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land' (Zech XIII, 2.). (So we sprinkle over the unclean man the water of purification and the spirit of uncleanness flees.)".

After he had gone out, his pupils said to him, "Him you have thrust aside with a reed, us what can you answer?"

He said to them, "As you live, the dead body does not make unclean, nor does

<sup>a</sup> If the emissaries are to be considered contemporaries of both Jochanan and Gamaliel, then the disputations must, of course, have taken place after the Destruction.  
<sup>b</sup> Bacher's translation of *Ḥulin 137a*, based on J. Joma, 45b.

the water make clean, but it (the law of the red heifer) is a decree of the King of Kings. The Holy One, Blessed Be He has said, "I have issued an edict, I have decreed a decree, no man may transgress My decree, as it is written; 'This is the decree of the Torah (Nu. XIX, 2).'" (Pesikta 40a).

The attitudes of both heathen and Rabbi in this disputation are of great significance. The heathen, as we have pointed out above, has sought and found a Jewish ritual practice which appeared unintelligible, if not base. In his question he refers to it in the harshest possible terms as "a species of magic". Surely a religion laying claim to superiority should be free of that.

The Rabbi, on the other hand, was not prepared to present the allegorization of the red heifer law, which the heathen most likely demanded. The Rabbi was probably aware of the fact that in Alexandrian Judaism, the allegorization of the Law had fast degenerated into utter antinomism, a tendency which was quite contagious, and had already in his own day penetrated into Palestine and threatened Judaism at its very foundations. The Rabbi was by no means inclined, therefore, to satisfy the heathen and commit himself to a moralization of the Temple ritual. He did well, then, to appeal to a practice current in heathen lands of curing certain diseases by "smoking out the spirit." Since it was of a medicinal nature, it would not occur to the heathen to term it witchcraft or magic. The heathen entangled by the Socratic questionings of the Rabbi could not help but concede the plausibility of the parallel drawn between the practice so familiar to him of smoking out the "spirit of possession" and washing out the "spirit of uncleanness".

To his pupils, however, he expressed his real reaction to the heathen's attitude toward the ritual law. He did not need to be evasive with them. To them

\* Of. Moritz Friedländer, "Der vorchristliche jüdische Gnosticismus" p. 87ff. & "Die religiösen Bewegungen innerhalb des Judentums im Zeitalter Jesu" p. 170ff. In both cases he quotes Philo's condemnation of the radical allegorists, who deteriorated into antinomists (Philo, de migrat. I, 450).  
That Jochanan was familiar with Hellenistic allegorization is further indicated by his indulgence of חֲסִידֵי חֲסִידֵי חֲסִידֵי (Succah 28a; J. Chag. 77a)

he could say frankly that all attempts at philosophical interpretation of the ritual and its details were both futile and dangerous. "The dead body does not make unclean, neither does the water make clean, but it is a decree of the King of Kings." The Rabbi's answer to the philosopher's challenge as to the meaning of the ritual is plainly this, that in our investigation of God's revelation we come to factors which we cannot hope to understand. We may not read into them our own meaning, but we must accept them blindly, if you will, on faith, just as you must accept without question the decree of an earthly king.

That in this disputation, and especially in the Rabbi's reply to his pupils we have come upon the genuine Rabbinic reaction to the strictures of both heathens and Jewish Hellenists on the Jewish ritual law is definitely confirmed by passages in Yoma 67b and in the Sifra, 86a. We shall quote from the Sifra. The passage is in the nature of a comment upon Lev. XVIII, 4:

אֲחֵיכֶם תַּעֲשׂוּ וְאֵת חֻקֵּי תַשְׁמְרוּ לִלְכֹת בָּהֶם אֲנִי יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.

"Mine ordinances shall ye do and my decrees shall ye keep, to walk therein: I am the Lord your God."

The Rabbinical comment follows:

"*Mine ordinances shall ye do.*" By these are meant such words, written in the Torah, of which it might be said that even if they had not been written, they ought to have been written, as for instance, the laws against robbery, incest, idolatry, the profanation of the name of God, and bloodshed. Of these it might be said: If they have not been written, they ought to have been written.

But as to these (the class of laws indicated by the expression, "and my decrees shall ye keep"), which the Evil Inclination challenges and which the heathens challenge, such as the laws concerning the eating of the swine, and the wearing of כְּלָאִים (goods of linen and woolen mingled), and the levirate marriage and the exemption from it obtained by the drawing off of the shoe, and the making clean of the leper, and the scapegoat, -- which the Evil Inclina-



tion challenges and which the heathens challenge--their significance is indicated by the accompanying text, "I am the Lord." I, the Lord, have decreed. You dare not challenge my decree. (Sifra 86a; Yoma 67b; Yalkut to Lev. XVIII, 4)

Thus the Torah is divided into two classes of laws. The one class consists of moral laws, the rationality of which is either self-evident or at least explicable. They are the *ḥukim*, judgements, answering to reason. If they had not been written we might still say they ought to have been written. By this sentence is no doubt meant that if they had not been given by divine revelation they could still have been derived by philosophical reflection. The heathen world has in part conceded their worth, and can be made to understand and respect that part which they have not conceded.

The second class consists of laws whose purpose is not evident, which Jews themselves, seduced by the Evil Inclination, are inclined to question, and which are the *special object of attack by heathens*. These are the *ḥukim* decrees, unillumined by meaning. They are accompanied by the stern signature, *I am the Lord*. These are the decrees of the absolute Ruler of the Universe, who brooks no questioning of his doings\*.

This classification is in part, then, a direct result of heathen criticism of the Torah. Judaism, homeless and bereft of its center of worship, assailed by sceptics and heretics from within, and from without by heathens keen in intellect as well as brutal in power, must cling tenaciously to the Torah, the sole remaining fountain of its life--must display and defend its rationality, wherever that was possible, must insist upon its being the undisputable will of God, wherever the rationality of it had become obscured. This

attitude toward the Torah, which is still prevalent among many modern Jews,

\* A similar view of the ritual law is to be found in the statement of Rab. (Gen. R. XLIV, 1): Rab said, "The Mizvot (commandments, referring chiefly to ritual) were only given for the purifying (training) of men. For what does God care whether one slaughters at the back of the neck or at the throat? Certainly, the commandments were only given for the training of men." This is another way of saying that they are absolute decrees, which do not need to be justified by reason. Rab is a Babylonian Amora of the first generation (d. 247 C. E.).

It is interesting to note, however, that Maimonides (Moreh, III:28) uses this very quotation in support of his contention that every law in the Torah, ritual or otherwise, has a definable, moral purpose.

may be said to have originated through the contact of the Rabbis with heathen philosophers.

An interesting parallel to this double classification of the laws is to be found in a disputation between Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah and Hadrian. The disputation bears all the earmarks of a legend. It represents the Rabbi and the Emperor in relations too intimate to admit of even the probability of authenticity. Yet it is interesting because it reflects the notion that the heathens themselves in time became aware of the twofold classification of the laws into rational and irrational, universal and peculiarly Jewish. Hadrian applies this division to the Ten Commandments.

b). *The Ten Commandments (as divided into peculiarly Jewish and ritual laws and into universal laws)*

Hadrian (may his bones be crushed) asked Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah: "God has indeed honored the heathens, for in the first five commandments, which He gave to Israel, mention His name; as if to say, that if Israel sins against them, they are thus reproached. The five last commandments, which He gave to the heathen, do not mention His name; as if to say that if the heathen sin against them, He will not reproach them." He said to him,

He said to him, "Come and walk with me through the country".

Now wherever the Rabbi led him, the Emperor saw some statue of himself standing. The Rabbi asked, "What is this?" The Emperor answered, "It is my statue". Then he drew him into a lavatory, and said to him, "My Lord King, I see that in all this province, you are the ruler, for everywhere your statue stands, but in this place your statue is not to be found!"

The Emperor said, "O patriarch of the Jews! Is that the honor of an Emperor that his statue shall be found in a place of filth?"

The Rabbi answered, "Then why do not your ears hear what your mouth speaks? Would that be the glory of God that His name should be mentioned among murderers?"

*rebs, adulterers and thieves?" (Pesikta Rabbati XXI)\**

The classification of the commandments suggested by Hadrian is not, of course, the same as the classification into *Mishpatim* and *Chukoth*. For in *Mishpatim* are included also peculiarly Jewish laws—those that Jews could legitimately reason about. The first half of the Ten Commandments contains such laws. It contains, also, however, the ritual law of the Sabbath. Hadrian's classification, therefore, bears a resemblance to our preceding classification strong enough to suggest a common origin.<sup>o</sup>

It must be kept in mind that this classification was meant primarily for the fortification of the soul of Jewry itself. Before the heathen, a reasonable ground for every law, moral or ritual, was always essayed, just as it was in the seemingly impossible case of the Red Heifer. We shall find that in their answers to attacks on such ritual institutions as the Sabbath and circumcision, the Rabbis employ all their resources of proof and experiment to make out a logical case for the ritual and ceremonial law.

c) *The Sabbath*. The heathen could not understand the Sabbath and was inclined to ridicule it. In *Lam. R. Proem 17*, we are told of jokes about the Sabbath which used to create laughter in the theaters. When considering it in a more serious vein, heathen philosophers, such as the Stoics, would argue that continuous activity was the law of nature. This view we shall find reflected in the disputations. The real reason for the heathen's failure to comprehend the Sabbath lay deeper. It lay, in the opinion of the writer, in the economic constitution of Greek and Roman society. Society was divided into a leisure

\*There follows at this point the familiar plea of the students that the answer to the heathen has been too simple for them to accept. The Rabbi replies with the familiar legend (*Mech. 87a*) of God vainly offering the Torah to the heathen nations. Bacher (*Ag. Tan. I, 80*), considers this a later addition to the original text of the disputation.

<sup>o</sup>For the circumstances of the disputations between Joshua and Hadrian, see Introduction, p. 6.

governing class and a subject working or slave class. The leisure class felt an utter contempt for manual labor of every description considering it an expression of man's grosser nature, unbecoming a free man. The highest expression of man's nature lay in contemplation, in philosophical reflection, in the pursuit of art and in the governing of the state. These pursuits required unlimited leisure; therefore the coarser exercises of providing food and clothing and other material necessities had to be engaged in by a slave class. So firmly rooted in the structure of Greek society was this institution of slavery, and so imbedded in the minds of the upper classes was this philosophical justification of it, that even Plato in defining the ultimate, ideal structure of society in his New Republic provides for slavery. Even Aristotle, the profoundest thinker that Greece produced, did not transcend the limits of his Greek social and economic environment, and gave in his Politics a philosophical sanction for slavery as a natural institution. The foreigners (who composed the slave-class to a large extent) were inferior beings. They were created for work. It was but just that they should be made to fulfill their function, and thus make it possible for their betters to exercise the higher functions of humanity. Now these slaves being a natural institution, worked every day, just as nature does. It would have been dangerous to the entire institution to permit of extended leisure. The ruling class, on the other hand, certainly needed no rest-day, since they never engaged in any labor which should require periodic rest.

The heathen philosophers who discussed the Sabbath institution with the Rabbis belonged to this upper stratum of Hellenistic society. They saw in the Jewish Sabbath not only one of those ritual laws which seemed to bind all Israel together into an insoluble unit, but they also feared that the spread of the idea would spell the break-down of their social structure, founded as it was upon slavery. The Sabbath appeared too much like a lever for social e-

manicipation. Here, the writer believes, lies the real reason for the hostile reaction of the heathen for the Sabbath. The philosophical objections are a subterfuge for the more primitive fear of the loss of social privilege.\*

The disputation on the Sabbath, which we are about to quote, is admittedly full of legendary matter. Nevertheless, in its main outlines, it suggests quite compellingly the heathen's searching theoretic questions on the meaning of the day and the Rabbi's brave hunt for a reply which shall at least ostensibly satisfy the heathen (the Rabbi always retaining the mental reservation that as far as he is concerned no human justification is at all necessary).

*Turnus Rufus, the wicked, asked Rabbi Akiba:*

*"Why one day more than another?"*

*He answered, "Why one man more than another?"*

(From here on we shall present the disputation in dialogue form, A.=Akiba, T.=Turnus Rufus.)

*T. What did I ask you?*

*A. What did you ask? You asked, why one day more than another, that is, why is the Sabbath more than any other day? And I answered, why one man more than another, that is, why does Turnus Rufus stand higher than other men?*

*T. Because the king chose to honor me.*

*A. So the Sabbath day, too, is distinguished, because God chose to honor it.*

*T. How can you prove your assertion? (By what natural phenomena can you support your theory that the Sabbath-day is actually different from other days?)*

*A. The river Sambation proves it, for it flows every week-day, but does not flow on the Sabbath.*

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\* That the Sabbath institution had already at this period been adopted over a wide area of peoples is attested to by Josephus. (c. Apion II 89)

*T. But you are begging the question (I have never seen that remarkable river, and cannot accept your description of it on hearsay evidence.)*

*( Here the disputation drifts for a while in the realm of pure legend. Akiba offers as a further proof of the distinction of the Sabbath the fact that spirits cannot be conjured up on that day. Rufus tries to call up his father's spirit on the Sabbath and fails. When he succeeds in bringing him up the next day, he asks the spirit "if" he has become a Jew since he died". The reply of the spirit is appealing from a poetic point of view. The tortured souls of the netherworld are given respite from their sufferings on the Sabbath day. What follows this excursus, however, appears genuine)*

*T. If, as you say, God honors the Sabbath, let him not permit the winds to blow on that day, nor the rains to descend, nor the grass to grow\**

*A. May the breath of that man be extinguished!° Let me explain the matter by a comparison: If two dwell in one courtyard, then one of them makes an Eruv (a form of placing the courtyard on the legal status of private domain), so that both may carry things about in the courtyard on the Sabbath (carrying being permitted on the Sabbath only within a private domain). But if only one man lives in the courtyard, he is free to carry things about. So God, since he has no other Power with him, and the whole universe is altogether his own, is free to carry things about throughout the entire world.*

*Moreover, all those who ate the Manna present the testimony that on all the days of the week it descended, but on the Sabbath it did not descend. (Gen. R. XI, 6).*

*Both questions of the heathen are logical, and both answers of the Rabbi are evasive and dialectic. It is remarkable that the Rabbi should not have mentioned at all the human value of a rest day, since the Agadah is full of sentiments to that effect (see, for instance, Sab. 118, 119,). The logical*

*\*The same question is reported as directed against the four Rabbis (including Akiba), who preached in Rome, by a Min, and practically the same*

*answer is offered (Ex. R. XXX, 61. Such expressions as מִיָּדוֹ מִיָּדוֹ, "may his breath be extinguished" or*

*מִיָּדוֹ מִיָּדוֹ, "may his bones be crushed" are most probably later glosses.*

question of the heathen as to why one day should be distinguished above all others is met with by a human analogy. As the choice of an officer is mere- the whim or will of a ruler, so is the Sabbath chosen because it was God's desire to choose it. The whim of an absolute ruler is as effective in matters divine as it is in matters mundane. To the heathen mind the analogy of God with a powerful emperor may well have been convincing. The answer, by the way, is also exactly what we have been describing as the Rabbis' genuine reaction to the perplexing problem of giving a *raison d'être* for the ritual. Combining as it does, the Rabbi's real sentiment with an argument likely to appeal to the Roman mind, the answer may be said to be ingenious.

