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The Prophet by Sholem Asch, 1955.

"THE PROPHET"

by
SHOLEM ASCH

November 13, 1955

My dear friends, in celebrating this Jewish Book Month we are made aware that fortunately today many books of Jewish interest are being written and published, and it is of interest to note how many writers, both Jewish and non-Jewish, go back to the book of books, to the Bible, for their inspiration, their themes and their subject matter. The great author, Thomas Mann, who passed away not so long ago, wrote his magnum opus, his chief work, on the story of Joseph. And the Book of Genesis, a five-volume work of Thomas Mann, in the nature of a midrash, on the narrative of Joseph and his brethren. Sholem Asch, the foremost yiddish writer of our day, has gone to the Bible time and again, both to the old Testament and to the new Testament, for his material, "Moses", "The Nazarene", "The Apostle", "Mary" and now "The Prophet". That ever replenishing source of literature, as well as of religion and ethical movements newer runs dry.

Sholem Asch's "The Prophet" is Deutero-Isaiah - the second Isaiah of the Bible. You may recall that the Book of Isaiah is made up of sixty-six chapters. The first thirty-nine are clearly the work of Isaiah the great Prophet who lived around the middle of the eighth century and Judea - long before the destruction of Judea - considerably before even the destruction of the Kingdom of Israel. Chapters Forty and Fifty-five are clearly the work of the prophet who lived after the destruction of Judea and of The Temple in 586 before the Common Era. He's evidently preaching in exile. He's a nameless prophet but because his prophecies have been incorporated in the Book of Isaiah, he is frequently spoken of as the second Isaiah - Deutero-Isaiah. The remaining chapters, from Fifty-six to Sixty-six represent a collection of prophecies written by anonymous prophets before the exile and during the exile and thereafter. The background of the prophecies of this second Isaiah is one of the greatest moments in Jewish history and in the world's history. The events leading up to the fall of

Babylon in 549 at the hands of Cyrus of Persia, and the movement on the part of the Jewish exiles to return to their original homeland in Judea and to rebuild Zion. The man who most nobly and eloquently embodied the ideal of the Return and of the Restoration, and who inspired his generation, was this unknown Prophet, Deutero-Isaiah, who is the hero of this book of Sholem Asch, "The Prophet".

There are many parallels, of course, between that movement of the Sixth Century before the Common Era - the movement of Return, Restoration - and the movement in our own lifetime to bring about the establishment of the State of Israel. And Sholem Asch does not fail to suggest, by deft and subtle allusions and incidents in his story, the parallels between these two great movements and their comparisons. The divisions which we find among our people today, the divisions of opinion and conflicting attitudes as to the need and the desirability of re-establishing the State -- the fears of dual allegiance, the charges of disloyalty, the tendencies towards assimilation and all the related phenomena of modern Jewish life, are reflected in the story of Sholem Asch, when he recounts the first return from the Babylonian exile. This Prophet, Deutero-Isaiah, is of supreme importance in Jewish history, not only because of his work in connection with the Restoration, with the return of the Babylonian exile, but also because of his major contribution to the development of Judaism, and therefore to the religious and spiritual development of mankind.

The idea of Monotheism, which was of course shared by all the prophets of Israel and by those who preceded Deutero-Isaiah, receives its highest and purest formulation at the hands of the second Isaiah. No prophet is so thoroughgoing in his rejection of polytheism, mythology, of idolatry, as is this prophet. God is truly one and alone! "I am the Lord, Who made all things, Who stretched out the heavens above, Who spread out the earth, Who was with me?" Deutero-Isaiah rejects the dualism which was central in the religion of Zorasta, the religion of Cyrus and of the Persians and Medes. Zoroastrianism was perhaps, among all the religions of the ancient world, the purest religion and the closest approximation to Monotheism.

Nevertheless, Zoroastrianism divided the world into two realms - the realm of darkness and of evil ruled over by Ahriman, and the realm of light and of good ruled over by Ormuzd or Mazda. The Prophet Isaiah the Second, rejects this dualism. God he maintained, is

He created the light and He created the darkness.

He created the peace of the world and also created the evil.

I am the Lord

Who does

all these things. And at the heart of the religious philosophy of Judaism is today this thoroughgoing monotheism - the rejection of dualism.

