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### THE MESSIAH.

#### PART I. INTRODUCTION.

##### THE MISSION OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL.

A SERMON, BY RABBI ISAAC WISE, DELIVERED AT ALBANY, JANUARY 30, 5609, A. M.

ובא לציון גואל ולשבי פשע ביעקב נאם ה' :

“And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord.”—ISAIAH lix.

#### INTRODUCTION.

THE Messiah, the anointed of the Lord, the Saviour, the Redeemer of Israel, or by whatever name this supposed personage is, was, or will be called, has been for many centuries the cause of much trouble and dissension between the Israelites and Christians, which resulted in many centuries of affliction upon the house of Israel. Whether he had already come, or is still to come, was the question which caused so much contention on both sides; it is the very axis around which the differences of these two religions have revolved; and, in fact, this question still remains undecided in the public mind, each party thinking to have the best evidence on its side.

Not only Jews and gentiles, but even Jews against each other, were involved in great difficulties about the coming of the Messiah. Some of them thought the Messiah must necessarily be a descendant of King David, who will be anointed by God himself, and gifted with a supernatural power to perform miracles. That he is to assemble all the sons of Israel from pole to pole,—bring

them back to their own country, and be their king. That he will restore the temple at Jerusalem, and reorganize the ancient form of divine worship. That he will restore the nation of Israel to their ancient nationality, form them into a moral, wise, and peaceable people, esteemed, and left in peace by all other nations, so that each one may rest safely and securely under his vine and under his fig tree, and serve his God according to the dictates of his own conscience. Other Jews combined a higher mission with the coming of the Messiah, and supposed that the resurrection of the dead would follow immediately on his appearance, so that afterwards, earth, and man, and everything pertaining unto them, should have another and more spiritual character. Again, other Jews, of course, having more philosophy than religion, supposed that there never did come, nor will there come any such personage, as generally understood under the Messiah; that every person promoting correct knowledge about God and man, and the things pertaining to them, every man adding to the common welfare of mankind, to the stock of learning, to the treasure of science, is a Messiah to his fellow-men; that many such Messiahs had come, and many are still to come, in order that the human race may be brought to such an exalted condition as is described by the prophets, when all the different nations on earth will worship but one God, and in one way, when the difficulties existing between Jews and gentiles will be radically removed, and all men will be brothers and sisters, forming one large family, united by their conviction in the existence of one true God. This Messiah question has been disputed by our foremost theologians of the Spanish period. Maimonides, commonly called Rambam, stated the twelfth principle of Judaism to be the belief in the coming of the Messiah, which Rabbi Joseph Albo, commonly known as the בעל העקרים, firmly contradicted, stating that one may be an Israelite in the very strictest sense of Judaism, without believing in the coming of a Messiah, since there is no commandment in the Bible to believe so.

Such are the difficulties and differences which exist about this question. Let us spend a little while to search faithfully in the holy Bible, to find out, in truth, what was promised by the divine messengers of God. Let us be guided by faith and sound judg-

ment. Let us address prayerfully the Most High, for His assistance in this contemplation.

In order to have a correct view about the Messiah, we must first investigate the very historical source from which this national idea originated; and to this end I must give you, in the first place, a full description of the mission of the people of Israel, as this was written down by Moses and the prophets; and this will constitute the theme of this lecture, being the mere introduction to the course of lectures which I am about to deliver on the Messiah.

#### THE MISSION OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL.

In my last lecture, I stated that our ancestors were redeemed from Egypt in order to receive a divine revelation, containing the true instruction concerning God and his divine attributes; concerning man, his duties, and hopes; concerning the way man should pursue to elevate himself to a higher and more perfect nature—to live happy, and die in a confidence of a better future. This religious code was not given to the house of Israel alone and exclusively; our fathers and we were only made the bearers of this divine word of God's will, and it was made our sacred duty to promulgate our holy possession unto all nations on earth. Thus we read in the nineteenth chapter of Exodus: "In the third month after the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day they came unto the wilderness of Sinai; for they had departed from Rephidim, and they came to the desert of Sinai and encamped in the wilderness; and Israel encamped there opposite the mount. And Moses went up unto God, and the Lord called unto him from the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: Ye have seen what I have done unto the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now, therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, then shall ye be unto me a peculiar treasure, above all nations; for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." In these important words is expressed the mission of Israel, and the sole object of divine revelation. As it becomes the priest's duty to serve his God ac-

