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The rebels of the Bible, 1931.



REBELS OF THE BIBLE

BY

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER  
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One of the great miracles of the Bible is its supreme humanity. The Bible is a complete and accurate miracle of human life. Every mood of life, nearly every emotion in human life, every perplexing thought is reflected in one book or another, on one page or another, of the Bible.

The Bible employs every conceivable medium of physical expression, every vehicle as a means for the portrayal and expression of all the experiences of men. Lyric poetry, epich poetry, the proverbs, memoirs, epistles, the drama and a fine realism, a remarkable sense of history and a ripened and seasoned vista are in evidence throughout the Bible.

Thousands of men and women pass across its pages; saints and sinners, heroes and cowards, kings and beggars. They are all human. They are not mere puppets or manikins upon which to drape a moral lesson. They are flesh and blood. The Bible never idealizes human beings; hardly a saint without his feet of clay, hardly a sinner without his touch of Godliness.

The immortal heroes of our Bible, Abraham, Moses and David never leave the hands of the Biblical interpreters without having their faults and frailties sharply pointed out.

The Bible never eulogizes the deity and never deifies humanity. Man is not God and therefore man is not perfect. His destiny is



to strive after perfection. However, the Bible never humiliates man. It never makes man feel his utter and complete worthlessness. Man's life is not a (Hebrew word) delusion. Man's efforts do possess cosmic merit. Man has his limitations, his finite, he is subject to mortality, pain, sickness, old age, death. He can't always realize his ambitions; his food and drink are not nectar and ambrosia of God but bread wrung from his soul by the sweat of his brow.

And yet man's life is not altogether insignificant. "Man is made in the image of God." Even the finite moves in the streams of infinity. "Man is made a little lower than the angels."

And something else of special importance does the Bible emphasize, - the relation of man to God. And this brings me to the discussion of this morning, the rebels of the Bible.

The same moral law which God created, even as He created the physical laws of nature, the same law is binding upon God as it is upon His creatures. The King, Himself, who made the law is subject to the same law which He made for his subjects.

God is not a willful divine tyrant. God, Himself is subject to those laws of justice, and love which He, Himself, established for the universe. Therefore man and God as far as moral life is concerned, belong to one fraternity, as it were. Man can appeal what he regards as the unjust acts of Divinity to the tribunal of the moral law which God created.

Therefore Abraham could say when he feels that God has not fulfilled the full requirements of the moral law in his relation to the given situation, Abraham can challenge Divinity and say (Hebrew) Will the Judge



of the whole world not do justice?"

So that in the Bible you will find no men cringing before Divinity. Judaism never taught men a dumb submission. That is why you will find almost every principle of religion which we have come to accept as an axiom, questions, doubting, challenging of some skeptics of the Bible, existence, unity of God, His moral administration of the world, free will, rewarded punishment, immortality; all these principles are here and there questioned by some one of the Bible and they are questioned not as a matter of metaphysical speculation. These problems are presented not for intellectual solution in the Bible. The Bible is not a book of philosophy. The Bible is a record of the religious experiences of men and women.

These questions leap to the lips of a man or a woman because some tragic emergency in his or her life, some cruel experience, some sense of injustice suffered, some feeling of having been victimized by fate, forces this thought upon the believer; the death of the young, suffering of the innocent, (Hebrew) suffering of the righteous, (Hebrew) the peace of the wicked, the inexplicable, seemingly unjust phenomena of life. These are the things that make these men and women question and frequently turn them into rebels.

I want to speak of three of them this morning. One of them was a prophet, undoubtedly the greatest of the prophets, Jeremiah.

Like all prophets Jeremiah had his dark moments. In one of these dark moments he hurls this challenge to Deity: "(Hebrew) "Thou art righteous O Lord, yet I will hold a dispute of it." (Hebrew)



(Hebrew) "I will speak with thee concerning the needs of fundamental justice, Why is the way of the wicked prosperous?" (Hebrew) "Why are all those who deal treacherously at peace?"