And the second outstanding feature of the religious philosophy of this second Isaiah, was his remarkable universalism. The God of Israel is the God of all nations. The God of Israel is not a national God, but the universal God, Who has chosen the people of Israel to proclaim His unity and His universality. It is significant, very significant, that this prophet, who, more than any other of the Bible, was what you might call, if you used modern terms, a nationalist, who worked for the restoration of Judea and the return of the exiles to Palestine. But this prophet, above all other prophets, was the most universal in his religious and his spiritual outlook. Some of the Jewish and non-Jewish universalists of our day have sought to create the impression that the prophets of Israel were somehow non-political, supra-national seers - not at all interested in the survival of the Jewish State and of the Jewish nation, but wrapped up wholly in faith and morals, as if religion is any less universal when it embraces the love of one's own country and the pride of one's own people. Now there is no evidence, absolutely no evidence, of such a strange notion anywhere in the writings of the prophets. Within their ample world outlook, the prophets of Israel found room for man the individual, for the nation and for humanity. The prophets of Israel loved their people with a surpassing love -- loved them even when they castigated them. They agonized over their people's misfortunes. They wept over the destruction of their country. They prayed for its restoration. And Deutero-Isaiah was foremost among them.

And a third great contribution which this Prophet Isaiah made to the thought of Judaism was this - he gave Israel the ideal of mission. He gave to Israel a philosophy of its history; an exalted interpretation of its role in the world - the scheme of things. The early prophets who preceded this Isaiah, Amos, Hosea, Jeremiah, were in the main, prophets of doom. They denounced their people for their evil-doing, they warned them of the evil consequences of their actions. At times they were very sharp and bitter in the oppressions and in the injustices and inequalities which they saw among their people and they spoke of them. Principally their words were tinged with the mood of doom and disaster. But the prophet of the Exile had a different task before him. Doom had overtaken the people - the country had been destroyed, the people had been driven into exile - the temple was in ruin. Their task, as lovers of their people and of Judaism was to try to rebuild the morale of the people - to sustain them in their trials and tribulations - to comfort them - to hold up before them the vision of a great destiny which awaits them in the future. This is the keynote of the prophecies of this second Isaiah. He is the great comforter. God has abundantly punished the people - their fathers - for their sins. They are now cleansed and purified. They are now ready to resume their march in history, in confidence and in high hope, because God has chosen them to be His witness to the nations of the world, to teach the unity of God and the brotherhood of man and universal righteousness and universal peace to mankind. And so the keynote of this Prophet is

servant, Israel

My beloved one

whom my soul delights
upon him

eousness to the nation. I have set him as a light to the world to bring the imprisoned out of the prison house, and them who dwell in darkness, out into the great light.

Israel has now become

the servant of God. It has

suffered - it will continue to suffer - but his suffering is the inevitable accompaniment of the performance of a great mission to redeem mankind.

I will support him

in

I have put my spirit

He will bring forth right-

And Sholem Asch caught these themes in his book "The Prophet". The book opens, of course (and an imaginative writer like Sholem Asch could not fail but use that as the great opener for his book) with the Feast of Belshazzar: an orgiastic feast of a thousand lords who had assembled to celebrate the glory and the greatness of the Empire of Babylon. And in the midst of the feast the King Belshazzar and the assembled guests see the fingers of a man's hand writing upon the plaster of the walls of the palace -- a mysterious inscription, which frightened the King who could not decipher the meaning of that inscription

And he summons his astrologers and his enchanters and his wise men to read the riddle for him and they cannot. And then the Queen of Belshazzar's father, the old Queen, recalls a Jewish Prophet in Babylon who is noted for his wisdom and his power to read riddles -- mysteries of life. And so Daniel is summoned before the King and is asked to interpret the meaning of that strange inscription written upon the walls of the palace. And the Prophet Daniel interprets the inscription....Mene, Mene....God has numbered the days of your Kingdom which is about to end. Tekal....you have been weighted in the balance and found wanting. Parsene.....Your Kingdom is about to be divided and given to the Medes and the Persians. And just as Daniel finishes his interpretation, couriers arrive in haste and announce that Cyrus has crossed the Tigris and is advancing on Babylon.

It is on the eve of these stirring events, events leading up to the fall of the great Empire of Babylon, which covered practically the entire then known world, that the Prophet Isaiah begins his preaching to the Exiles - Jewish Exiles in Babylonia. And his first words are words of comfort.

"The man who addressed them was young; he was full of health, strong, upright and solid as though hewn out of one cedar trunk, and dry as seasoned wood. His bones protruded from his taut brown skin so that it seemed there was not an ounce of fat in his whole body. He was all skin, bone, and sinew. His glowing, flashing eyes were set deep under a high brow and his face was adorned by a short, thick black beard. He was speaking to those sitting at his feet, his hands outstretched towards them with bony fingers interlaced. His congregation were crowded together as though they had coalesced into one body. They hearkened with all their soul and being: heart, body and spirit yearning to hear. What was he saying to them? Was he talking at all?