But the Roman seeks proof from nature. If the Sabbath is the fundamental universal principle that the Rabbis make of it, it ought to find some reflex in nature. Here the Rabbi is at a loss for a reply. He resorts (or, if you will, the tradition of the disputation resorts) to legend and superstition, which must have failed utterly to impress the Roman.

Then we find the Roman returning to the attack with a like philosophical argument: Nature seems to show no rest. The winds blow and the grass grows on the Sabbath as well as on other days. In other words, "your God is himself not keeping the Sabbath." To which the Rabbi offers a purely casuistic answer. The Rabbinical legislation that in his private domain an individual is free to carry things about is applied to God for Whom the world is His private domain. More likely to satisfy the Roman is the second part of the Rabbi's reply, namely the argument from history that the Manna, which fell on all other days of the week did not fall on the Sabbath, and fell in double quantity on the sixth day in order to provide for the Sabbath. The historical traditions of their subject peoples the Romans may well have credited.

In this disputation we have presented the main, direct attack of the hea-

then upon the Sabbath. What follows is of minor importance in defining the mutual reactions of Rabbi and heathen as regards the Sabbath, but is interesting as throwing light upon their evaluations of the Torah as a whole, the Sabbath reference being only incidental.

*d). A Second disputation on the Sabbath.*

Hadrian (may his bones be crushed) asked Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah:

"I am greater than Moses your Master."

J. In what way?

H. In the sense that I am alive and he is dead, and it is written, "The living dog is better off than the dead lion." (Ecc. IX, 4)

J. Can you decree that no man shall kindle a fire for three days?

H. Yes.

That evening they both walked on the roof of the palace, and they saw smoke rising from afar.

J. What is this?

H. An officer of mine became ill, and the doctor visited him and said that unless he drink hot water, he cannot be cured.

J. (May his breath be extinguished). While you are still living your decrees are annulled; as to Moses, our Master, ever since he decreed, "Ye shall not kindle a fire in all your dwellings on the Sabbath" (Ex. XXXV, 3), no Jew has ever kindled a light on the Sabbath. And to this day his decree is not annulled. Will you still say, "I am better than he?" (Ruth R. III, 2)

Of course, this is legend. It betrays itself as such not only by the crudity of the conception that Hadrian should compare himself with a dog, or should argue the point with the Rabbi as to whether he was greater than Moses. It actually defeats its own purpose. In fact, it is hard to account, even in a legend, for such ineptness of illustration. Hadrian's weakness is presented as lying in the fact that his decree is set aside by an officer on account of sickness. But so is the Sabbath of Moses set aside in a case of sickness!



Yet the disputation is significant in revealing certain currents of thought. It is to be noted that the view of Moses as decreeing the laws of the Torah, rather than as being the spokesman for God, is quite probably the result of contact with the heathen philosophers. To offset their extolling of their philosophical authorities, the Rabbis began to conceive and to speak of Moses as the giver of the laws and as a thinker.

Significant, too, is the Rabbinic argument of the greatness of the Torah on the evidence of the age-long and punctillious obedience the Jewish people has displayed toward it. Here is a phenomenon likely to impress the heathen philosopher: If a people is so persistent and so well-nigh unanimous in its attachment to a certain law and to a certain tradition, there must be some substance to that law and tradition.

There remains to be recorded a legend which reflects an attempt on the part of the rabbis to impress the heathen with the joy that the Jew finds in his Sabbath.

*e) A Third Disputation on the Sabbath.*

Caesar said to Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah, "Why has the Sabbath soup so pervasive a fragrance?"

The Rabbi answered, "We have a spice, (and Sabbath is its name), which we put into the soup, so that (the fragrance spreads."

"Let me have some of that spice."

"The spice produces its flavor only for those who keep the Sabbath." (Sab. 119a) \*

The observance of the Sabbath day, the Rabbi would tell the heathen, enhances the enjoyment of life, furnishes a flavor to one's food which can be obtained in no other way.

Thus by every weapon that comes to his hand - by analogy, experiment, dia-

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\* Practically the same story is told of Judah Ha-Nasi and Antoninus. (Gen. R. XI).

lectic and humor the Rabbis defend the precious Sabbath against the outwardly calm but inwardly bitter attacks of the heathen.

If the heathen's apparent inability to comprehend the Sabbath was a mere pretence based on opportunistic motives, his reaction toward the rite of circumcision was one of real abhorrence. Some light on the comparatively greater degree of opposition to circumcision than to Sabbath is thrown by the fact that whereas, according to the testimony of Josephus, (to which we have referred), the institution of the Sabbath spread readily and was a feature of attraction which led to the adoption of Judaism on the part of many heathens, the rite of circumcision, as may be inferred from the history of Christianity, repelled the heathen. It was only when Christianity gave up circumcision that it was enabled to convert the heathen in considerable numbers.

In addition to abhorring the rite, the heathens felt that in circumcision more even than in the Sabbath or any other element of the ritual, lay the clue to Jewish exclusiveness. As long as the Jew bore the mark of the covenant upon his flesh, he would remain separate and alone.

Nevertheless, the heathen approach to the problem is philosophically calm. Circumcision, as they see it, is a disingenuous attempt at improving on the works of nature or the works of God. The human body, as it emerges into life, is graceful and well-ordered. Circumcision is only a form of impairing the natural beauty of the body. To this philosophical argument they add disparagement of the rite from the viewpoint of the Torah itself: The Torah itself does not lay such great importance on circumcision. The rite is not included in the Ten Commandments. It is not mentioned as having been performed on Adam. Why do the Rabbis, then, treat it as the *sine qua non* of Judaism?

The following disputation offers the typical philosophical statement of the objection to circumcision. Here the answer of the Rabbi is also

given in terms that may also well be termed philosophical and scientific. In the philosophically least defensible rite the Rabbi proves the better philosopher.

f). Circumcision.

(T.=Turnus Rufus; A.=Akiba)

T. Whose works are better, man's or God's?

A. Man's

T. Could you have made heaven or earth?

A. Confine yourself to those things that are at all in the power of man to do.

T. Why do you circumcise?

A. I knew you were coming to this.

Akiba now shows Turnus Rufus grains (the work of God) and cakes (the work of man) and asks him if the latter are not an improvement over the former. He also shows him threads of flax and linen clothes and asks him if the latter are not an improvement over the former?

T. If God wants circumcision, why are not children born circumcised?

A. Does not the mother have to cut off the umbilical knot?

But further as to your question why is not the child born uncircumcised;

Because God gave the commandments to Israel only in order to train them. This David meant when he said, "The word of the Lord purifies" (Ps. XVIII)

31)\* -- (Midrash Tanchuma, חורייק, Begin.)  
לפי שלא נהן הקב"ה לישראל את המצוות אלא כדי לצרף בהן לכך אמר דויד אמרת יהוה צרופה

The metaphysical postulate of the heathen that nature cannot be improved upon by man is here met by the pragmatic postulate of the Rabbi that man does improve upon the products of nature, which postulate is born<sup>e</sup> out by our

\* This principle has been quoted above as a parallel to the classification of the laws into moral ordinances and ritual decrees. Its use here certainly strengthens the force of the parallel, though Bacher (op. cit. 300) says that it cannot be original in this text since Genesis and Leviticus Rabba, which are much older than Tanchuma, attribute the principle to Rab.

experience in adapti<sup>n</sup>g the products of nature to our appetites and needs. It is to be doubted whether the Rabbis would ever have expressed so bold a principle as that "man's works are better than God's, if they were not under the duress of answering the philosophic attack upon the rite of circumcision. Here, then we have another strong indication of the deep influence exerted on Rabbinic thought by contact with the heathen.

When the heathen returns to the attack from another angle, and intimates that since a child is born with all other essential organs and faculties, he ought, if circumcision is so important, to be born circumcised, the Rabbi points to the phenomenon that all mothers have to cut the umbilical knot, proving that the child is in no case born physically complete. The further answer, which, according to Bacher, is interpolated, that circumcision like other Mizvoth are intended only to discipline Israel represents the real reaction of the Rabbis, as has been noted before.

We now turn to the heathen attempt to show that the Torah itself does not treat circumcision as essential:

g). *Circumcision in the Ten Commandments.*

*The Matrona\* asked Rabbi Jose bar Chalafta:*

*"If circumcision is so dear to God, why did He not place it among the Ten Commandments?"*

*He said to her, "It is already implied in "and thy stranger that is within thy gates" (Ex. XX, 10---The Fourth Commandment). For the proselyte is meant, who observes the Sabbath, even as does an Israelite, as one of the obligations involved in the covenant of circumcision." (Pesikta Rabbati XXII, 4)*

How such a casuistic reply might have affected the heathen we have no

\* For the identification of the Matrona as a heathen see above p. 15.

° In the same context as the above disputation, Aquilas the Proselyte asks Rabbi Eliezer the same question. Rabbi Eliezer refers him to Ex. XX, 5, the introduction to the Ten Commandments and argues that the word "my covenant" in that verse refers to circumcision.

Bacher takes this disputation to be an indication that the Matrona is a Christian (Ag. Tan. II, p. 170, note 2. This assumption, however lacks support in view of the Matrona's confession of heathenism which we have quoted above. There is nothing peculiarly Christian, certainly, about the question.

definite basis for judging. The probability is that such reasoning satisfied the Rabbi more than it did the philosopher, O

On a more logical basis, and from a point of departure more familiar to the heathen, is carried on the discussion as to why, if circumcision is so important, Adam did not receive it.

*h) Circumcision not mentioned in the case of Adam.*

A philosopher asked Rabbi (Judah Ha-Nasi):

*"If circumcision is so dear to God, why was it not given to Adam?"*

*R. Why does a man shave off the hair of his head and leave the hair of his beard?*

*Ph. Because it grew up without his being aware of it.*

*R. If so, let a man put out his own eyes or cut off his hands, or break his feet because they grew up without his being aware of it!*

*Ph. Are we speaking of these things?*

*R. It seems impossible to satisfy you. However, (I may state the principle that everything that was created in the six days of creation requires improvement, mustard needs sweetening, lupine needs sweetening, wheat needs grinding, and even man requires improvement. (Pesikta Rabbati XXIII, 4.)*

Here, too, in defense of circumcision, the principle is boldly laid down that the world God created is not complete, that it devolves upon man to improve upon the work of creation.

We have now completed our study of the heathen attack upon the ceremonial and ritual law of Judaism as presented in the Pentateuch, and we have analyzed the motives of each objection and the viewpoint from which it is raised. In the case of the Red Heifer, the heathen exults in discovering a suggestion of witchcraft in the religion which claims perfect purity. In the case of the Sabbath, the heathen's inner motive is a fear of the institution as a social leaven, while his outer formulation of his objection is the natu-

ral incongruity of a period of complete rest. In the case of circumcision, the inner motive was moral revulsion against a practice which seemed cruelly meaningless, while the outer formulation, too, was couched in terms of the metaphysical inconceivability of tampering with the forms of nature. Underlying all the heathen objections, too, is the natural intolerance of the forms of an alien faith, and especially the Roman's apprehension that the ritual was the great obstacle in the way of the Romanizing of the Jew. The Rabbis' reaction to these attacks on the ceremonial is a determination to avoid the pitfalls of philosophic speculation as to the purposes of the ritual laws and to lay down the principle that they are absolute decrees, intended to discipline Israel, and not to be further inquired into.

Before leaving the subject of Jewish Law, we may mention a disputation disclosing yet another method of heathen attack upon it. We mention it independently because it involves no objection to the laws themselves, but is a subtle way of discrediting them by showing that the Rabbis themselves did not observe them.

Proclus the Philosopher asked Rabban Gamaliel in Acco, where he was bathing in the Bath of Aphrodite, "It is written in your Torah (Deut XIII, 18), 'Nothing of the devoted thing shall cleave to thy hand! Why do you bathe in the bath of Aphrodite?'"

He answered, "We do not answer questions in the bath". When he had gone out of the bath, he said, "I did not come into Aphrodite's territory, she came into mine. They do not say, 'We shall build a bath for Aphrodite as an ornament', but 'We shall make an Aphrodite as an ornament for the bath!'"

"Another answer is: 'No matter how much money you were offered, you would not enter the presence of your god, naked, polluted with seminal emission, and passing urine, whereas this figure stands at the gutter, where everybody passes urine in her presence. The Torah forbids only "their gods", that is only those

images which the heathens worship as gods, but those images which are not worshipped as gods, it is permitted to come into contact with them." (Ab. Za. III, 4).\*

Having studied the heathen's attack upon the contents of the Biblical books on the ground of contradictions discovered, of the injustice of the civil law, and the meaninglessness of the ritual law, we now turn to a further attack upon the contents of the Bible on the ground of crudities, absurdities, and mythological elements discovered in them.

#### *IV. Mythological Elements and Absurdities in the Bible.*

As the philosophizing heathen read the Bible, he was agreeably surprised to find that it contained the same crude conceptions of the nature of the universe, the same anthropomorphic descriptions of God, and the same absurd hero-myths under which his own Greek religion labored. It was to rationalize these by means of allegorical interpretation that the heathen philosopher had set himself as his life's task. Philo had attempted this same rationalization for the legends of the Bible, proving that the heathens were not necessarily the first to criticise the Bible on the score of the mythological character of some of its contents. The Rabbis, however, refused to rationalize in the same way as did the heathens or even Philo. They refused to do such a thing as make Adam stand for reason and Eve for the senses. They did not, as did Philo, accept any of the Greek systems of philosophy as absolutely true. They did not, therefore, need to accommodate the contents of the Bible to pre-conceived metaphysical principles. They made no attempt to reduce the flesh-and-blood-characters of the Bible to abstract qualities. Whenever a character or a sto-

\* This apology of Gamaliel's for the use of the heathen baths does not seem to have satisfied the Rabbis for we find in Tosefta Mikva'oth VI, 8 an ironic account of how when Gamaliel and Aquilas were in Ascalon at the same time, Gamaliel took his bath in the heathen bathhouse, whereas Aquilas bathed in the sea.