according to the best of his conviction, and to promulgate his divine knowledge to his fellow-men, so became it Israel's duty to worship the Most High, and to be henceforth the teacher of all nations, to proclaim God's holy name to the whole world; "for mine is the whole earth," saith God. God is the loving Father of all mankind, all the inhabitants of the earth, in all the different climates and zones, in all the various regions and countries, are the beloved objects of his care; to all of them, Israel should bring the divine truth, that they all may hear it and live; to this end, our forefathers were selected from among all nations, to be God's peculiar treasure, to be a sanctified instrument in the benevolent hand of Providence, to be a holy nation through the holy purpose they serve, by purity, morality and piety. But before the Israelites can fulfil their divine mission, they ought to know themselves all the sublime truths of the revealed word, they ought themselves to believe firmly in the divine doctrine, which they should proclaim, to be convinced of its beneficial consequences, to know by experience that it has the power to save man from the snares of vice and impurity, that it redeems from the bondage of fiction and darkness; that it guides man to the brilliant light and truth, into the heavenly garden of morality, purity of mind, and firmness of character; they ought to know, by their own experience, that this law teaches man to live happy in the midst of sore distress, and to die confident in God, in His mercy and justice; for none can teach a doctrine with love and enthusiasm—at least none can expect sweet fruits of his mental seed—if he teaches what he does not exactly believe in himself; of what he himself has not sufficient evidence; and no evidence is stronger or deeper-rooted in the heart than that which has been obtained through one's own experience. In order to effect such a love, such a zeal and enthusiasm in Israelites—in order to gather the best evidence of the consequences of God's divine law on the field of experience, there were required long ages, many years of practice, many generations had necessarily to pass away, and live in and according to these religious dictates, to experience their blissful influence; for mental prosperity develops itself but slowly, the realization of spiritual principles requires a long process of time; wherefore their progress is almost imperceptible to the eye of the mere observer of passing events.

In order to have a field to gather experience, Israel ought to have and actually had a country of their own, where they could fully enjoy their heavenly property; where they had leisure and opportunity to develop their spiritual faculties and their mental capacities in accordance with their religion; where they were at liberty to take such a direction, to pursue such a course as their law required of them; where they could educate and strengthen themselves for their great mission. Therefore, God gave them for their religious instruction a political and civil code, based upon the principles of the purest democracy, independence, personal liberty, and self-government. The mind of the Israelites was not to be engaged with the projects of warfare, nor with the speculations of commerce, neither should it be occupied by the perplexing calculations of natural philosophy, by the combination and figures of mathematics, nor by the lofty propositions of metaphysics; they should rather be a simple agricultural nation, each resting under his vine and under his fig-tree, subsisting on the products of their land, which flowed with milk and honey; they should develop their mind and exercise their mental faculties, in experiencing the blessed consequence of God's word, in comprehending thoroughly the lofty destiny to which all of them were designated by the hand of Providence; to educate themselves in their mode of thinking, feeling, acting, and speaking, to be the teachers of all other nations, to be the priests of the Most High, for which their civil law, the situation and oriental products, and even the pleasant climate of their country, were favourable and extremely well adapted; but also to prepare and strengthen themselves to meet all the oppositions, all the hardships, oppressions, and injustice that would befall them in the process of their history, in the fulfilment of their divine mission, if they disobeyed the will of Providence and went astray, if they did not pursue the path which the hand of the Almighty had pointed out to them, and given them the most suitable means to proceed on it; to learn to meet with hardships and oppressions, and still not lose confidence in God and His divine instruction; for it is evident that we Israelites must fulfil our mission; we must realize the will of our God; we must diffuse the shining light of truth which we received from Sinai.

Through all the world, from east to west, from pole to pole,

one of two things must happen. Either the Israelites obey the voice of the Lord, live in and exclusively for his sacred faith, and teach the other nations, by the living example of the peace and happiness they enjoy, of the order and prosperity of their own country, of the enlightenment, good morals, and liberty prevailing among all the people, of the brilliant success and glorious development of his history, as Moses clearly enough expressed it: "Behold I have taught you ordinances and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep, therefore, and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these ordinances and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people; for what nation is there so great? who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call unto him for? and which nation is there so great, that has ordinances and judgments so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day?" (Deut. iv.) Or, as Isaiah said (chapter xlii.), "Behold my servant (the people of Israel), upon whom I am leaned, my elect in whom my soul delighteth. I have put my spirit upon him; he shall bring forth judgment to the gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard abroad. A bruised reed he shall not break, and the smoking flax he shall not quench; but he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment into the earth, and the isles shall wait for his law. Thus saith the Lord thy God; he that hath created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which comes out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit unto them that walk therein,—I the Lord have called thee in righteousness; I have taken thee by thy hand; I have formed thee, and set thee to a covenant of people, to a light of nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out the prisoners of the prison, and them that sit in darkness from the prison-house." Or, if the Israelites go astray, break the covenant of the Lord,—if they will not pursue the path of virtue and righteousness, turn their minds to vain imaginations and idols, and their hearts to carnal desires, to low passions,—then God will execute judgment, punish the erring people, in order to recall them to the way