"He was not just speaking. He was like a raging hot wind that seizes upon four corners of a house, shakes it and makes it tremble.

For his word was a furious, fiery whirlwind, a mighty cry of victory. It was as though all the angels of heaven were with him under one canopy and that the song of the celestial beings was heard in its mighty trumpeting. It was a roaring cry, a thunder which reverberates and breaks back again but still does not terrify as it crashes. It was the kind of thunder that rolls and brings good tidings, sounding a message of consolation and salvation.

'Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people.

A voice calleth out. In the wilderness make ye clear a way of Jehovah, make straight in the desert the highway for our God.

Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight. O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain.

O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength.

Lift it up, be not afraid.

Say unto the cities of Judah, 'Behold your God!' ' ' "

And so Sholem Asch continues to quote from these great prophecies from the Second Isaiah, and I must say that the most stirring and exalted passages of Sholem Asch's "The Prophet" are those borrowed from the Bible. And the listeners

"stare at one another and their eyes are confused. To whom does he refer?" (when he said)

"I have raised up one from the North, and he shall come; From the rising of the sun shall he call upon my name; And he shall come upon the princes as upon mortar, And as the potter treadeth clay."

To whom did he refer? this Prophet.

"Can he be thinking of Cyrus, the king of the Medes and Persians who is coming up against Babylon?"

And Isaiah was thinking of Cyrus. In fact he thought of him as the Messiah

Adenai - the anointed of the Lord - and speaks of him as the Messiah who had come to destroy Babylon and set the Jewish Refugees free that they may return and rebuild their homeland, and by destroying Babylon this Prophet believed that he would also destroy the deities of Babylon and that the one God - the God of Israel - would come to be acknowledged as the God of the whole world. Some of those that listened to him were, of course, gladdened in heart - others were disturbed. Some, again, resented him. Some thought that in calling Cyrus the Messiah he was preaching treason; that Persia would conquer Babylon. This was treasonable doctrine and might bring disaster upon the people. There were Jews in Babylon who had grown wealthy in commerce and in trade and were content to remain in Babylon. They were not eager to return to the barren rocky hillsides in Judea. There were Jews in Babylonia, young Jews

born in Babylonia, second generation Jews who were fully assimilated to their environment. The younger people were enchanted by the majesty of what they saw and of the religious processions in honor of the Babylonian Gods. For them Babylonia had become the promised land.

Isaiah is summoned to appear before an assembly of Judean refugees and he is told, hereafter not to preach any more, for he may bring ruin upon his people. He is forbidden to appear in the synagogues which the Jews in Babylonia had built. But Isaiah continues to preach of course.

Cyrus marches on Babylon, comes near to its gates and while he is negotiating with some of the Priests in Babylon to betray their city to him, as part of the stratagem, he withdraws his forces from the walls of Babylonia, and the Babylonians of course, raise a shout of exaltation and triumph that Cyrus is retreating. And, of course, the Prophet who had prophesied the victory of Cyrus is at once in disrepute -- he is taunted -- called a lying Prophet -- jeered. But when the armies of Cyrus finally enter Babylonia and conquer it and put Belshazzar to death, the fame of this Prophet rises sky high. He is hailed and acclaimed and the Prophet himself believes that his great vision has come true.

But now that Babylon has fallen and the Israelites are about to return to their land, the true faith, the faith in the one God will spread from the East to the extremes of the West.

is no other God but Me.

I am God.

And there is no other.

But the old Prophet Daniel, who had read the mystery of that inscription on the wall requests the young Prophet Isaiah to come to see him. And he comes. And Isaiah says:

" 'Peace be unto thee, my son!' He spoke in a thin clear voice.

'I sent for you to enjoin you to pray to God lest your thoughts become darkened at the time your eyes and ears are opened.'

"The prophet was terrified and astounded. He went white and answered in a trembling voice:

'Father of Isarel! Have mine eyes deceived me in what I saw; have mine ears misled me in what I heard?'

'God in heaven forbid! Your eyes have seen straight and your ears have heard aright. But your heart is too hasty and your soul too

thirsty for the redemption. You repose more confidence than is seemly in flesh and blood, which is here today and gone on the morrow, vanished and without remembrance. You have seen a branch and taken it for the whole tree.'