Hoshaja, a Palestinian Amora of the third century, in commenting upon this reply of Gamaliel's calls it a *תשובה כפויה*, a forced answer. (Ab. Za. 44b).

ry is attacked, they make a subtle effort to prove the passage reasonable from a human standpoint. On the whole, however, one cannot help but reach the conclusion that the Rabbis, so far from trying to explain away the miracles or impossibilities of the Bible, *actually magnify the miracles and add to their number.*\* The Rabbis believed in God's power to interpose in human affairs and accomplish great and wondrous things, and their own souls' satisfaction did not require the removal of anthropomorphisms in the description of God. As long as no images were made of Him to be worshipped, anthropomorphism in verbal description was not offensive, for how can human beings talk except in human terms?

Some of the anthropomorphisms which the heathens pointed out will be treated in connection with the disputations on the God-conception. Here we shall deal with those of a cruder sort.

a). *On the Stealing of the Rib.*

Caesar said to Rabban Gamaliel,

"Your God is a thief," for it is written, 'and the lord God caused sleep to fall upon the man and he slept, and He took one of his ribs' "

His daughter<sup>o</sup> said to him, "Let him alone for I shall answer him."

She said to him, "Bring me an officer". He asked, "what is the matter?"

She said, "Thieves came to us at night and took from us a cup of silver, and left us a cup of gold?"

He said, "Would such thieves would come every day!"

"And was it not good for the first man that God took from him a rib and gave him a maid to serve him?"

"With this I would agree, but why did not God take the rib openly?"

She said, "Bring me a piece of meat." It was brought, and she placed it under the grate in the ashes; then she took it out and said, "Eat of it."

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\*An example that comes easily to mind is the multiplication of the number of plagues (Ex. R. XXIII, 10.)  
It is remarkable that Talmudic scholars cannot agree on the identity of the daughter of Gamaliel. It is the Caesar's, Rabbah Gamaliel's daughter.  
(Frankel: *Manuskript II, 176. Rabbah Ag. Tam. I p. 87.*)



He said, "It is revolting to me"

She said to him, "The first man, too, would have found the woman revolting if the rib had been taken out openly." (Sanhed. 39a).\*

Here we have a fine example of the human or common sense standpoint of the Rabbis as contrasted with the abstract philosophical standpoint of the heathen. The heathen finds <sup>it</sup> a gross disparagement to the dignity of a God that he should be represented as stealing something from a sleeping man. The Rabbi, on the other hand, takes the human standpoint that it is not stealing to replace a less valuable article with a more valuable article. The heathen still thinks it beneath the dignity of a god to take a thing by stealth, even if it be granted that he is justified in taking it at all. The Rabbi again appeals to common experience: We cannot find pleasure in the product when we have been witnesses of the nauseating process.

#### b) God as a lion

Caesar said to Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah, "Your god is compared to a lion, for it is written, 'The lion has roared, who shall not be afraid?'. Wherein lies the greatness (of such a god)? The horseman kills the lion!" (Amos III, 8)

He answered, "He is not like such a lion; He is like the lion of the hills." (Chul. 59b). There follows at this point a purely legendary description of a wondrously powerful lion.

It is not the Rabbi's supposed answer that lends interest to this disputation but the heathen's question. It is too typical to be laid aside as legendary together with the answer. To the heathen thinker, the comparison of God to a lion constituted a limitation upon God's omnipotence unworthy of a reflective God-conception.

#### c) God as a Carpenter.

The daughter of Caesar said to Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah, "Your God is a Carpenter." <sup>Practically the same disputation is recorded as having taken place between Rabbi Jose bar Chalaftan and the Matronah (Gen. R. XVII, 11). There the incident of the thief is not related. The Matrona confesses her satisfaction with the Rabbi's answer.</sup>

carpenter, for it is written, 'Who layest the beams of Thine upper chambers in the waters' (Ps. CIV, 3). Tell him to make me a reel." (Chul. 60a).

There is no answer attempted to this allegation of crude anthropomorphism in the Biblical God-conception. But a legendary account follows of how the Rabbi actually prayed that the heathenness be granted a reel. The prayer was answered in an ironic manner. For she was stricken with leprosy, and according to the custom with regard to lepers in Rome, she was given a reel, that she might sit in the market-place and occupy herself with winding skeins. When the Rabbi finds her in that condition, he asks her sarcastically whether God had made her a good reel. She begs that it be taken from her, but the Rabbi answers, "Our God gives, but does not take away."

The entire legend may be merely a reflection of the irritation of the Rabbis at the constant strictures of the heathens upon the Expressions used by the Bible in reference to God.

d) *The Translation of the hero, Chanoch.*

The Matronah asked Rabbi Jose, "Why do we not find death mentioned in the case of Chanoch?"

He answered, "If it had said, 'And Chanoch walked with God' and after that the text had been silent, I should have agreed with you, but since it continues, 'and he was no more, for God had taken him' (Gen. V, 24), we must interpret 'and he was no more' to mean 'he was no more in this world,' (that is he had died) for God had taken him away" (Gen. R. XXV, 1).

The heathen woman has found in the Jewish Bible, supposed to contain an exalted God-conception the same sort of myths about the translation of heroes into gods that had so embarrassed her sense of reason when she had tried to interpret them as they existed in Greek tradition. Chanoch appears to her a clear parallel to the translated Heracles or Dionysus. Jose sensing the danger in such a parallel hastens at once to show that by the implications of the text itself, hero-translation cannot be the thing meant. The text

means that Chanoch died\*.

e) *The Veracity of the Joseph Story*

*The Matrona asked Rabbi Jose, "Is it possible that Joseph, a youth of seventeen, with all his natural passion could have done this? (resisted the temptation offered by Potiphar's wife?)."*

*He brought her the Book of Genesis and read to her the story of Reuben and Bilhah, and the story of Judah and Tamar. Then he said to her, "If in the case of these older men who were under the supervision of their father (and might therefore have been expected easily to refrain from vice) the Scripture makes no attempt at concealment, how much less would it have been inclined to make concealments in the case of Joseph, young and away from the supervision of his father (in whose case falling into the temptation might have been extenuated)?"*

We derive from this disputation a most valuable insight into the critical bent of mind with which the heathens read the Bible, eager to make an issue of every possible shortcoming in the text. In this case the veracity of the story of Joseph's virtue is challenged. The heathen would make a case out against the Bible for conferring upon its characters a degree of virtue that is unnatural. The Rabbi's answer is decisive. He points out the extreme frankness of the Bible in recording the sins of its heroes, even in cases where concealment would have been safe. Thus the Joseph story continues to rest on its own merits. The Rabbi attempts the invention of no allegory, but rests his faith on the text as it stands. And this sentence may be said to summarize the Rabbi's attitude toward the heathen attempts at discovering unworthy anthropomorphisms, mythological elements, and incredibilities in the Biblical text.

\*Both Frankel (MGWJ. IV 207f.) and Bacher (Ag. Tan. II 170) take the question of the Matrona to be a Christian's attempt at finding a Biblical parallel to Jesus' Resurrection. This may be true of the question the Minim ask Abahu in the same passage, but here the reaction is more probably purely heathen. It was in these translated heroes of the heathens that Christians sought confirmation of the Resurrection just as they sought it in the Chanoch story.

### V. Non-Polemical Discussions

Before leaving the treatment of disputations upon the general contents of the Bible, we must take note of the existence of a large number of conversations between Rabbis and heathens which do not enter the precise field, to which we have limited ourselves. For they bring out no point at issue between the Rabbis as such and heathens as such. They are either requests for information with no ulterior motive discernible, or they are discussion which reveal a difference of opinion such as might exist between one Rabbi and another. For instance, in Gen. R. LXX, 7, we have a record of a discussion in which Rabbi Meir proves to the complete satisfaction of a heathen that a kid can as correctly be used for redeeming an ass as a sheep. Or, in Sifre to Deut. 143 we have an account of a certain Arius asking Jose Ben Chalafta what the difference might be between a *בשר* and a *חיה*. Of this neutral character (as far as the writer can judge) are the questions put to Rabbi Meir by Abnimus ha-Gardi, a large number of the questions put to Jose ben Chalafta by the Matrona, and all the questions put to Judah ha-Nasi by Antoninus with the exception of the one concerning the time when the soul enters the embryo, the significance of which we have pointed out in the Introduction.

Of this neutral character we may consider such questions of the Matrona, as "Why is the expression, 'that it was good' not uttered with regard to the work of the second day of creation?" (Gen. R. IV, 8) or why did Jacob refuse to comfort himself over the loss of Joseph (Gen. R. LXXXIV, 19), or why does God give wisdom to the wise rather than to the foolish (Dan. II 21) (Ecc. R. I, 17).

Of this neutral character, too, may be considered such questions of Antoninus as: May one pray every hour? (We include such questions here even though they do not refer directly to Biblical verses, for this is by far the most convenient connection in which to mention them). Or, "Shall I, a heathen, be able to enter the world to come?" (The references to these quotations are respectively Tanchuma p. 98b; Ab. Zar. 10b). Of like character is the question

put by a heathen to Joshua ben Korcha as to what festival Jews and heathens celebrate together or synchronously? (Gen. R. XIII, 4.)

If these <sup>S</sup>disputations may be said to have any significance for us, it is that they show the conversations between Rabbis and heathens to have been frequently of a very friendly nature, and that heathens frequently asked questions about the Bible and about Judaism in general, out of pure interest in the subject and not with a view to attacking Judaism.

# Disputations upon the Jewish God-Conception

It was upon the Jewish God-conception that the heathens directed their most energetic attack. Instinctively they felt its superiority and its greater power of endurance. It was no compromise such as was theirs. It was no labored interpretation of the many as one. It was a great faith simply held. While making a show of disdaining to philosophize, the Rabbis nevertheless possessed a highly philosophical God-conception. The unyielding adherence to the unity of God, the insistence upon the spirituality of God as indicated by the total absence of images in His worship--these were eloquent of the depth of the Jewish God-conception. The piety of the Rabbis and the powerful hold Judaism had even upon the masses of the people bespoke the fact that the Jewish God-conception lost nothing in potency through its quality of purity. What was peculiarly provoking to the overbearing heathen was to find that the monotheistic conception which he had been able to attain only through vast philosophical research, and over which he prided himself as the holder of a highly advanced and radical viewpoint--that this conception had already been possessed by the Jews for centuries. It was a losing fight for the heathen, encumbered as he was with a polytheistic religion, to contest the lofty God-conception of a people in whom monotheism seemed inbred.

Even in their disputations on the God conceptions the Rabbis evade philosophical speculation, and prefer to rest their case either upon the Biblical text or upon an argument drawn from common human experience. That they did indulge in philosophical disciplines has been noted above. These, however, were esoteric, intended to confirm their own faith. Publicly they felt Judaism could be argued in simpler terms. Only now and then do philosophical or mystic elements break into the discussions.

We shall begin our study of the disputations upon the God-conceptions

with those disputations in which the philosophical elements are most prominent, those in which the heathens approach the question from a purely philosophic point of view, and the Rabbis answer in philosophic terms.

Such disputations are notably those on the conception of God as creator. To the Greek mind, creation was a foreign conception. No matter in what terms expressed, it smacked of anthropomorphism. All the great Greek philosophers believed in the eternity of the world. God was the form-principle which gave energy and shape to a pre-existent original stuff. Creation out of nothing was inconceivable. The heathen was confirmed in his opposition to the notion of creation when he read the Bible and found that it lent itself easily to the interpretation of God as the world-shaper rather than the world-creator.

#### a). *Creatio ex Nihilo*

A philosopher said to Rabban Gamaliel: "Your God was a great artist, for he found good materials to serve him: Tohu, Bohu, (חָו וְבוֹהוּ), darkness, spirit, water, and Tehomoth (תְּהוֹמוֹת)." (Gen. I, 2.).

He said to him, "(May his spirit be extinguished). Of all of these materials creation is expressly mentioned: Tohu and Bohu, as it is written, 'Maketh peace and createth evil' (Is. XLV, 7); darkness, 'He formeth light and createth darkness (ibid.); water, 'praise him, ye waters, .... for He commanded and they were created' (Ps. CXLVIII, 4-5); spirit, 'For behold, he forms the mountains and creates the spirit (wind)' (Amos IV, 13); Tehomoth, 'When there were yet no Tehomoth (depths), I was brought forth!' (Prov. VIII, 24) -- (Gen. R. I, 12).

The heathen is evidently no match for the Rabbi when the discussion bases itself upon the Biblical text. To the heathen's interpretation of the second verse of Genesis as naming the primordial stuffs out of which the 'artist-God' formed the world, Gamaliel, by a master-stroke of exegesis quotes

\* Frankel (MgWJ, IV, 178) points out that in identifying עָל, evil, with חָו וְבוֹהוּ shapeless matter, Gamaliel shows his insight into the trend of Greek philosophy, for Plato's  $\alpha\lambda\eta$ , or original stuff developed later into the Neoplatonic principle of evil.

passages indicating that each one of those primary materials had been made <sup>atol</sup> ex nihilo. In this way Rabban Gamaliel upholds the authoritative view of Judaism. This view, as Dr. Neumark has stated, (Gesch. Phil. chap. 2), is itself the product of earlier prophetic and Graeco-Jewish reflection; but in Gamaliel's time it had already become fixed, and the staunch defender of authoritative Judaism would brook no questioning of it.

Not so his younger contemporary, Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah. He, yielding to the influence of Greek thought, had already modified the rigid authoritative view by adopting the conception of *emanation*. This is the <sup>c</sup>onclusion drawn by Dr. Neumark (op. cit. 80-81) from the following disputations of Joshua and Hadrian.

*b). Emanation*

To understand the disputation better, we must include some of its context in the Midrash.

"They are new every morning" (Eam. III, 23).... Rabbi Chelbo interpreted: "Every day God creates a new set of angels, who sing a new song, then disappear...."

Hadrian: You say that every day God creates a new set of angels who sing a new song, then disappear.

Joshua: Yes.

H. Where do they go?

J. Whence they were created.

H. Whence were they created?

J. Out of the river of fire.... which flows continually. (Dan. VII, 10)

H. Whence flows this river of fire?

J. Out of the sweat of the beasts that carry the throne of God. - (Eam. R. III,

21; Gen. R. LXXVIII, 1)

Dr. Neumark points out that Joshua could have answered the question, "Whence



were the angels created by saying, "Out of nothing." When he states in the classic language of Mercabah that the angels are created out of a stream of fire flowing from the throne of God, he commits himself to a theory of emanation. God did not create the world out of nothingness; the world emanated out of Him. In another disputation with Hadrian we find Joshua applying the principle of emanation not only to the angels but to the world itself.