There is the old plaint of men who want to understand God's moral management of the world. Why does the good man suffer. Why does the evil man prosper? That's always baffled the believer and Jeremiah, the prophet, is baffled and in his human impetuosity he would urge upon God swiftly to correct this injustice. "Pull them out like sheep for slaughter. And prepare them for the day of slaughter." Put a quick end to the wicked, reward the righteous and the people will know that Thou art God and everybody will be righteous.

And Jeremiah in his calmer moods after the spirit of rebellion is perhaps quieted within him, realizes that God's way is the wiser way. If all wrong was instantly punished and all right instantly rewarded there would be no merit at all to mortality and morality. This is the ethics of 'Put and Take.' A mitzvah performed, immediately you are paid for it. That's a business not morality. The highest morality is the disinterested type, the doing of good for good's own sake; and the reward of goodness, ~~THAT~~ is goodness itself; and the punishment of sin is sin itself. It takes a man of keener insight, of finer understanding to realize that the essence of morality, the very heart of moral life is the doing of good for its own sake, even though it involves suffering and sacrifices. And the nobility of man, the majesty of the human soul is evidenced only when a man lives the noble life and performs his moral duty in spite of tremendous costs involved.



But Jeremiah rebels in his dark moments against it as men have since in all times and in all generations.

Another one of the rebels of the Bible was Ecclesiastes. Before I pass on to Ecclesiastes, I should like to point out one other type of rebellion of which prophets were frequently capable, of which Jeremiah was an example.

Sometimes they rebelled against their own fate, their own destiny, and their own mission. A great man who lives for a great ideal is oftentimes victimized by his ideal, suffers for it. Men misunderstand him. Men mock and taunt him. Men pain him and he would like to surrender his mission, he would like to throw off the yoke of the burden of the great things placed upon him by destiny. He would like to escape. And Jeremiah tried it. He rebelled against having been chosen for prophetic leadership. He wanted peace and quiet: "O Lord thou hast enticed me, and I was enticed. Thou hast overcome me, and hast prevailed: I am become a laughing-stock all the day, everyone mocketh me... Because the word of the Lord is made a reproach unto me and a derision all the day."

They laugh at me. I am become the target of their cynicism, of their contempt.

"And if I say I will not make mention of Him nor speak any more in His name," I am through. "Then there is in my heart, as it were, a burning fire shut up in my bones and I weary myself to hold it in but cannot."

And so the rebellion is there and the answer to the spirit of rebellion. A great man can not escape his destiny much as he would like to. Once you have an ideal and it is real, although it breaks you, you can't escape it. It enters right into your bones like a burning fire. You may rebel



against it but it has possessed you and forever after you are the victim of your ideal, both the king and the slave, one and the same.

I said that the second great rebel of the Bible was this anonymous man who goes by the name of Koheleth, Ecclesiastes, a profound sceptic. He questions not only God's management of the universe but the value of every human experience.

"You say that life has meaning, that life has purpose." I say  
(Hebrew) "Vanity of Vanity everything is vanity."

"You say that the goal of human life ought to be acquisition of wisdom, to learn more and grow in knowledge." I say: "I put my heart to seek and to search out wisdom concerning all things that are under heaven. And I found that it is a sore task; that God hath given to the sons of men." (Hebrew)  
"The more wisdom the more vexation." (Hebrew) "And the man who increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." "The fool and the wise are alike. The same fate overtakes them both."

"You say there is progress in the world, that man should strive to make this a better world in which to live; that mankind can rise to higher levels." (Hebrew) I say, "That which is crooked can not be made straight, that which is wanting cannot be numbered....And there is nothing new under the sun."

"You say, man is made in the image of God, the summit of destiny. That makes destiny higher than that of the beast of the field." I say, "That which befalleth the sons of men befalleth the beast. As one dieth so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that man hath no preeminence above the beast; for all is vanity."

"You say, that God favors the good and punishes the evil. I say,



"All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean and to the unclean, to him that sacrificeth and to him that sacrificeth not; as is the good so is the sinner."