"The aged Daniel closed his eyes. His face seemed to take on a new translucency and a pure light spread over his countenance. A faint sound issued from his lips:

'I saw in the night visions,
And behold one like the son of man
Came with the clouds of heaven.
And came to the ancient of days,
And they brought him near before him.
And there was given him dominion, and glory and a kingdom,
That all peoples and languages should serve him;
His dominion was an everlasting dominion
Which shall not pass away,
And his kingdom,
That which shall not be destroyed.'

"Daniel was silent. It was apparent that his spirit was exhausted. He seemed to sleep.

"Silent and troubled the prophet went from the room.

" 'I told you that Daniel was exceedingly old and no longer knows what he is saying,' said Zerubabel.

" 'Daniel knows well what he is saying,' whispered the prophet as though speaking to himself. 'He sees vary far -- to the very end of days.' "

I am afraid that because of the lateness of the hour I will not be able to complete the discussion of Sholem Asch's "The Prophet". I am very grateful that we have had this marvelous music of Ernest Bloch this morning - music from his Avodet Hakodesh sung so beautifully by the members of our Choir, under the direction of Mr. Willard, the organist and we were privileged to listen to the superb rendition of Ernest Bloch's Baal Shem Suite by the splendid and gifted artist, Mr. Josef Gingold. I will, therefore, leave the main discussion of this most interesting book "The Prophet" for next week, when we will have more time to discuss not only this great book, but also the profound philosophy of Deutero-Isaiah - his interpretation of the role of history in the world - the role of Israel in the history of the world - the reason for the suffering of Israel - and comment on the parallels between those days and these days.

We will now conclude our service with the Adoration.

1) J. Book Month - many books - interesting to note how many ^{sermon 881} written (1)
J. and now J. - go back to the Book, Books - the Bible - for their themes
and subject matter.

Thomas Mann's - ^{magazine} opus - is a 5 vol. "history" on Joseph.

Sholem Asch - the present Jewish writer, and day - he goes
to the Bible - both the Old Testament - for his material -
uses - the Babylon - many - the Bible now on the "Purport"

That even - reflects his source, later - as well as a red. variation
variation varies must dry. - 22 700 -

4. S. his Purport is written to - the Purport of the Restoration,
Present book, Isaiah - (3 parts) - collaboration.

The book found - one, the present moments in history -
and in the words history - the Fall, Babylon (549) - and
the movement on the part, the J. writes (586) to return
and should give.

The man who met nobly + eloquently embodied the ideal
of ~~Isaiah~~ the Return from Captivity - inspired his generation
was this unknown prophet -

There are many parallels, 7 - cases, between that movement
of the 6th c. B.C. - and the movement in our own
life - time to reestablish the Tab. Israel - And S. Asch
does not fail to suggest by apt and subtle allusions, the
parallels and comparisons. Division, previous among Jews
to-day, emphasizing attitudes into the real and desirable

* re-establishing the state, peace, dual alliance & change of
disloyalty - assimilation and bad retrogression, modern

J. Sp - are ~~referred~~ ^{referred} but ~~into~~ ^{also} among the
Jews, Babylon to whom Israel brought his message;
Returns

3/ D.L. is / supreme importance to J. history - w/ and he.
his work in connection with the return from the Exile & de-
but also he, the major contributions which he made to the
rel. esp. development of Judaism and of humanity.

① Monotheism represents the highest and purest formulation
no prophet is so thoroughly in rejecting polytheism & idolatry.
God is one and alone! "I am the Lord, who made all things,
who stretched out the heavens alone, who spread out the earth,
who was with me."

He rejects the divinities, the Corruption religion, which
was perhaps the purest religion among all the polyth. religions
the ancient world. Which divided the world into two
realms - the realm, darkness & evil ruled over by
Abel man, and the realm, light & good - ruled over by
Br mighty, or mighty:

Israel maintains . . .

② Universality - The God, Israel is the God, all
nations. The God, Israel is not a nation's god but
the universal God - who has chosen the people Israel to
proclaim His unity and His universality.

It is significant that this prophet who more than any other (3)
was a 'nationalist' - worked for the restoration, indeed the return
of the J. nation - was the most universal in his vision &
sp. outlook.