*c) Creation by Emanation*

Hadrian (may his bones be crushed) asked Rabbi Joshua bar Chananiah: "How did God create His world?"

He answered: God took six coils composed of Fire and Snow, spun them out in all four directions, and thus created the world. (I have followed Dr. Neumark's translation of this involved passage)\*.

Hadrian wondered: Is it possible?

Joshua took him into a little house, and said, "Stretch out your hands east, west, north, and south. This is the way God created His world."—(Gen. R. X, 3).

Rabbi Joshua's answer here is not so clear. However, Dr. Neumark argues from the classical terminology of Emanation used by Joshua and from the testimony of the preceding disputation that the Rabbi intends here to describe creation as a process of emanation.

Another disputation in which the answer of the Rabbi seems to impair the doctrine of pure creatio ex nihilo is that between Abnimus ha-Gardi and Abba Joseph the builder.

*d). The process of Creation .*

Abnimus had applied originally to Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi with the question, how was the world first created. The Rabbi had told him that no man had a clear notion as to those things, but he referred him to Abba Joseph the build-

\*Bacher (Ag. Tan. I, 177) and Dr. Neumark, too, in an alternate translation, take the six coils to mean the six primary elements of Gen. I, 2.

er, who answers:

*"God took the dust from under the Throne of Glory and scattered it over the water, and thus the earth was made..." (Ex.R. XIII, 1.)*

Aside from the fact that the theory of creation out of nothing conflicted with their own world-view, the heathens noted that it led the holder of such a theory directly into an anthropomorphic conception of God. Such anthropomorphism they found in the first chapter of Genesis.

*e). Creation an Anthropomorphism—Jose bar Chalafta and Matrona.*

*M. In how many days did God create the world?*

*J. On the first day.*

*M. How do you prove that?*

*J. Have you ever given a banquet?*

*M. Many times.*

*J. Did you put on all the courses at the same time? (Tanch. B. Bereshith 2)*

*M. No, I cooked them all at a time but served them separately. J*

The Rabbi has caught the drift of the question at once and anticipates all objection by maintaining that the world was actually created all at a time. The Matrona had intended to point out that it was beneath the dignity of an absolute God to be represented as so dependent upon time that in creating the world, He must perform the task one bit at a time. His advanced philosophic view that creation was accomplished all at once, a view not really given in the text, the Rabbi confirms by a human analogy. The Rabbi has here yielded to the need of interpretation. His theory of creation is not found in the text. It is a product of philosophical speculation; but it is not incompatible with the text. Therefore he states it as the Biblical cosmology itself.

On the whole, then, we may say, that while such strict conservatives as Rabban Gamaliel would adhere tenaciously to the theory of creatio ex nihilo, the more liberal teachers could not help but be influenced by heathen criticism

of the conception of God as creator. The Neoplatonic theory of emanation offered them a solution, and they found that the Biblical text was not incompatible with a theory of the world as emanating from God, which seemed comparatively more intelligible than the theory of creation out of nothing. As for the anthropomorphism involved in creation, that, too, was removed to a large extent by the idea of emanation. The Rabbis, too, may even at this time, as we know they did in the later Amoraic period (Gen. R. III, 2), have held the view that creation was accomplished purely by word.

The Rabbis use philosophic terms and ideas in contesting the heathen strictures upon God as creator, because these involved a genuine clash between a fundamental element of Greek thought, and a fundamental element of Jewish thought. In the ensuing disputations upon other phases of the God-conception we shall find the Rabbis resorting more and more to simple arguments, and homely parables.

Next to the idea of God as *creator* the philosophical heathens found it most <sup>d</sup> difficult to comprehend the idea of God as *immanent and provident*. The God of their reason was, so to speak, a logical or mathematical entity, fast bound by His own laws. They were astonished at the flexible conception of the Rabbis which saw no contradiction in the proposition that the Primal Cause, or the Pure Energy shall approach men by means of local revelations, or shall interfere in their affairs. From their answers, it would appear that the Rabbis, on their part, took the providence of God for granted as an integral factor in the God-conception, and saw no occasion for questioning the possibility of His immanence and revelation, in view of his omnipotence. To God all things are possible. Thus the Rabbis transferred the burden of anthropomorphism upon the philosophers. Only for those who reason of God in human terms, who ascribe to him human limitations, only for such is any activity of God inconceivable. To understand God, you must magnify human powers to the *n*th degree.

f) God's Immanence or Revelation.

A heathen asked Rabban Gamaliel, "Why did God reveal himself to Moses from a thornbush?"

He answered, "If it had been from a carob-tree or a fig tree, you would have asked the same question. It is impossible to satisfy you, yet I will tell you that it was in order to teach you that there is no place free from the Divine Presence, so that even from a thornbush God would speak to Moses!" (Nu. R. XII, 4) \*

Here the Rabbi, evidently considering it useless to argue the question of immanence with one whose reason conceives it as impossible to attribute such a characteristic to God, resorts to a homily in which he simply restates the Jewish position that God lives in the world, in the meanest place as well as in the loftiest, and reveals Himself to men at His own will.

The heathen God-conception excluded the idea of God's providence, for providence would involve irruptions into the orderly system of natural law, and would result in chaos. God was the mainspring of the working of the natural forces, but He could not change or interrupt them. Thus human affairs were predetermined, or fated, by the irresponsible as well as the inexorable forces of nature.

g) God's Providence.

Ptolemy\* the King asked the elders in Rome, "In how many days did God create the world?"

They answered, "In six days."

"And since then?"

"He is busy heating up hell for the wicked! Woe unto the world at the judgment of God." (Gen. R. X, 11).

\* Exactly the same disputation is accredited also to Joshua ben Korcha and a heathen. (Ex. R. II, 9 and S. o. S. R. III, 8)  
 a° "Ptolemy in Rome" is evidently an anachronism. For significance of "elders in Rome, see below, p. 69

The Rabbis' statement is a figurative way of saying that God's function in the world is the administration of justice.\*The answer is put in harsh terms because it is suspected that the motive of the questioner is not kindly.

Exactly the same question is asked of Rabbi Jose bar Chalafta by the Matrona. (Lev. R. VIII, 1.) His answer is, according to one report, that God is busy matching couples for marriage. The Matrone retorts that such a task is so easy that she can do it herself. Jose warns her that God considers the matching of mates as difficult as the dividing of the Red Sea. She tries her skill on her own slaves and meets with disaster, upon which she confesses her error. According to another report, Jose's answer to her question was, "God sits and makes ladders, with which he raises one man and lowers another man, as it is said, 'For God is judge; He putteth down one and lifteth up another' (Ps. LXXVII 8).

The latter version is plainly a statement of the doctrine of God's providence. His present function is to maintain the balance of justice in human affairs. The first version expresses one phase of providential activity. Thus the Rabbis maintain the Jewish tradition that God is not a transcendent being aloof and inapproachable, but continues to guide the world. He did not create it only to leave it to its own fate.

From yet another point of view did the heathens attack the Rabbinic God-conception as unphilosophical, as astonishingly heedless of fundamental logical discrepancies. On the one hand God was looked upon as omniscient and prescient and on the other hand passions were ascribed to him. The two are incongruous as we shall let the heathen himself explain:

\*That this thought was quite prevalent among the Rabbis is confirmed by the anonymous expression of the same idea found in Mechilta to Ex. XXXI, 17: "And on the seventh day he rested (שָׁבַת וְיָנוּחַ)". ---- "From what did he rest, from labor or from judgment? the text teaches שָׁבַת, this means that the administration of justice never ceases to be a function of God."

h). *The Contradiction between God's omniscience and His passions.*

*A heathen said to Rabbi Joshua ben Koroha:*

*"Do you not believe that God can see into the future?"*

*"Yes".*

*"But it is written, 'And God was grieved' (Gen. VI, 6)."*

*Rabbi Joshua answered:*

*"Was a son ever born to you?"*

*"Yes".*

*"What did you do?"*

*"I was happy myself and entertained everybody."*

*"Did you not know that it would be his end to die?"*

*"There is a time for rejoicing and a time for mourning."*

*"It was the same way with God." (Gen. R. XXVII, 7).*

To the impartial reader judging the disputation from a philosophical standpoint there can be no doubt but that the heathen's objection was a valid one and that the Rabbi's answer did not satisfy it. The fact alone that mediaeval Jewish philosophers asked the same question would be sufficient to indicate as much. This is one of those disputations which make one prone to believe that the Rabbis avoided philosophizing and preferred the more comforting (albeit also the more illusive) solutions of common sense.

It is interesting, indeed, to note that in all these questions relating to a philosophic God-conception, we find mediaeval Jewish philosophers taking the same side as that upheld by the heathens in the Talmudic disputations. Thus the Gabirol group did not believe in *Creatio ex Nihilo*, the doctrine so anxiously defended by Gamaliel. The nature and degree of divine providence was a question very much in dispute, and it is questionable whether Ralbag, for example, would have agreed with Rabbi Jose that God is provident to the extent of matching mates. Revelation, too, had the same difficulties for the mediaeval philosophers that it had for the heathen opponents of the Rabb

Rabbis. But all this is but another way of saying that the period of the mediaeval Jewish philosophers witnessed a superior pressure of Greek thought upon Jewish than it exerted in the Talmudic period. When Greek thought had lost its stigma of being connected with idol-worship, Judaism welcomed it eagerly as an ally in the cause of God.

It may be that the heathens, observing the degree of inconsistency which the Rabbis were prone to tolerate in their God-conception, were led to doubt also the validity of the Jewish conception of the unity of God. So I would construe the heathen inuendos as to the unity of God. They are not meant to refute monotheism in favor of polytheism, but rather to show that the Jewish conception of monotheism was not a pure one. With this object in view they searched the Bible and the Rabbinic teachings, and found statements which appeared to them to impair the doctrine of absolute unity.

*1). The Unity of God (as impaired in a Biblical text)*

Caesar said to Rabban Gamaliel, "He who created the mountains did not create the winds, for it is said (Amos IV, 13), 'the former of the mountains and the creator of the wind'." (This would indicate the existence of two gods).

The Rabbi answered, "But if one wants to treat the text in such a manner, the duality of God would be indicated also in the creation of man, for the word *וַיִּבְרָא*, "he created", is used in one case (Gen I, 27), while the word *וַיִּצְרָ*, "and he formed" is used in the other case (Gen. II, 19). You might say, then, that the one who created in the one case did not create in the other. Moreover, a man has two palms and has two outlets; you might say that he who created the one did not create the other (and you would indeed be supported by the text), "He who planted the ear, shall he not hear? He who formed the eye, shall he not see?" (Ps. XCV, 9).

"Even so." (That is, these, too, are indications of the plurality of God).

"Strange, then, that all these gods should be so unanimous in the case of death," answered the Rabbi\* (Sanhed. 39a).

It is the heathen in this story who is undoubtedly the casuist. He tries to force into a text obviously referring to one God a suggestion of duality, which no impartial reader would discover. The Rabbi calls his attention at once to his abuse of the text, and offers him examples revealing the absurdity of such exegesis. It is ridiculous to interpret two nouns in apposition as two independent subjects, or the use of two different verbs in describing an act as indicating that each verb has a different subject. When the heathen declares that he would not hesitate to go to those extremes of exegesis, the Rabbi silences him by what must be termed a clever stroke of repartee. The case for the unity of God was safe in the hands of the Rabbis.

j) *The Unity of God (as impaired in Rabbinic teaching)*

Caesar said to Rabban Gamaliel, "You say that wherever there are ten men (occupying themselves with Torah) there the Divine Presence rests. How many divine presences are there?"

The Rabbi answered, "Why does the sun shine on Caesar's house?"

"The sun rests upon everything."

"If, then, the sun, which is only one of the millions of the servants of God, rests upon everything, how much the more so God himself!" (Sanhed. 39a)

The Rabbi means that just as one sun radiates light upon the whole world, and is yet conceived as a unit, so God's presence may be conceived of as resting in many different places at the same time without the unity of God being thereby in any way impaired. In philosophical language we might say

\* The same question is reported as having been asked of Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi by a Min. (Chul. 87a). There the answer is, "Look at the end of the verse, 'The Lord of Hosts is his name' Even Herford, who is inclined to interpret all such references as Christian admits that the disputation with the heathen must be the original version of which that with the Christian or gnostic is a later copy (Christianity in Talmud and Midrash, 243)



Gamaliel reconciles God's attribute of ubiquity with his attribute of unity. The reconciliation is effected by the notion of *radiation*. It is most likely however, that Gamaliel had no philosophical principles in mind. The unity of God was a conviction with him, of which he merely found a concrete illustration in the radiating action of the sun.

From the disputations on the unity of God, we pass on logically to disputations on *idolatry* or *polytheism*. To the heathen, even as a philosopher, polytheism, as a religion, offered all the practical benefits of a religion, and he saw, therefore, no good reason for destroying the established faith. Intellectual heathens could join in the public worship of the gods with certain mental reservations. Nothing could be gained by any such procedure as the removal of the familiar images and the substitutions of an imageless, abstract deity. Polytheism *worked*. The gods answered the prayers of the people. And were not the polytheists the successful and prosperous of the world, while the monotheists, were defeated and in distress?

We shall begin with a disputation in which the attempt is made by the heathen to show that prayer to the gods is efficacious. If that can be proven, what more is needed to establish the validity of a religion?

*h). Zonon asked Rabbi Akiba, "How does it happen that people who enter the heathen temples diseased come out well?"\**

*Akiba answered, "The course of bodily diseases is predetermined to the day the hour, the physician, and the drug that effects the cure. If the victim happens to be in the temple at the time for which the cure has been predetermined, the predetermination will not thereby be changed. This principle may*

*\*Baohar (Ag. Tan. 401) explains that the form of worship here meant was known as Incubation. The worshipper lodged in the temple of Serapis or Asclepius, and the means of curing his disease was revealed to him in a dream. This explains Rabbi Akiba's reference to "the drug that effects the cure."*

be illustrated by a parable. In a certain town there lived a reputable man, with whom all the people of the town left deposits without witnesses. There was one man, however, who always brought witnesses. One time he forgot to bring witnesses. The man's wife urged her husband to punish him by disclaiming possession of the article deposited without witnesses. But the man said, "Why should we injure our own reputation, because this fool behaves injudiciously?" (Ab. Zar. 55a).