of virtue and piety, to fit them again to dwell in the heavenly home of the loving Father, to return to their exalted destiny: and if they still refuse, if they will not return, still harden their hearts, shut up their ears not to hear the gracious voice of their Father in heaven,—that then they should be scattered abroad among all nations and tongues around the globe; they should be persecuted, trodden down, hated for their sin, and for the sin of their fathers; but wheresoever they go, they must still take the divine truth along with them, and carry it to all nations around the globe, that all of them may see it, and at last appreciate it. Thus should Israel be punished, if they refuse to serve the Lord in joyfulness; in the happiness of the heart, from the abundance of all that maketh glad the heart of man. Such is the mission of Israel, and these are the two ways to accomplish it. The path they had to pursue was dependent on themselves solely. Thus it was foretold by Moses and the prophets.

In one of the last speeches of Moses, which commences with the twenty-eighth chapter of Deuteronomy, and ends with the thirtieth, these two ways—which Providence has given to Israel to fulfil their sacred mission—are spoken of in forcible and very expressive terms. The address is too long for being recited entire; but I wish that every one would read it, and he will find that I have drawn my remarks from this source. The same is the case with an address of the prophet Isaiah, which begins with the fifteenth verse of the fifty-second chapter, and ends with the fifty-fifth chapter; where the downfall of Israel, the distress, the hardships and sorrows they will experience in the world among opponents, their resurrection, their final triumph, the acknowledgment of truth by all nations, are powerfully described. Allow me to recite a few verses merely. “If the mountains depart, and the hills be removed, my kindness shall not depart from thee; neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord, that has mercy on thee.” (lix. 10.) In respect to the final triumph of truth, and the fulfilment of Israel’s mission, the prophet says, in this same address, “Behold thou wilt call a nation thou didst not know, and a nation that hath not known thee will run to thee; because of the Lord thy God, and for the holy one of Israel, for he has glorified thee.” (lv. 5.) To stimulate the people for their mission, even if in the midst of calamities and

distress, to assure them of a blessed future as the result of their painful task, the prophet says, farther: "For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and return not thither, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater,—so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall make prosperous him whom I send; for ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." (lv. 10–12.) You will read in these two addresses, which I particularly recommend to your attention, as in many other chapters of the Bible, that Israel—the whole nation, and no particular man—was chosen to bring the truth of the Almighty to all the nations on earth, either amidst peace and joy, happy in their own country, if they would obey, and be constantly a holy nation; or amidst pain and grief, in distress and calamity, scattered and persecuted—if they would disobey the word of the Most High—if they would go astray, and forget the holy covenant, the object of their sacred mission.

And if you ask me, which part of our sacred faith shall be diffused among all nations? I must answer you, Only the fundamental truths, the principal doctrines, the abstract truths concerning God and his attributes, concerning man, his duties and hopes, shall become the property of all nations on earth. "One shall say, I am the Lord's, and another shall call himself by the name of Israel, and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel." (Isaiah xlv. 5.) "And the Lord will be King over all the earth, on that day the Lord will be One and his name One." (Zech. xiv. 9.) Every knee will then be bent before the Lord, every tongue will glorify and proclaim his holy name, every heart will rejoice in truth, in the glory of our God; and as once Israel did on Mount Carmel, so shall once all nations united and combined proclaim: "The Lord is the one and true God, the gracious Father of all men, the kind, benign, and merciful Saviour of all his children; all men are the beloved objects of his care, all men are brethren; we are all but one great family, and God is our



Father." To this end should Israel bring all mankind; this is our lofty destiny; this is our glorious banner, which we are to carry from pole to pole; but the ceremonial part of our faith is the exclusive property of Israel; it has never been given unto us to teach it to other nations; but partly to separate our forefathers from paganism, from the altar of idols, which they saw adored in Egypt, and in all the countries round about them; partly to prevent us from being divided and subdivided into an innumerable amount of sects; and partly to stamp us with the signs and tokens of our faith, and of our nationality, that we, if scattered, may remain all over the earth one and the same nation, designed for one destiny; that we may not be swallowed up by the overwhelming multitude of other nations, before all the world shall have accepted our sacred message, until all nations adore with us the ONE and true God—until our mission is fulfilled. "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come that were lost in the land of Assyria, and they that were outcasts in the land of Egypt, and they shall worship the Lord on the holy mount in Jerusalem." (Isaiah xxvii. 18.) "And in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain at the house of the Lord shall be established on the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills, and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come and say, Come, let us go up to the mount of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for the law shall go forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strange nations afar off, and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; no nation shall lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; but they shall sit every man under his vine, and under his fig-tree, and none shall make them afraid, for the Lord of Hosts hath spoken so." (Micah iv.) The common acknowledgment of truth will effect in all men a thorough and genuine fear of God, a general desire to practise justice and mercy, in order to find grace in the sight of the Lord.