Some J. & non-J. 'universalists' have sought to create the
impression that the prophets, Israel men "non-political", supra-
national seers, not at all interested in the survival of the
state, or the J. nation, but wrapped up wholly in faith and
morals - as if religion is any less universal when it
embraces the last, our country or the first, our own
people. There is no evidence for such strange notions
anywhere in the writings of the prophets. Within their
ample world - indeed the prophets found room for every
nation and humanity. - The prophets of Israel loved their
people with a surpassing love, loved them even when they
castigated them. They agonized over their people's misdeeds.
They wept over the destruction of their country. They fought for
the restoration. And Isaiah - Is. - was foremost among them.

4) Third Great Contribution - gave Israel the ideal, Nation.
gave it a philosophy of history - and an exalted interpretation
of its role in the world.

① Early prophets - down - But now - up -
Comfort - how to maintain their morale?

God had promised - to purify it - & prepare it for its
eternal role - a witness & leader -
12/21/12 - 12/21/12 - 12/21/12 - 12/21/12

moment, the performers, the musician -

5. Bull gun - ^{organ} Fort, Belkay - ^{1000 he had. Sunday out, Verses, 1000, 1000, 1000.}

On the wall - fingers, 6 nails hand wrote on the planks, the wall, the keys, ~~black~~ - 6 wythes kept - the keys color changed - his hands gave away - this time knitted together - Enchanters - astrologers - were over - could not - the

Green - Daniel - there, there, Telle, and Persen
2 JN - just has remembered the dogs, your key down short
2 JN - it to an end

SPX - } as have been marked on the balance of your work
PODD - } as Kingdom is divided and parts of the beds and Persen

6. Just then comes a visit - 'Cyprus has crossed the Tigris and is advancing on Babylon'

7. It was on the eve of the Fall, B. that I saw him begin his preaching to the exiled Jews in Babylon.

Fort Carpenter - as for you - paid the pennants - God's power will now return

✓ (49-52)

8. Yes - the Prophet was thinking of Green - He saw in him the 5th Prince - came to redeem Israel - He thought he saw in him now - an anointed Wholly

the pure ~~fact~~ membership faith / Israel would be extended to the farthest part of the earth —

3/11/1941 11/10 - 131/2 0010 10 - 21/2 (1111) 101 1131 1141
The defeat of B. would lead to the defeat of the B.
deities and of all polytheism & idolatry. - New Jerusalem would become center of a new world.

9/1. Some Jews welcomed his prophecy - Others feared it & looked the prophet. Any one prophesying the defeat of B. at the hand of Persians was a traitor - might bring ruin upon his people.
There were Jews who had given wealth in commerce and trade to B. - Quite content to remain where they were. Did not seek to return to the barren rocky hillside, Jordan.

This was Jew, the 2nd generation, B. born, who were fully assimilated to their environment? Their eyes wandered away from the land after the fall of B. - The young people were enchanted by the majesty, the rich provinces in Persia, the B. gods.
For them all B. had now become the Persian king.

10/1. An urgent assembly is called - & the rich perfumed Jew, leaves Israel - & attempt to seal his lips. Prophet is forbidden to speak in the synagogues - would be looked over to the King, B.

11/1. ~~He is~~ ~~before~~ ~~Israel~~ continue to speak - ~~(134-6)~~

12/1. As part of his strategy Jews - negotiating with Persians - But Mordechai made the city to give the gate - retreats

1. of 120 or 200
 2. suffering
 3. WRHS
 4. why?
 5. suffering
 6. any the clear
 7. for the
 8. brilliant
 9. brilliant
 10. brilliant



1. brilliant
 2. brilliant
 3. brilliant
 4. brilliant
 5. brilliant
 6. brilliant
 7. brilliant
 8. brilliant
 9. brilliant
 10. brilliant

6. a short, exaltation was - & the Prophet is in trouble (6)

Parable - Lying prophets -

but when the armies, Gues quickly returned Jerusalem
to the center, the city - and Belshazzar was slain - his
name reversed again - He is hailed and acclaimed..

(a) But old Daniel - Gues was not the only. (189)

13/. Exp. since Gues as part, his agreement with prince
& his own analysis acknowledges the deviancy & does reference to it.

When was the hope of converting the world?
He is shaken.. - Something was wrong with his vision! What
was it. ~~(291)~~ (294)

14/. He is gladdened when Gues. When he returns to B -
was the historical prophets ~~(296)~~ - variously
reversed - Exiles begin to gather for the return -

15/. But his doubts remained unresolved - Agony said -
- why should Israel suffer? His vision (Is. 53)
- a prophet and a people that has a prophetic role must live

16/. His personal vision - (309 - ~~317~~ 317)

17/. Exiles begin their return - He does - Is. 53
"I will press thee in a fight the matter that my relatives may be
into the eyes of the Lord"