The illustration offered by the Rabbi is more appealing than the principle he states. Predetermination, even when attributed to God, does not ring as a genuinely Jewish doctrine. The parable is more satisfying. God's providence, it may be interpreted, takes its course. Diseases are healed by certain drugs. And God does not intervene to prevent a cure nor permit a man to suffer, merely because he has prayed to idols to cure him. On the whole, it is the question in this disputation that is really interesting, the answer being of minor importance. The question gives an intimate glimpse into the psychology of the heathen philosopher. He approves of developing a lofty, pure God-conception, but he would still cling to polytheism as a *working faith*.

We come now to a series of disputations upon the relations of the Jewish God to the many gods of the heathen world. These disputations are not carried on upon a philosophical plane, and seem to reveal the heathen in the role ~~of~~ <sup>assumed</sup> ~~or~~ <sup>real</sup> ~~of~~ a naive believer in many gods. The jealousy of the God of Israel is the theme of the heathen's protest. Among the many different gods of the heathen world there is comparative tolerance. Why is the God of Israel so exclusive? Why does He want the world all to Himself?

1). The jealousy of Jahwe implies the worth of the gods.

Agrippas, the captain, asked Rabban Gamaliel, "It is written in your Torah, (Deut. IV, 24) 'For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.' Is there any jealousy except between one wise man and another wise man, one hero and another, one rich man and another?"

The Rabbi answered, "Let me illustrate by a parable: When a man takes a second wife, his first wife will not be jealous if the new spouse is superior to herself; but will certainly be jealous if the new wife is inferior." (Abodah Zarah 55a)

The naive question is answered by an effective homely parable. We are jealous not so much when our loved ones desert us in favor of a superior person--there at least a reason is evident--as when our loved ones desert us in favor of someone whom we know to be inferior to ourselves.\*

The naive heathen was puzzled by the Jewish view that God is angry with the worshippers of idols, that He punishes Israel when Israel turns to idols and maintains an attitude of hostility toward idol-worshippers in general. He has chosen the wrong object for His wrath.

m). God's jealousy should be directed against idols rather than idolators. A philosopher asked, Rabban Gamaliel, "It is written in your Torah (Deut. IV, 24) 'For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God! Why is he jealous upon the worshippers of idols, and not upon the idols themselves?'"

The Rabbi answered, "Let me illustrate by a parable: There was once a king who had a son. This son was raising a dog, and called the dog by the name of his father, and when he swore, he would say, 'By----' (naming the dog and thus also the father!° Now when the father hears of this, with whom is he angry, with the son or with the dog? Certainly, you will admit, with the son."

The heathen replied, "Do you call idol-worship a dog? But it does possess validity."

"What have you observed?"

"Once a fire happened in our town and the whole town was consumed except the temple of the idols."

"Let me illustrate this by a parable: The province of a certain king rebels

\*A parallel to this disputation is to be found in Mechilta to Ex. XX, 3, where the co-disputant is a "philosopher"

Bacher believes the Agripas of this disputation to be a mistaken copy of Agnitus.

°Bacher explains (Ag. Tan. 183) that "By the dog" was a common Greek oath.

against him. When he makes war upon them, does he make war upon the living or upon the dead?". (Ab. Zar. 54b)\*

The disputation continues here with another question on the part of the heathen, but as that question forms also the beginning of another disputation important for the light it throws on the circumstances under which many of the disputations take place, we shall quote it in connection with that disputation.

That the co-disputant is here called a philosopher does not make the question any the less crude. However, it is still possible to imagine such a question asked by a philosophical heathen merely as an opportunity for matching wits with the Rabbi and not out of concern with the issues involved.

The following disputation follows a more deeply reflective strain:

n). Why does not God destroy the gods?

They asked the elders in Rome: "If God is displeased with the idols, why does he not destroy them?"

The Rabbis answered, "If they would worship things the world does not need, He would destroy them, but they worship the sun and the moon and the stars and the constellations! Shall He destroy His world on account of fools?"

The heathens answered, "If so, let Him destroy those objects of worship which the world does not need, and leave those which the world does need."

A similar disputation is recorded between Turnus Rufus and Akiba. Turnus Rufus quotes Malachi I, 3, "And Esau I hate", as he asks why God hates the heathens. Akiba also answers by an anecdote in which a dog is called by the name of Rufus, and draws from Rufus' anger the analogy that just as an earthly ruler, who is after all a mere animal resents having a dog called by his name, so does God resent hearing the idols called divine--that is, by His name. (Midrash Tanchuma Yekandenu, begin. Terumah)

We have already met with a number of disputations engaged in by the "elders in Rome." There are numerous suggestions in Talmud and Midrash to the effect that four Tannaim--Rabban Gamaliel, Eliezer ben Azariah, Joshua ben Chananiah, and Akiba--traveled to Rome together and there engaged in a number of disputations with both Minim and heathens. Most of the disputations we have already encountered. The main references to the journey are to be found in

The Rabbis answered, "That would only be confirming the position of the idol-worshippers (who would point to those objects of worship which had not been destroyed) and say, 'Know now that these are indeed gods, for lo, they are not destroyed'." (Mishnah Ab. Zar. V, 6)

The Gemara, which retells this disputation of the Mishnah (Ab. Zar. 54b), adds to the Rabbis' answer to the last question the principle:

עולם כסדרה נהוג ושומים שקלקלו עתידין ליתן את הדיון

"The universe follows its regular course, and fools who do wrong are certain to be made to give an account." Illustrating this principle, the Rabbis tell of stolen seeds which grow nevertheless, and of illegitimate sexual intercourse, which is productive nevertheless. A like parallel is to be found also in Tosefta Ab. Zar. VI, 7.

Here, again, we may identify a Rabbinic principle which we may call a direct product of the disputations with heathens. To the heathen's defiance, "If God does not like the idols, why does He not destroy them?" They formulate the answer, "God disdains to disturb His world because of those that lack understanding. The universe proceeds on its regular course, and in time wrongdoers are brought to account." There is an attempt made here to reconcile the workings of natural law with divine retribution, an effort to which the Rabbis were compelled by the heathens' boast that if the heathen gods were worthless, the Jewish God who claims mastery of the world, could have destroyed them. Either He respects them, or He is himself powerless. How the accounting of which the Rabbis are so certain is to take place is not clear. It may be

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 Lam. R. V, 19, and J. Sanhed. 25d. In Frankel's Monatschrift of 1851, <sup>p. 115</sup> Graetz attempts a discovery of the purposes of this journey. By an analysis of four sources (Deut. R. II, Ab. Zar. 10, 11, and Gittin 56) together with corroboratory passages from the Roman historians, Sueton and Dio Cassius, Graetz makes the deduction (though the logic is precarious at times) that there is a hidden record in the Talmud of the conversion to Judaism of Flavius Clemens, a noble Roman, relative of emperor Domitian. Clemens gave the Tannaim warning

either through a turn of fortunes in human affairs, or through judgment in the world to come, though with regard to the latter alternative it must be said that the predominating attitude of the Rabbis was that it was not idolatry per se that was to be punished in the judgment of God, but the immoralities to which it leads, for, as Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah said, "The righteous among the heathens shall have a share in the world to come." (Tos. Sanhed. XIII).

An emphatic contrast between God and the idols is made by Rabbi Jose in ~~answer~~ in answer to a typically heathen interpretation of the verse, "And Moses ran from the snake," (Ex. IV, 3).

*a) The gods are more terrible than God.*

*The matrona asked Rabbi Jose, "My god is greater than yours!"*

*"How?"*

*"When your God revealed Himself to Moses in the bush, Moses hid his face, (Ex. III, 6), but when he saw the snake which is my god, at once" Moses fled from him:"*

*"When our God revealed Himself to Moses in the bush, there was no place for him to flee, where should he flee--to the heaven to the sea or to the dry land? Is it not said of our God, "Behold I fill the heaven and the earth"? (Jer. XXIII, 24), but as for the snake, who is your god, a man need but run two or three steps to escape him". (Ex. R. III, 15).*

The Rabbi makes an effective contrast between the lofty monotheism of the prophets and the unworthy idol-worship of the intellectual heathen. The significance of the Matrona's confession that the snake is her god has already been discussed.

~~of a decree~~ of extermination of the Jews which had been decided upon by the emperor, Domitian. The Rabbis hastened to Rome in the fall, the season of storm on the Mediterranean, to try to stave off the decree. It seems that they made ~~unsuccessful~~ pleas at the Roman court, but Clemens was put to death for the crime of conversion to Judaism. While there the Rabbis seemed to have defended the doctrines and ritual of Judaism against Roman criticism.

We proceed now to a series of disputations in which the heathens seem to ask for assistance in gain<sup>n</sup>ing a clearer understanding of the Jewish idea of God. It is God's invisibility which puzzles them chiefly. A god without an image by which he might become some definite being to his devotees was inconceivable. They could not see how a worshipper could enter into personal relations with a god as diffuse and abstract as the Jewish God. Philosophical heathens may have asked these questions only thus to draw out the Jewish God conception, to search for a weakness or a contradiction. Less enlightened heathens may have asked them for purposes of information, and out of sheer amazement at the strange, imageless faith.

*p). Seeing God.*

*Caesar said to Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah, "I want to see your God".*

*"You cannot."*

*"But I want to see Him."*

*The Rabbi let him stand against the Tamuz (midsummer) sun, and said, "Look at it."*

*"I cannot."*

*"Upon the sun which is only one of the many servants of God you cannot look, how much the less can you look upon the divine presence itself." (Chul. 59b).*

A somewhat similar disputation is recorded of Rabban Gamaliel and a heathen who asks the Rabbi where God dwells. The Rabbi professes ignorance. When the heathen expresses surprise at the worship of a god whose dwelling is unknown the Rabbi asks him if he knows where his own soul is situated. The heathen professes ignorance. Then the Rabbi argues if the heathen does not know the whereabouts of a thing as near to him as his own soul, how should he expect Gamaliel to know the whereabouts of God? (Shocher Tob to Ps. 103).

In both instances the Rabbi explicates the Jewish idea of God by means of simple experiments capable of appealing to lower as well as higher levels of intelligence. Such experiments were familiar to the Greeks themselves, and

we may here have instances of the Rabbis availing themselves of Greek wisdom to refute Greek religion.

q). Another heathen stricture which is solved by an experiment follows:

Caesar said to Rabban Gamaliel, "It is written (Ps. CXLVII, 4), 'He counts the number of the stars'. Where is the greatness in this? I, too, can count the stars!"

He brought some quinces and threw them in a sieve and whirled it about, and said, "Count them!"

"Keep it still."

"But the sky also keeps whirling".

Another report has it that the Rabbi said, "Count your teeth"

The heathen put his hand in his mouth and counted.

The Rabbi said, "You do not know what is in your own mouth, how much less what is in the heavens." (Sgnehed. 39a).

The friendly relationships involved in these disputations is evident; they are carried on almost in a humorous vein. There is an easy give and take between two widely different cultures. The following is obviously mere conversational pleasantry:

r). Caesar said to Rabban Gamaliel, "I know what your God is doing."

Rabban Gamaliel (instead of answering) sighed.

"What is the matter?"

"I have a son in a distant country, and I am worried about him. I wish you would tell me something of him".

"How should I know anything of him?"

"You do not know what goes on on earth, how can you presume to know what is going on in the heavens?" (Sanhed. 39a).

A legendary disputation is accredited to Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah and Caesar. The latter desires to banquet God, and he spreads the immense



repest out on the seashore. What happens is that everything Caesar puts down in the summer, the winds blow into the sea, and whatever he puts down in the winter, the rain washes into the sea. These, the rain and the winds, the Rabbi tells the Caesar, are only the humblest of God's retinue of servants. At which Caesar gives up the notion of entertaining God. (Chul. 60a). This legendary account reflects the efforts made by the Rabbis to convince the naive class of heathens of the greatness and incomprehensibility of the God of the universe.

There is only one disputation recorded in which a heathen attacks the Jewish God as unjust (that is, aside from the attack upon the justice of the Mosaic law.).

*s). The Justice of God.*

The heathen, referring to the flood story, asked why, since man alone sinned, God destroyed all living creatures. The Rabbi answers with a parable:

*"A king prepares a wedding feast for his son. The son dies. Then the king discards all the wedding preparations, for he thinks, 'What is all this to me when he, for whom I prepared all this is dead!'*

*So, too, did God say, 'Did I not create all creatures for the sake of man? Now that man has forfeited his life through his sins, of what use are all the other creatures to me?'. (Sanhed. 108a).*

The answer is certainly a noble effort, if not, from a modern viewpoint, altogether convincing. It may well have satisfied the heathens among whom the homocentric view of the universe was prevalent.

We have completed now our attempt to trace the mutual reactions of Rabbi and heathen with regard to the conception of God. The outstanding fact is that the heathens did succeed in influencing deeply and modifying to a large extent the Jewish view of God as creator, and while they did not succeed in shaking the Rabbis from their position that God is immanent and provident, and one, they did succeed in pointing out that such advanced views were not consistent with the role God plays in the Genesis stories. The Rabbis, on the

other hand, are unconcerned about the contradictions, Their faith is warm, and contradictions disappear before an application of common-sense thinking. On the other hand, they avail themselves of all the truth they can find in the heathen culture and apply it to the strengthening of their own faith. Their attack upon the idols is keen and irresistible, they meet the apologies of heathen sophistry with the revelations of Rabbinic parable. There is no doubt in the writer's mind but that the contact of the Rabbis with the heathens as recorded in these disputations was one of the powerful factors in the subsequent breakdown of heathenism.

### Disputations on Resurrection.

The Rabbis believed in the survival both of the body and the soul, but seemed to lay the most stress on resurrection of the body. This belief had entered into Judaism by way of Persia, and is first mentioned directly in the Bible in Isaiah XXVI, 19, "Thy dead shall live, the corpses shall arise." This chapter is, according to Dr. Moses Bottenwieser, a product of the Persian period. The Rabbis developed resurrection into a potent moral doctrine. Resurrection was to be the great reward of the pious and righteous. It became so important a dogma that all who refused to believe in it were practically read out of the fold of Judaism. "The following shall have no share in the world to come: those who do not believe in the resurrection of the dead, and those who do not believe in the divine origin of the Torah" (M. Sanhed. XI).