Now nothing in the literature of the world, nowhere, will you find anything more devastating of the whole moral structure of society than this penetrating scepticism of Ecclesiastes. And it is a miracle that the Bible includes this Book of Ecclesiastes. This represents the thinking mood to which men and women are subject during their lives, particularly in their old age and it should by all means find a place in that encyclopaedia of human thought, the Bible. And it does find a place in it. And if one were to take this scepticism seriously and permit it to dominate one's thinking and action one would be beaten before starting out in life. In that way lies madness.

And so the Book properly ends with this sentence whether by Koheleth himself or by some later editor of the Book: "After all is said and done," after you have speculated and meditated and indulged in the luxury of pessimism, (Hebrew) every argument having been heard, "Fear God and do his commandments for that is the whole man."

The secret of life is in trying to live a righteous life, doing the good. Whatever satisfactions can come into life can come only as a result of doing the good that every happiness may be yours, can only be derived from that life. Life has its limitations, life has its frustrations but if there is any measure of satisfaction, of contentment, of happiness that can be obtained out of life, it can be gotten only out of fearing God and doing his commandments, for that is the whole of man.



My soul is weary of my life;  
I will give free course to my complaint;  
I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.  
I will say unto God: Do not condemn me;  
Make me know wherefore Thou contendest with me.  
Is it good unto Thee that Thou shouldest oppress,  
That Thou shouldest despise the work of Thy hands,  
And shine upon the counsel of the wicked?  
Hast Thou eyes of flesh,  
Or seest Thou as man seeth?  
Are Thy days as the days of man,  
Or Thy years as a man's days,  
That Thou inquirest after mine iniquity,  
And searchest after my sin,  
Although Thou knowest that I shall not be condemned:  
And there is none that can deliver out of Thy hand?  
Thy hands have framed me and fashioned me  
Together round about; yet Thou dost destroy me!  
Remember, I beseech Thee, that  
Thou hast fashioned me as clay;  
And wilt Thou bring me into dust again?  
Hast Thou not poured me out as milk,  
And curdled me like cheese?  
Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh,  
And knit me together with bones and sinews.  
Thou hast granted me life and favour,  
And Thy providence hath preserved my spirit.  
Yet these things Thou didst hide in Thy heart;  
I know that this is with Thee;  
If I sin, then Thou markest me,  
And Thou wilt not acquit me from mine iniquity.  
If I be wicked, woe unto me;  
And if I be righteous, yet shall I not lift up my head -  
Being filled with ignominy  
And looking upon mine affliction.  
And if it exalt itself, Thou huntest me as a lion;  
And again Thou showest Thyself marvellous upon me.  
Thou renewest Thy witnesses against me,  
And increasest Thine indignation upon me,  
~~XXX~~ Host succeeding host against me.

Wherefore then hast Thou brought me forth out of the womb?  
Would that I had perished, and no eye had seen me!  
I should have been as though I had not been;  
I should have been carried from the womb to the grave.  
Are not my days few? cease then,  
And let me alone, that I may take comfort a little,  
Before I go whence I shall not return,  
Even to the land of darkness and of the shadow of death;  
A land of thick darkness, as darkness itself;  
A land of the shadow of death, without any order  
And where the light is as darkness.



And thus through chapter after chapter of that mortal drama one hears the agonized cry of this afflicted soul, this agonized groping in the darkness of his world, seeking in the midst of his physical suffering some spiritual stability, trying to understand why God permits the righteous to suffer.

At long last peace does come to the soul of Job. The poet makes God really reveal himself to Job out of the whirlwind and makes God, Himself, speak to Job:

"Job thou art human. Thou canst not understand the mystery of the Divine pen and the Divine mind. The laws of the universe are the Creator's home." Man's mind is finite and limited and must forever be unable to solve these riddles of life. It is enough for man. And God has placed within him a moral law, to do good, to seek the good and to pursue it. And in that striving after the fine and the good and the noble man should try to find the complete satisfactions of his life. Man does not suffer physically because of his sins. Man is not rewarded physically because of his virtues. Man's rewards and punishments are inner rewards and punishments. So that you, Job, torn and afflicted as you are must find solace, comfort and inspiration in the thought that in your moral life you are at one with God. That still remains your sanctuary, wherein you still remain Lord and King, even though outwardly you have been beaten and battled by fortune, even though in physical things you are a pauper now and shot through with pain. Man's empire is the empire of mind and spirit. Therein the righteous man is Lord and master and the wicked man is slave."