Justice and mercy will then make all men brothers, will inspire them to harmony and peace, combine them to form a fra-

ternal union. This is the sublime end of Israel's mission; and before this condition of mankind is brought about, Israel's mission is not at an end, and so long must we uphold our nationality with all the signs and tokens with which God has marked us, with all our biblical ceremonies by which we know each other in all the different parts of the world; but we are not obliged to teach them to the gentiles.

Our mission has been and is still misunderstood, or rather not understood at all, by many ignorant or indifferent Israelites, as well as by almost all the Christian interpreters of the Bible. They call it the mission of the Messiah; they ascribe the importance of our nation in history, together with all the instructions and prophecies of the Bible relating to it, to one man, to one son of our nation, whom the Christians adore as a God. But they ought to consider, that the son has not given birth to the nation, —but our nation gave birth to this and all other sons that first taught truth to the world, even to all the pagan world. They ought farther to consider that all the divine truth they possess not only came by our sons, but was taken from our sacred shrine, copied from our code; and every word that strangers have added, every dogma taken from abroad, is but a heresy of idle priests and monks, a mere product of the dark ages of ignorance and superstition. Again, they ought to consider that this mission is still not fulfilled, though the Christian Messiah long ago perished; that this mission was partially fulfilled before that Messiah appeared. Moreover they ought to consider that he brought them no accomplished truth; Martin Luther and many others have reformed his doctrines, and the majority of the people in our present age disbelieve his principal doctrines, and hundreds of reformers have grown up in our present century. They see these difficulties and say: "He will come a second time;" of which there is neither an evidence, nor is there the least ground for the supposition. To prevent the people from returning us their best thanks for the truth they possess, they made him a God; and to him who does not believe in this imaginary deity, they say: "Whosoever believe and be baptized shall be saved; and who believeth not, shall be damned."

Instead of coming and learning the whole truth from us, to

seek for the end where they found the beginning, they send their missionaries to us; they are to teach us doctrines which they have taken from abroad; because our own doctrines they can never teach us, for this would be as if the child would say to his mother, I am much wiser than thou art,—as if the branch would say to the tree, I bear more fruits than thou doest. It was, and is still, Israel's mission to promulgate the sacred truth to all nations on earth; to diffuse the bright light that first shone on Sinai's sanctified summit all over the world. The progress of civilization, of science, arts, and enlightenment level the way for this promulgation; the Christian missionaries prepare the heathen to accept, at some future day, the eternal truth from the hand of Israel; the infidelity so tremendously raging in Christianity all over the world, the innumerable sects in which it is broken up, give us the best evidence that the dogmas of Christianity are not any longer of a satisfactory nature, either to the profound investigator, or to sound common sense: this gives us a satisfactory evidence, that the time is close at hand when they will come and say, Let us ascend the mount of the Lord, let us enter the house of the God of Jacob; for from Zion cometh forth the Law, and the word of God from Jerusalem.

And now, my dear friends, after I have given you a full description of the mission of the people of Israel, our own destiny, our problem which we have to solve in the history of mankind, we are enabled to go on with our proposed investigation of the Messiah, which I will do in my next lecture. But let me remind you of all the hardships that our fathers experienced, because of this mission; how they were persecuted with sword and fire, driven like outcasts, like the wild beast of the field from one country to the other, from land to land; how they were bereft of their earthly joys, of their possessions, of their liberty; nay, of their families, of their fathers and mothers, of their wives and children; how thousands of them died the martyr's death; but they kept their heavenly property, their religion, and went confidently from land to land, to slavery, to poverty, to death, and were never tired of their pilgrimage, of their sacred mission: remember this, and the importance of our name in history, and learn to be pure and pious sons of our nation, worthy of our pious ances-

tors, of our great and important mission; learn from this to be proud of the honourable name of Israel, and act constantly so as to win for it the respect and regard of all men; learn from this to be inspired for our sacred mission, to be pious and pure, moral and virtuous, so as to deserve the glorious name of an Israelite, so as to be actually a priest of God, a representative of his holy word,—that the name of the Lord may be glorified by you, and you be happy and joyful in Him.

Let us conclude to-day with the fifteenth Psalm.

“ Lord! who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart; he that beareth no evil words on his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour. In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not. He that putteth not out his money to usury, and taketh not reward against the innocent. He that doth these things, shall never be removed.” He will live in the sunshine of God’s mercy, in the light of the Father’s love. Amen.

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