The heathen world could not conceive of resurrection. While all people entertained some view, more or less vague, as to the condition of man after death, yet at the period upon which we are engaged, the definite belief in the resurrection of the body as a phase in God's plan of justice in the world was confined to Judaism. The philosophical heathens believed in the immortality of the soul. That belief was compatible with a metaphysical view of the world. The soul of man was part of the nous or Divine Intellect which was the form-principle of the world. But the idea of resurrection clashed violently with the facts of daily experience and with a scientific view of nature. Wherever Greek thought found an entrance into Judaism, there a conflict arose at once as to resurrection. Thus the Hellenized Sadducees\* did not believe in resurrection (Jos. Ant. XVIII, 14, 16); nor did later the Minim. (Gen. R. XIV f).

The Rabbis, in their reaction to this assault upon their cherished doc-

\* In Sanhed. 90a, we have an account of a disputation between Gamaliel and the Sadducees in which the Rabbis are challenged to prove resurrection from the Torah. He attempts some strained deductions which they reject. It is remarkable that both Herford and Frankel, despite the testimony of the Munich Mss. and the Dikduke Soferim persist in changing the word Sadducees for Minim (Herford op. cit. 231; Frankel Monat. 1851, 231)

trine, accepted every challenge, and not even the most philosophically inclined of them would yield. They had no fear for the argument of incompatibility with natural law. In the first place, the great God of the universe was never, in their opinion, limited by natural law; in the second place, they could produce natural phenomena as evidence that resurrection was possible even from a naturalistic viewpoint. It was in deducing the doctrine from the Torah that they found the greatest difficulty. It is in fact not there. But as it was the Rabbis' method to find that all traditional beliefs and practices have their source in the Torah, they felt that they had to find it. In this difficult task they exhaust their resources of casuistry without avail. We shall quote a disputation below which shall illustrate this phase of apologetic exegesis. Sanhedrin 90-91 is full of such attempts at derivation. Raba, for instance, interprets Deut. XXXIII, 6, "Reuben shall live and not die" to mean: Reuben shall live--in this world; and shall not die--in the world to come.

We shall now examine the disputations in the light of the various forms of the attack which the heathens make upon the doctrine.

#### *1. Resurrection is unnatural.*

##### *a). Shall the dust live?*

*Caesar asked Rabban Gamaliel: "You say that the dead live; but they become dust, and can dust live?"*

*His daughter said, "Let him alone, and I shall answer him: 'There are two potters in our city. One makes vessels out of water; the other makes vessels out of clay. Which is the more praiseworthy?'"*

*"The one who makes them out of water."*

*"God made living beings out of water (Gen. I, 20); how much the more easily can he make them out of dust?" (Sanhed, 90b)*

Considering the tendency of the argument, it is surprising that the Rabbi (for the daughter, whoever she was, was giving the Rabbinic argument) did not

refer to the original creation of man out of dust (Gen. II, 7). However, the position of the Rabbi is clear: To the God who created man, it is altogether possible to revive him from death at his pleasure, and no laws of nature known to man, be they ever so adverse to the process of resurrection, need impair our belief. This is the thought<sup>by</sup>, which, we have already observed, the Rabbis solved all contradictions as to the attributes of God.

*b) Natural parallels to Resurrection.*

A king\* asked Rabbi Meir, "I know that the dead live again, (They shall bloom from the city like the grass of the earth (Ps. LXXXVII, 16)! but when they rise will they rise naked or with their garments on?"

Meir answered, "Let us learn from the grain of wheat. If the grain of wheat which is buried naked, emerges clad in so many garments, then how much the more likely is it that the righteous, who are buried in garments, shall rise clad in garments." (Sanhed. 90b).

The question impresses the writer as ironical. What could have been the value of the information in itself? The questioner pretending to accept the premise that the dead are resurrected proceeds to draw from that belief a humorous situation, which betrays the unnaturalness of the belief.

Rabbi Meir meets the heathen upon his own ground, and accomplishes a double purpose in his reply. First he indicates the natural plausibility of resurrection as a whole, and he second he shows the natural plausibility of resurrection in garments. The analogy of the growth of the plant from the buried seed with the rising of the dead body is certainly striking, and the Rabbis must have felt that they had in this a potent confirmation of their dogma. It is interesting to note that Paul used the same argument. (I Cor. XV, 35-38). The argument is used by preachers to this very day.

\*The printed editions read מלכות, "Cleopatra," which is, of course, an anachronism. The Dikduke Soferim gives the reading מלך, "king", which is the reading the writer has accepted. Bacher (op. cit. II, 62) believes the word is a corruption from מלך, a patriarch of the Samaritans.

We have a record of yet another disputation in which the Rabbi tries to exhibit natural corroboration for the doctrine of resurrection.

c). *The physical indestructibility of the body.*

Hadrian asked Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah, "From what (nucleus) does God cause the body to grow up again for the world to come?"

"From the nut of the spinal column (the hard vertebra)".

"How do you know this?"

"Bring me one, and I shall prove it to you." He ground it in a mill, and it could not be ground. He burned it in fire, and it could not be burned. He put it in water, and it was not affected. He put it on an anvil, and began striking it with a hammer. The anvil was split and the hammer broke, while the nut remained whole. (Gen. R. XXVIII, 3).\*

This disputation gives the impression of being legendary, Yet its frequent repetition is significant. It reflects the inclination of the Rabbis to find in the hardness of some bodily parts an indication that the body can resist complete decay, so that enough is left of the body to make conceivable the revival for continued life of the same body that died.

Whether they argued successfully or no, the salient feature of these disputations for us is that the Rabbis remained unmoved in their position of belief in the literal resurrection of the body, and that in support of this belief they met their philosophical and scientific opponents on their own ground by adducing corroboratory natural phenomena. Their main support, however, lay in their uncritical faith in the omnipotence of God.

2. *The doctrine of resurrection is deducible from the Torah and the Bible as a whole.*

a). *Resurrection in the Torah.*

The Romans asked Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah, "How do we know that God revives the dead, and that He knows the future?"

\*Almost exact parallels are given in Ecc. R. XII, 5, and Lev. R. XVIII, 1.  
Rabbi Joshua answered, "They are both to be derived from the verse, etc.:  
"For the Lord is God, and He will revive the dead."

Rabbi Joshua answered, "Both can be derived from the same text:

וַיֹּאמֶר יְיָ אֵל מֹשֶׁה הִנֵּךְ שָׁכֵב עִם אֲבוֹתֶיךָ וְקָם

'And the Lord said unto Moses, "Behold, thou liest down with thy fathers, and wilt rise!" (Deut. XXXI, 16).

"But the word וְקָם belongs with the following clause: וְקָם הָעָם הַזֶּה, "and this people shall rise"

The Rabbi answered, "Take this half of the verse in your hands to prove that God knows the future." (Sanhed. 90b).

There is something suspicious about the way the question is so articulated as to fit into the involved theory of Rabbi Joshua. No questioner is like to ask two such questions simultaneously. However, whether historically authentic or not, this disputation reflects effectively enough the heathen's challenge that resurrection cannot be found to be taught by the Torah itself, and the Rabbis' desperate efforts to find it nevertheless.

b). *Immortality in the Bible as a whole.*

As will be clearly indicated in the following disputations, the Rabbis found it much less difficult to find both the doctrine of resurrection and the doctrine of the immortality of the soul in the Bible as a whole. The quotation from Isaiah given above and Daniel XII, 2 are definite statements of resurrection. The immortality of the soul, too, is readily found.

The Matrone asked Rabbi Jose bar Chalafta, "What is meant by that which is written, 'And who knows as to whether the spirit of the sons of men rises upward?' (Ecc. III, 21)

He said, "Those are the souls of the righteous which are placed in the Treasure-house, for so said Abigail (inspired by God), 'May the soul of my lord be bound by the bond of life with the Lord your God' (I Sam. XXV, 29). Now you might think that this applies also to the souls of the wicked, therefore the text continues, 'and may the souls of thine enemies be hurled away as out of the middle of a sling!'"

She said to him, "And what is that which is written, 'And the spirit of cattle that it goeth downward'?"

He said, "Those are the souls of the wicked, which go down to Gehinom, as it is said, 'In the day when he went down to the netherworld' " (Ez. XXXI, 15)

(Ecc. R. III, 27)

The deduction still is strained. A sentence expressing doubt is read as a sentence expressing certainty. Indeed, the supplementary quotations from Samuel and Ezekiel furnish the Rabbi even better proof than the verse around which the quotation centers!

The strict connection of both immortality and resurrection with retribution is here brought out. In a world ruled by imperious Rome, it was hopeless to look for the reward of the faithful on earth itself, and the punishment of the wicked, too, seemed a long way off. No wonder, then, the Rabbis clung so tenaciously to the doctrine of resurrection which alone seemed capable of rendering conceivable the working out of God's justice.

We have given the disputation on immortality a subordinate place under the general heading of resurrection because, in the first place there was no serious clash on the question between Rabbis and intellectual heathens, and in the second place because it is likely that this form of immortality of the soul of which Rabbi Jose speaks is only a step in the direction of resurrection. The souls of the righteous are stored up in the treasury of God, to be returned to their proper bodies on the day of resurrection.

Later Jewish thought has passed its verdict upon these disputations on resurrection. Mediaeval Jewish philosophers retained the terminology of resurrection, as for instance Maimuni himself, but they made it very clear that what they meant was the purely spiritual existence of the soul and not a re-awakening of the body. Here as in the case of creation out of nothing, we find the successors of the Rabbis yielding gracefully to the potency of Hellenistic thought, where the Rabbis themselves had so doggedly resisted it.



### Disputations on the Relation between Israel and God

We have reserved these disputations for the last place because in these the heathens offer what was to them the strongest argument against Judaism: the wretched condition of the Jew. In the first place, the argument seems to run, Judaism cannot be the only true religion, for the people that possessed such a religion would surely be prosperous and powerful, the God who gave such a people His mission of teaching the true knowledge of Him, would surely have favored them, and guided them safely out of danger. Nor would He have permitted their name to become an object of scorn and contempt among the people of the earth. This is a natural expression of heathen psychology. The gods are expected to protect their devotees, and a defeat of the worshippers of a God means the defeat of their gods. Judged by this standard, how utterly had the God of Israel been defeated. how utterly Judaism with its ritual and beliefs discredited! But the argument has also another phase. Conceding, the heathens may be imagined to say, that Israel has been worshipping the one God and the true God of the universe, it is obvious that this true God no longer cares for Israel, that Israel has so angered Him by his sins that God has cast him off.

What could the Rabbis answer to this charge? Outwardly, it was certainly correct. The cruel facts of history supported the heathen. The Temple, the center of the worship of the God of Israel, was destroyed. Jerusalem was in ruins. Israel was scattered all over the known world. All semblance of political independence in Palestine was gone. Most of the Jewish people were poverty-stricken, and the burden of humiliating taxes lay heavy upon their shoulders. Meanwhile heathen Rome waxed daily more powerful, more prosperous, and more arrogant. The mental reaction of the Rabbis to this anomalous situation is beautifully illustrated in an early Midrashic passage. (Lam. R. V, 19). It is one of those passages which offer us some vague information as to the journey of the four Tannaim to Rome, of which we have spoken before as being the occasion of

a number of disputations:

Rabban Gamaliel, Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah, Rabbi Joshua and Rabbi Akiba were approaching Rome, and they heard the noise of the city from afar. They began weeping, only Rabbi Akiba laughed.

"Akiba," they said, "why do you laugh when we are weeping?"

"Why are you weeping?"

"Shall we not weep when the heathens, who bow to their idols, dwell in safety and prosperity, while the House which was the footstool of the Lord our God is in ashes and is the dwelling place of wild beasts?"

"But I laugh at this, because I consider: If he does this even for the heathens who anger Him, how much more will He yet do for those who do His will!"

In the same passage is told also the story of the four Rabbis visiting the ruins of Jerusalem and seeing foxes coming forth from the temple area. Again Akiba laughs while the others weep. On being asked to explain, he argues that just as the prophecy of the ruin of the Temple has come true, (Jer. XXVI 18) so it is certain that the prophecy of restoration (Zach, VIII, 4) will come true.

The Rabbis, then, in answer to the heathen boast of power, leaned back upon their supreme faith in the Guardian of Israel, and trusted that the present sad condition of Israel was only a temporary phase in the development of His inscrutable purpose, and that finally the righteous would be gloriously vindicated, and the wicked heathen be put to shame. The Jews are still the sons of God with whom He is angry for a moment but whom He will soon restore to His loving arms. Was it not a sign of the continuation of God's protection over him that Israel has succeeded in surviving at all the ruin and havoc under which other peoples would have succumbed to disappear altogether from the face of the earth?

Moreover, it is most likely in answer to this terrible argument used by heathen and Jewish heretic alike, that the Rabbis proceeded to formulate the philosophy of Israel's history as the

the philosophy of the mission of Israel: "God favored Israel by scattering them among the nations." (Pes. 87b) "God exiled Israel among the nations only in order that proselytes might be added to their number." In view of the fact that heathens were becoming Jewish proselytes in great numbers, (Graetz, Geschichte IV, 110ff.), the latter statement appears an especially effective reply to the heathen charge that the dispersion of Israel indicated either the defeat of their God or the fact that God had forsaken them. There is a distinctly dramatic note to these disputations in which the heathen assails the Rabbi at his most vulnerable point, and the Rabbi rallies to the breach with a courage born of intense faith.

a). *Is Israel a slave or a son of God?*

*Turnus Rufus : If God loves the poor, why does He not provide for them?*

*Akiba : In order that through benevolence toward them, we may be saved from the punishment of hell.*

*T: on the contrary, this should condemn you to hell. Let me illustrate: A king became angry with his son and placed him in prison. He commanded that his son should not be fed nor given drink. Now a man came and gave him food and drink. When the king heard of this, do you not think he became angry? And you are even called the slaves of God, "for to me the children of Israel are slaves" (Lev. XXV, 42)*

*A; Let me tell you a parable: A king became angry with his son and had <sup>him</sup> placed in prison. He commanded that his son should not be fed nor given drink. Now a man came and gave him food and drink. When the king heard of it, do you not think that he offered him a gift (for his kindness to his son)? Now we are called the sons of God, as it is written, "Ye are the sons of the Lord your God," (Deut. XIV, 1).*

*T: You are called sons and you are called slaves. When you do the will of God you are called His sons; when you do not do His will, you are called His slaves; and now you are not doing His will.*

A. But it is written, "Deal thy bread to the hungry and bring the poor that are cast out to thy house" (Is. LVIII, 7). When shall we bring the poor to the house and deal our bread to them? At a time like this, when they are being cast out by the taxgatherers? (Baba Bathra 10a).