And Job knelt humbly before this new reflection which had come to him and submits and is satisfied.



There are other rebels in the Bible. I can not speak of all of them. Sufficeth it to say that when you get into a mood such as that of Jeremiah or Ecclesiastes or Job and you feel that that mood means the end of religion, the end of faith; that that mood definitely and completely vanishes God from the world, go back to the pages of your Bible and see how men, thousands of years ago wrestled with the same problem and ended up not in lesser faith but in greater faith. It is out of the depths that men first begin really to call upon God.





1. The Bible - mirror - Every c. - Every medium

(a) A fine realism - Thousands of men  
Always human - flesh + blood - puppets.

(b) Idealizes no one - clay feet -  
Abraham etc. - Bible with humanity  
- his destiny not perfection

2. B; however, does not humiliate - grief.  
Infinite & finite; - Man cannot escape  
pain - food-dread -

(a) But - not insignificant. Maya -  
- cosmic hearings - Image - Even  
brute - stream

3. Both Man & God - moral law - The King  
is subject - Just - plain story -  
Fraternity - Appeal -

(a) Not cringe - Abraham. - No  
dumb submission.

4. Every principle, Religion - sceptics  
- Existence

(a) Not as Metaphysical problem - Wrong  
- When he suffered - פרשן דלוי -  
Rebel!











5 - You say - God <sup>favours</sup> ~~favors~~ the good - Punishes the evil.

I say: "All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean: ~~that~~ to him that sows righteousness and to him that sows unrighteousness; as is the seed, so is the harvest."

Answer - > 23 & 10. That way his madness

7. Job. - Questioned God's administration of the world.

(1) A righteous man - afflicted. Why?

(2) He sinned! No! He will not damn himself to see the face of divine justice!

(3) Eliphaz counsels him: "Don't question!"

"Shall mortal man be just before God?"

"Shall a man be pure before his Maker?"

But Job will question!

God is always good - Happy is the man whom God correcteth - despise not the chastening; the Lord - He will heal!



(31) Baldad - would have believed that he had  
sinned! Repent the same!

"God will not cast away an innocent  
man!"

No! "I am innocent!" He destroyeth  
the innocent and the wicked. If a  
change slay suddenly, He will work  
at the calamity of the guiltless!"

(1) I can't come to justice with  
God. "He is not a man, as I am, that  
I should answer Him, that we should  
come together in a court of judgment.  
There is no arbiter betwixt us, that  
might lay his hand upon us both"  
But I will cry out! (Just chap. 10)

8- And now and on speaks yet out, the  
distress, his soul. He rebels at God -  
at old rivalry -

(1) Finds peace at last

God reveals Himself  
man's intellect is  
luminous  
Get there is divine  
truth revealed



"To fear of God, that is wisdom  
And to shun evil is understanding"

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World never perfect - lives are  
blasted!

"For what is the hope of the fathers, tho  
he get him gain  
When God taketh away his soul?"



{ 29. 1-20  
30. 1 and 9-11 and 16-23  
31. 35-37

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(2) Rebelled against his destiny and his mission:

"O Lord, Thou hast enticed me, and I was enticed,  
Thou hast overcome me, and hast prevailed;  
"I am become a laughing-stock all the day,  
Every one mocketh me . . . .  
Because the word, the Lord is made  
A reproach unto me, and a derision, all the day,  
And if I say, I will not make mention, Him,  
Nor speak any more in His name.  
Then there is in my heart as it were a  
burning fire  
Shut up in my bones,  
And I weary myself to hold it in,  
But cannot."