This disputation, while ostensibly concerned with the rather sophisticated problem of why God does not Himself support the poor, is at bottom centered upon the problem of whether the Israelites are to be considered the sons or the slaves of God, His chosen people, or a people whom He has rejected and disgraced. The heathen who began with intimating that they were always mere slaves finally compromises; yet, admitting that they have sometimes, when they were obedient, been in the position of sons, they now are certainly slaves.

While maintaining his spiritual dignity and insisting that Israel is the son of God, the Rabbi nevertheless utters a bitter note of complaint over the plight of Israel and the cruelty of his oppressors, whose taxgatherers cast out the poor of Israel from their homes.

A disputation quite similar to this is to be found in Jellinek's Beth Hamidrash I, 21. There a heathen approaches Rabbi Meir with the assertion that the Israelites are slaves whom their Master has cast off, so that they have had to seek a new master, Rome. They should therefore become Romans. Meir, however, insists that the Israelites are to be regarded as the sons of God, punished only temporarily and bound soon to be restored.

The superiority of Rome to Israel is intimated in the Bible itself, the heathens asserted. In the following disputation we find the heathen hinting broadly that the domination of Rome over Israel took place according to God's announced plan:

b). Jacob and Esau.

The Matrona asked Rabbi Jose bar Chalafta: "How is it that Esau came out first (from the womb)?"

\* He answered, "The first drop of semen was really that of Jacob. If you put The translation is according to Bacher (Ag. Tan. I, 295)

two pearls into one box, does not the pearl that has been put in first come out last? So the first drop was Jacob's, therefore he came out last."

(Gen. R. LXIII, 11).

By a clever analogy the Rabbi "turns the tables" on the heathen. The fact that Esau was the first to emerge from the womb does not justify Rome (whom the Rabbis called Edom or Esau) in claiming priority of importance in the eyes of God. Esau came out first because he was created last.

In another conversation with Rabbi Jose, the same Matrona disputes Israel's claim to eternal life as a people, on Biblical grounds.

c). Is Israel eternal?

The Matrona asked Rabbi Jose: "It is written, 'Your days will be as many as the days of heaven over the earth!' (Deut. XI, 21). This means that you are only going to exist as long as heaven and earth exist. But heaven and earth are destined to decay! For it is written, 'The heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall decay like a garment!' (Is. LI, 6)."

He answered, "From the same prophet from whom you have drawn your proof, I shall draw my refutation, for it is said, 'As the new heavens and the new earth which I shall make stand before me, says the Lord, so shall your seed stand' (Is. LXVI, 22)." (Tanchuma B. Genesis 20).

The disputation is carried on in highly artificial terms, but the issue is important. Israel's claim to eternity is connected with its claim of being the bearer of the ultimate religious truth, and such a claim the heathens could not afford to let go unchallenged. Here the heathen woman tries to show the Rabbi that the Bible itself does not bear out such a claim. But her argument is sophistical, and in the juggling of texts the Rabbi is easily her superior.

From a principle promulgated in the Torah itself, another heathen educes that it is the duty of Israel to become assimilated with heathen Rome:

d). *Why do not Jews join the Majority ?*

A heathen asked Rabbi Joshua ben Korcha, "It is written in the Torah, *אחרי רבים להטות*. (According to the Rabbinic translation, this phrase means: Follow the majority.) Now we are more numerous than you. Why do you not assimilate yourselves with us in idolatry?"

J. Have you any sons?

H. You remind me of my troubles.

J. How?

H. I have many sons and whenever we sit down at the table, one extols one god, the other extols another, and they not rise from the table before they have bruised each other's head.

J. And do you succeed in harmonizing them?

H. No

J. Then before you try to assimilate us, assimilate your own sons.

The heathen went away. After he was gone, the Rabbi's pupils said, "Rabbi, him you have thrust aside with a broken reed; us what can you answer?"

He said, "Of Esau there are enumerated just six persons, yet in referring to them the plural 'souls' is used (Gen. XXXVI, 6); while of Jacob there are seventy persons enumerated, yet the singular expression 'soul' is used in referring to them (Ex. I, 5). Thus Esau, because he worships many gods, is referred to as many souls; while Jacob, who worships but one God is referred to as one soul. (Lev. R. IV, 6).

In this disputation, the deepest-lying motive which actuated the heathen, not only in his assertion that God had forsaken Israel, but in all the disputations is revealed. The heathen plainly wants the Jew to become a completely assimilated Roman. Whether it arose from a desire to render secure the fruits of the Roman conquest of Judea, or whether it arose from envy of a rival culture which was winning many Romans, the definite intention was

to prepare the way for the Romanizing of the Jews, to break down the moral resistance of the Jewish leaders. We have been examining potent arguments for the abandonment of Judaism drawn from the miserable condition of Israel, a condition in which either their God had willingly placed <sup>them</sup>, or a condition from which He was powerless to save them. Organically connected with such arguments is the one presented in our disputation. Since you have failed so miserably with your own God, the heathen argues, why not cast in your lot with our victorious gods? Moreover, is it not written in your own Torah that the majority ought to be followed, and are not the heathens a majority in the world?

To this argument, the force of which must be conceded, the Rabbi answers warily: The heathens do not constitute a real majority over the Jews. The superiority in numbers is only specious. As a matter of fact heathenism is torn into so many conflicting sects that it is doubtful whether the adherents of any one sect form a majority over the Jewish people, which is comparatively unified in its worship of the One God. It is for the heathen, therefore, literally to set his own house in order before attempting to teach the Jew how to unite with him in religion. The answer to the pupils is in purport the same as the answer to the heathen, except that the Rabbi indulges his own and his pupils' love for homiletic exegesis and finds an involved Biblical confirmation of that which he had already stated in more direct form to the heathen himself. Thus without entering into the comparative merits of heathen religion and Judaism, and without questioning the validity of the numerical standard for the valuation of a religion, meeting the heathen absolutely on his own ground, the Rabbi trenchantly exposes the heathen's empty presumptions.

It may be pure legend, but there is one disputation, too interesting to be denied citation in full, in which the heathen is represented as admiring Israel's remarkably persistent loyalty to its God in the face of defeat and persecution. The Rabbi's reply forms the keynote not only of the Rabbinic re-

reaction to the heathen attempt at seducing or forcing them away from the God who had hidden His face from Israel, but forms the keynote also of all Israel's resistance against the dangers and temptations that have beset his historic path. It is expressive of Israel's will to live, of his conviction that he has a divine purpose to fulfill in the world, that he has a task which he dares not shirk or abandon.

And with this disputation our study of disputations between Rabbis and heathens closes.

#### *e) Israel's Persistence*

Hadrian said to Rabbi Joshua, "Wonderful is the lamb which can survive among seventy wolves!"

Rabbi Joshua answered, "Wonderful is the shepherd Who delivers Israel from his enemies, as it is written, 'No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall arise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. Thine is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their due reward from Me, saith the Lord'. (Isaiah LIV, 17) (Esther R. X, 11).



## PART TWO

DISPUTATIONS WITH MINIM  
OR JEWISH HERETICS

*Who are the Minim?*

Of all the various etymologies that have been attempted for the word מינים the most acceptable one is the simplest. It is that proposed by Bacher, namely, that the word has its usual meaning of "kind" or "species." The Minim are various kinds of unorthodox, disloyal, or heretical Jews.\* This at least is certain--they are Jews. "The term, Minim, is not applied to heathens" (Chul. XIII, b). But here the certainty ends. As Dr. Kaufman Kohler points out in his article on "Christianity" in the Jewish Encyclopedia, the Talmud contains no specific name for Christianity. Nor has it a specific name for Gnosticism or the Subordinate sects of either. Instead they are all grouped under the very general term--Minim.

Now all the earlier scholars such as Graetz, Frankel, Bacher, and Herford practically identify Minim with Judaeo-Christians. More recent scholars such as Moritz Friedlander, J. Bergmann, and B. Kellermann have taken issue with their masters and have exposed their position as uncritical. The present situation with regard to the problem of who the Minim are may be described as follows:

All agree that the term Minim when it is used by the Amoraic teachers refers to Christianity. It is the identity of the Minim of the Tannaitic and pre-Tannaitic period that is in question. The scholars who believe that all Minim are Christians are placed in a dilemma. If all the Minim are Judaeo--Christians, then certainly those that are mentioned as active in

\* Herford contributes an interesting supplementation to this etymology (Ch. T. M. 382ff.). Another Hebrew word for "kind" is מין (II Chron. XVI, 14). In a comment upon this sentence in Ba. Kam. 16a, the Rabbis interpret the word as if it were related to מין "fornicate". The word Min must have been given the same extension of meaning as is indicated by the fact that the Rabbis identify the harlot of Prov. V, 8 and Eccl. VII, 26 with Minuth. (Ab. Zar. 16b). A Minis, therefore one who has been seduced by foreign beliefs.

the time when the temple was still standing must have been of the Ebionite type, that is, Christians who remained loyal to every "tittle of the Law," the only difference between whom and authoritative Judaism was that they believed the Messiah had already come in the form of Jesus. Their attitude toward the Torah is reflected in the words put into the mouth of Jesus in the Gospel According to Matthew, V, 17-19: "Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men to do so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven." But at that early date when Christians are believed to have been still loyal to the Torah, the Minim are already mentioned as hampering Israel in the carrying out of the Torah. In Mishnah Rosh HaShanah II, 1, they are mentioned as maliciously attempting to confuse the Beth Din in fixing the dates for the high holidays. Strangely enough, too, at this early date they are already described as attempting to impose upon Jewry their total denial of a future world. (Mishnah Berach. XI, 5). Now this conflicts with all we know of early Jewish Christianity, as pictured in the accounts given of the Ebionites and Nazarenes in the works of the early Church Fathers. Scholars seem to agree that at least up to the time of the Destruction, if not later, Christians were absolutely obedient to the Torah, and differed from authoritative Judaism only in believing in the Messiahship (not the divinity) of Jesus\*. And while some scholars believe that early Christianity did not believe in the resurrection of others than Jesus\*, it is much to be doubted that early Christians\*

\* W. Beveridge, Ebionism, in Hastings' Encyclopedia.

° B. Kellermann, Kritische Beiträge zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Christentums, II, Das Minaerproblem, p. 77-78.

\* The statement of I. Brill in the article on Minim in the Jewish Encyclopedia that the Minim mentioned in the period before the Destruction of the Temple are Sadducees or Samaritans is not, in the opinion of the writer, acceptable. Where we have a sect that is so frequently referred to by a specific name, there is no good reason for postulating that they would also be referred to by a general term, through which they might be confused with other sects.

would take an aggressive stand against the doctrine, such as is implied in the passage from the Mishnah to which we have referred. Here, then, we have Minim who are certainly not Christians.

It is moreover most likely that as late as the Bar Kochba Rebellion (133 C.E.), the only Christians the Rabbis ever came into contact with were Christians of the Ebionite type. Advanced criticism of the New Testament has established it that antinomistic Christianity could not have sprung full-grown from the brain of Paul, but must have been the result of a process of evolution spread over many years. It was only after the failure of the Rebellion that it reached the extreme stage of its development. Now the Ebionite Christians (by this term I mean to describe not a sect of but all of early Christianity), looked upon themselves as one with the Jewish people. To them Christ had been the Jewish Messiah come solely to the Jewish people as predicted by the Jewish prophets. It is this position of the early Christians that is reflected in the words put into the mouth of Jesus in Matthew XV, 24-26: I was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel... It is not meet to take the bread of the children (Israel) and cast it to the dogs (heathens).

Yet upon examining all the disputations extant between the Tannaim and Minim, we find not a single disputation on the chief issue between the Jews and Christians of that time, namely the Messiahship of Jesus; whereas the greatest number of the disputations with the Minim are concerned with the issue of Israel's rejection by God—an issue which could only have arisen after a full development of antinomism and a complete separation of the Church from the Jewish body. This argument against the identification of Minim with Christians gains further in weight when we consider that according to the patristic writers, the Messiahship of Jesus was one of the most important subjects of disputations between Christians and Jews.\*

\* J. Bergmann, *Jud. Apol.* p. 25.

Friedlander argues also that such extreme hostility as the Rabbis express toward the Minim could not have applied to the comparatively innocent, ritually observant Judaeo-Christians. Thus Rabbi Tarphon declares that a man fleeing from a snake should seek refuge in a heathen temple rather than in the house of a Min; and Rabbi Ishmael charges them with bringing jealousy and hatred and strife between Israel and God. They are much worse than heathens, for heathens deny (the Torah) because they do not know it, whereas the Minim know it and deny it nevertheless (Sab. 116a). All the ritual exclusiveness practiced against the heathen, such as the prohibition of their wine and meat, are put into force also against the Minim, and their children are called Mamzerim. (Chul. 13a). A Min that has fallen into a pit may not be helped out. (Ab. Za. 26b). Such hostility between the Rabbis of the period before the Rebellion and Christians, thinks Friedlander, is inconceivable, not only because the Christians of that period are known to have been loyal to the Torah, but also because the Christian sect was altogether too small in numbers to constitute the grave menace which the expressions of the Rabbis attribute to the Minim. (Friedlander, *Religiose Bewegungen*, p. 176).

Who, then, were the Minim? Friedlander has made the most important contributions to the scientific study of this subject, and we must accept the main proposition of his work, "*Der vorchristliche juedische Gnosticismus*", that already in the days of Jesus, Palestinian Jewry had become permeated by Hellenistic thought-movements, and by the philosophizing spirit of Alexandrian Jewry. By the period of the Destruction, there were already in Palestine more than the few sects whose names have, by the accidents of history, come down to us.—the Sadducees, Essenes and Christians. Stimulated by the Hellenistic spirit, Jewry was teeming with new currents of thought. Rationalism, mysticism and traditionalism were engaged in a conflict, the result of which was the spiritual disintegration of Jewry. This situation is reflected in the Rabbinic statement, לא גלו ישראל עד שנקשו עשרים וארבע כיתות של מינים

"Israel was not exiled until it had become divided into twenty-four different sects of Minim." (Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1).

The question now arises in precisely what ways did the Hellenistic culture affect Jews. We have already referred to the fact that it led the Rabbis to cultivate emanation theories and theories of ideas for the purpose of rationalizing the belief in creation. As to its more decisive effects Friedlander believes that they were to a large extent the same in Palestine as they were in Alexandria. Contact with Hellenism led Jews to allegorize the Torah so as to render it consonant with Greek philosophy. But allegorists were of conservative and radical schools. Thus Philo could declare that all the laws of the Torah are meant to symbolize some ethical or metaphysical principle, and yet remain a rigid observer of all the laws. But more radical allegorists, finding that the ritual laws had only a symbolic value, concluded that it was not necessary to obey them. From this attitude toward the Torah it was but a step to the belief that the Torah was the work not of the transcendent, real God, but of an inferior Demiurge, who did also the inferior labor of creation. Against these radical allegorists, Philo inveighs in his *De Posteritate* I, 225, and in his *De Migratio*, I, 450. He rebukes them for having abrogated the ceremonial law after allegorizing it, for throwing over the Sabbath, the festivals, and circumcision, and for having thus separated themselves from traditional Jewry to form a sect by themselves. To this rebuke by Philo of the radical allegorists, Friedlander finds an interesting parallel in the words of Rabbi Eliezer of Modiim, a teacher of the first century of the common era. The words of Rabbi Eliezer are evidently directed against a certain class of Palestinian Jews.

"Whoever profanes the Sabbath, despises the festivals, and puts his fellow man to shame in public, and makes void the covenant of Abraham our father, and makes the Torah bear a meaning other than the right, such a one, even though knowledge of the Torah and good deeds be his, has no share in the



90

one Jewish natinal<sup>o</sup>, the other Hellenistic and heathen, began toward the end of the first century a process of convergence which resulted in Paulinian, or antinomistic and anti-Jewish Christianity. The Church's opposition to Gnosticism was a much later development, occurring long after Judaeo-Christianity had been combined with Gnosticism to give Christianity its attractive, universalistic, Paulinian form. The Minim may represent at times a mere stage in this process, and at times the completion of it. Thus the theories of Herford and Friedlander are in a sense harmonized. The Minim are Christians, but they are gnostic Christians.

With this view of Kellermann, the writer finds himself in agreement. The few disputations between Minim and Rabbis which we have, and which we shall quote, seem to find their best explanation in this theory. The writer would insist, however, upon a good deal of latitude in the application of it. Thus, in no disputation would the writer say that it can be determined with any approach to certainty whether the Min is a pure Gnostic or a Christian Gnostic, or merely a Hellenistic, philosophizing Jew. But it can be said of all the Minim who engage in these disputations that they are members of Jewish groups of heretical tendencies, who have become disloyal to traditional Judaism to the degree that they feel themselves apart from it and feel even a contempt for it, thus arousing the extreme hostility of its protagonists.

How contact with these heretics gave the Rabbis renewed impetus for the study of the Torah, and for profound reflection on the meaning of Judaism is evidenced by the comment which Rabbi Jochanan, an early Amora, makes upon the statement of Rabbi Eleazar with regard to the need of being prepared to answer the unbelievers. We shall re-quote the original statement and add to the commentary,

*Rabbi Eleazar said, "Be watchful in the study of the Torah, and know what answer to give to the unbeliever."*

*Rabbi Jochanan added, "This applies not only to a heathen unbeliever, but*

even more so to a Jewish unbeliever, for the latter take much more license in their interpretation of the Torah" (Sanhedrin 38b).

The testimony of the disputations with the Minim, we shall find, confirms the Rabbi's judgment upon the Jewish unbeliever as being even more radical than in his opposition to Jewish belief and practice than the heathen. We find that the subjects of disputation with Minim are the same as those with heathens, and that the Minim are always more bitter in their attack than the heathens. From the tone of the disputations one is frequently led to doubt whether they are really Jews. To criticism from this quarter the Rabbis must have reacted with even more vigor than to the criticism of the heathen, for internal disintegration of Jewry was a danger more threatening than any external pressure for the forced abandonment of Judaism that heathens could bring to bear. These disloyal Minim represented to the Rabbis the fruits of Hellenistic culture, the results of assimilation with Rome, and their influence upon the Rabbis was to make them all the more determined and watchful in their self-defence against these. Thus Rabbi Ishmael, a teacher of the first half of the second century, and frequently mentioned as an unyielding opponent of the Minim\* prohibits his nephew, ben Dama, from studying Greek philosophy:

"Ben Dama, the nephew of Rabbi Ishmael, asked Rabbi Ishmael, "Now that I have studied the entire Torah, may I study Greek philosophy?"

Rabbi Ishmael read to him the following text: " 'this book of the Torah shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night' (Josh. I, 8). Now go and find an hour which is neither day nor night, and use it for studying Greek philosophy." (Menach. 99b).

The total prohibition of the study of Greek lore represents the extreme of Rabbinic reaction to Minuth. It seems that there was general agreement

\*Ishmael's opposition to Minuth reached the degree that he would not permit his dying nephew, ben Dama, to accept the services of a Min in healing a snake-bite. This incident is frequently referred to: Ab. Zar. 27b; J. Shabb. 14d; Tos. Chull. II, 22, 23; J. Ab. Zar. 40d, 41a.



among the Rabbis that such study should at least be restricted to scholars already reputed for knowledge and discernment, and that classes in such disciplines should be limited to the number of two or one., as we may learn from the rules that were laid down regarding the study of Maaseh Bereshith and Maaseh Mercaba. These disciplines constituted, if not a direct study of Greek philosophy, at least a study of subjects which the Rabbis knew to have been suggested by Greek philosophy. (Chag. 11b, 14b; J. Chag. 77a).

In the Tannaitic period, as has already been noted, disputations with Minim are few in number. The bulk of the disputations with Minim belongs to the Amoraic period. It is true that the Tannaitic period abounds in anecdotes with regard to Minim, in homilies and in laws with regard to them. But these are not directly in our field of study. We have already mentioned such of them as we found of avail in the treatment of the problem of the identity of the Minim. We shall now consider the disputations themselves:

*a). Against the Sabbath.*

Rabbân Gamaliel, Rabbi Joshua, Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah, and Rabbi Akiba went to Rome and there preached as follows: The ways of God are not like the ways of man. The latter decrees and tells others to do things which he does not himself do, but God does not do thus.

A Min happened to be present, and after they went out he said to them, "Your words are naught but falsehood! Did you not say that God does what He commands? Why does He not keep the Sabbath?"

They said to him, "You most wicked one! Is not a man allowed to move about in his dwelling on the Sabbath?"

"Yes".

"The upper regions and the lower regions are the dwelling of God, as it is said, 'The whole earth is full of his glory' (Is. 66, 3)." (Ex. R. XXX, 9)

It will be observed at once that the disputation runs practically along

the same lines as that between the heathen, Turnus Rufus, and Akiba on the Sabbath. Akiba, then, had the disheartening experience of having the same objection to the Sabbath, put in the same terms, addressed to himself by a heathen and a Jewish heretic. The Min assumes an attitude of contempt toward God, as if he himself worshipped a higher being than the God of the Rabbinis. From his tone, we would characterize him as an extreme antinomistic gnostic, whereas his apparently total rejection of the Sabbath makes it doubtful that he was a Christian. The journey to Rome, to which reference has already been made, took place in the last years of the first century, and while there may be some doubt as to the existence at the time in Rome of deliberately antinomistic Christians, it is most probable that any Jews living in Rome would be the most susceptible to extreme Hellenistic influence, since they lived so far from the center of Jewish life.

*b). Against the Unity of God.*

The disputation against the unity of God is carried on between a certain Min and Rabbi Judah HaNasi. (Chul. 87a). It is practically the same as that on the same subject between Caesar and Rabban Gamaliel. The heathen, in attacking the idea of the unity of God, may be motivated either by the desire to seek support for polytheism or by the desire to find flaws in the Jewish conception of Unity or to find that the Bible itself contradicted the Rabbinic notion of Unity. The Min must have been interested also in finding contradictions in the Jewish conception. In addition, if a Christian, he is interested in rendering plausible the divinity of Jesus; if a gnostic, he is interested in finding some Biblical corroboration of his belief in the superior and inferior Gods.

\*The main difference between the two disputations lies in the answer given by the Rabbi. While Rabban Gamaliel answers by ridiculing the heathen's treatment of the text, Rabbi Judah answers by calling the Min's attention to the last clause in the verse, which proves that only one God is meant, "The Lord of Hosts is His name." (See above, page 64.) Herford conjectures that the similarity of the two disputations means that the earlier, that between the heathen and Gamaliel is the only authentic one. That, however, does not necessarily follow, since we shall see numerous examples of Minim asking practically the same questions as the heathens. This too be explained by the fact that the Minim adopted the viewpoint of the heathen philosophy.

c). *Against Resurrection*

*It happened that the son of a certain man in Sepporis died. (Some say he was himself a Min; others say that a Min was sitting with him). Rabbi Jose came to visit the mourner. The man saw him sitting and smiling. He asked,*

*"Why do you smile?"*

*"We trust in our Lord in heaven that you will see your son again in the world to come"*

*(The Min answered) "Is not this man sufficiently troubled now that you must come and talk nonsense to him? How shall potsherd's come together again?" Does it not say, 'Thou shalt shatter them as the vessel of the potter?'"*

*(Ps. II, 9).*

The Rabbi proceeds at this point to demonstrate that just as a glass vessel which is made by human breath can be made whole after it has been broken, so surely man, a vessel made by the breath of God can be made whole after the disintegration of death. (Gen. R. XIV, 8).

In this disputation, too, the most salient feature is the heathenish attitude of the Min. Herford would have us believe that the Minim objected not to resurrection as a principle but to the Rabbis' position that it could be proven from the Bible or Old Testament, as they wanted to claim the doctrine as a distinct contribution of the new dispensation. But it is clear that the Min in this disputation is aggressively opposed to the belief altogether. He is not very likely, therefore, to be a Christian. He is a Gnostic or Hellenistic Jew, whose scientific view of the world is incompatible with the doctrine of resurrection and he brings against it a philosophical objection much like the one Caesar presented to Gamaliel (Sanhed. 90b).

d) *"God Has Rejected Israel"--- A series of disputations.*

The final evidence of the completeness of the breach between Jew and Min lies in the disputations wherein the Min taunts the Rabbi with proofs from Scripture that God has forsaken Israel. Adopting without reserve the attitude

of the conquering heathen, the Min gloats over the defeat and misery of Israel, and sees in it the divine judgment upon Judaism as a religion outworn and bound to give way to the true, philosophic faith represented by himself.

1). A Min said to Rabban Gamaliel, "You are a people whose Lord has departed from it, as it is written, "With their sheep and cattle they shall go to seek the Lord, but shall not find Him; He hath drawn off from them" (Hosea V, 6)

The Rabbi answered, "Fool, is it written *חלץ להם*, "He departed in regard to them, that is, he forsook them? It is written *חלץ מהם*, which means he took Chalizah from them, that is, they departed from Him, not He from them. If in the case of a childless widow, the expression had been 'the brothers draw off in regard to her'; there would be some ground for your argument". (Jeb. 102b)

The Rabbi deals with the Min's proof of Israel's rejection from the words of the prophet Hosea in a very technical manner. His answer may be said to be that God never of his own accord forsook Israel. It was Israel always that forsook God by going after other gods. God, however, was always ready to receive Israel back whenever they repented.

2). "And I will hide my face in that day" (Deut. XXXI, 18). Rabba explained this verse as follows: God said, Though I have hidden my face from them, yet in a dream I will speak with them (Nu. XII, 6). Rabbi Joseph said, His hand is stretched out over us as it is said: "In the shadow of my hand have I covered thee" (Is. LI, 16).

Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah was standing in the house of Caesar. A certain Min showed him a sign (in pantomime manner) that Israel was a people whose God had turned away from it. Rabbi Joshua answered with a sign meaning, His hand is still stretched out over us.

It turns out that the Min did not understand the sign that Joshua had made. For this failure Caesar has him slain. (Chag. 5b). As has been said in the Introduction both Bacher and Graetz believe this disputation to be literally authentic. It took place in Alexandria, the Caesar being Hadrian.

They take it for granted, of course, that the Min is a Christian, whereas in the opinion of the writer, the Min cannot be identified with such certainty.

There may be in this disputation a hint to the effect that the Minim were even harsher toward their fellow-Jews than the heathens themselves. For in slaying the Min, Hadrian indicates that he considers Joshua's retort the correct answer to the problem.

3). A Min said to Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah, "You brier! Is it not written of you, 'The best of them is like a brier'?" (Hosea VII, 4) *3*.

The Rabbi answered, "Fool, look toward the end of the verse, 'The upright is a thorn hedge and a fence' What is meant by 'the best of them is a brier'? Just as the briars protect a breach in the wall, so the good among us protect us." *4*

Another report of the Rabbi's answer is: *The best of them is a brier* • חֲרִיקִים because they thrust חֲרִיקִים the wicked down to Gehinnom, as it is said, (Micah IV, 13), "Arise and thresh; O daughter of Zion, for I will make thy horn iron and thy hoofs brass. And thou shalt beat in pieces many peoples." (*Erub.* 101a).

We have included this disputation under the caption of the rejection of Israel, because it represents the same spirit of contempt for Israel as do those that deal directly with the rejection. The Rabbi's repartee is exceedingly ingenious. Accepting the epithet of brier, he interprets it to mean that the Rabbis are thorny or sharp in their defence of authoritative Judaism against the heretics.

Our study of the disputations between Rabbis and Minim closes with the following disputation in which a woman, Beruriah, the wife of Rabbi Meir, comes to the defence of Judaism against its enemies from within, who have deserted Israel to the extent of taunting their people upon its misfortunes:

4). A certain Min said to Beruriah, "It is written, 'Sing, O barren one that

didst not bear' (Is. LIV, 1) Should a woman sing because she has not borne? "

Beruriah answered, "Fool, look at the end of the verse, where it is written, 'For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord'. Moreover (to give you another answer), what is meant by 'O barren that didst not bear'? It means, 'Sing, O congregation of Israel, who is like a barren woman, for she has not borne children for Gehinnom such as you'. (Ber. 10a).

Israel is taunted with being barren, the new faiths being now the most fruitful. The Rabbi's wife retorts that it is better to be barren than to produce children for Christianity or Gnosticism.

With regard to the disputations on the rejection of Israel, then, the motive of the heathen is a desire to impress the Jew with the hopelessness of a continued separate existence on the part of the Jewish people--it has nothing further to live for. On the part of the Gnostics, the impetus to the disputation is a feeling of contempt for the people who still cling to the Torah of the inferior God. On the part of Christians, the motive is clearly a desire for self-justification. Israel is rejected so that Christendom, the true Israel, might be elected.

The salient fact about the disputations between Rabbis and Minim is that they are on the same subjects and in the same spirit as the disputations between Rabbis and heathens. This indicates that the co-disputants in both cases draw their inspiration from the same source--Greek thought. Our account, then, of the religious disputations of the Tannaitic period is a significant chapter in the history of the struggle between Hebraism and Hellenism.

Leon Fram