

WINNING JEWS TO CHRIST

A Handbook to Aid Christians in their Approach to the Jews

by

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CHAPTER TWO

A PECULIAR PEOPLE

A GLANCE AT THEIR SINGULARITY

Some words of caution:

In all your dealings with the Jew, remember that, although he affirms that he wants to be treated like any other human being, he was, is and will ever be aware of being a peculiar people. His first patriarch Abraham was peculiar, was different from all men around him. And God chose him and his descendants to be His people, holy, separate, and exemplary. When Jacob came to Egypt he asked for and received a separated, exclusive place for settlement. For hundreds of years Jacob's offspring (the Jews) lived in Egypt and remained a distant people. Egyptian civilization with its few virtues and many vices had no effect on them. Balaam saw their camp in the desert and prophesied their future as "**the people [that] shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations**" (Numbers 23:9).

The Law on Sinai, by inculcating into their hearts and minds the faith in the One True God, and the abhorrence of any other gods, was the final touch (the master stroke) which separated them forever from all other people.

For many years there were several attempts by the Jews to be like other people, but God always frustrated such attempts. "**And that which cometh into your mind shall not be at all, that ye say, We will be as the heathen, as the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone**" (Ezekiel 20:32).

During their first exile in Babylon large numbers of Jews became "like others." They assimilated and vanished as Jews, but the main stem remained intact. Many of them returned to Zion, where they could live apart from Gentile contact and influence.

During the period of the second Temple many Jews tried to be like the Greeks, then like the Romans, but the nation as a whole preserved its integrity. After centuries of vigorous training by the prophets and their successors, the Jews, by the time of their second exile, were already thoroughly imbued with what we call Judaism. Nothing could turn them from it and it involved a life peculiar, distinct, and isolated from the life of all other people.

It often happened that, in order to escape persecution, or to gain recognition when needed, Jews found it necessary to assume “Gentilism,” to put on Gentile garb and to speak Gentile language. Sometimes even to shave the beard and the sidelocks in order to look like a “goy.” After living in a country long enough to be acclimated and adapted to environment, they even began to look like their Gentile neighbors, like Arabs in Arabia, like Chinese in China, like Germans in Germany, etc.

But all adaptations and simulations were only external. Essentially the Jew remained Jewish no matter what disguise he put on. There has always been the almost impregnable wall of partition between Jew and Gentile. No matter what contacts he made with the Gentile outside, his home always remained the sanctuary of Judaism whereto the Gentiles had no access, except occasionally for some business transaction. They could not dine together. There could be no thought of intermarriage. There was no particular subject which could be equally near and dear to both of them.

The usual subjects of the Jew’s conversation have been Judaism and the Jewish people at home and abroad, in all corners of the earth. Of course he could not share his feelings about these with his Gentile friends. Nor could he share such sentiments as the Gentile is likely to voice. What is dear to the Gentile (especially religion) has always been, at best, taboo to the Jew. The practices and rites of non-Jewish religions whether Egyptian, Babylonian, Canaanite, Greek, Roman, so sacred, so dear to his Gentile neighbor, were an abomination to the Jews. And so were the rites, processions and pomp of medieval Christianity. The bloody sports and pastimes of Spain, fencing in Germany and prize fights in America, etc., have, to the Jew, been equally brutal, unfit for man created in the image of God. Nor have the carnivals, the various races, masquerades, dance parties ever, been to his liking. The average Jew cannot fathom why a man should be so enthusiastic, so excited, so engrossed in physical sports as is the average Gentile.

Not only have these differences kept the Jew apart from the Gentile, he has also distrusted the Gentile, considering him unpredictable and unstable, who might get drunk (or be incited by some demagogue) and start a quarrel which could lead to a general brawl and bloodshed. So he has stood apart and aloof, looking down upon the Gentile as an inferior being.

Every day in prayer the pious Jew thanks God for not having made him a Gentile. While this self-righteousness is not praiseworthy we may admit that the average Jew has in most cases stood above his Gentile environment in moral virtues. In all places at all times he was more humane than those around him.

Why so? Because at all times and in all places he took the Scriptures as his guide. Not always did he interpret God’s Word properly, and not always did he follow His guidance. There were times when he would sacrifice his life for every iota; there were times when his zeal was without knowledge; there were times as in the present when he was ready to abandon the precepts of the Torah — but always he was proud of his heritage, proud of being peculiar, and proudly conscious of the obligation to be better than the “*goyim*.” Noblesse oblige: He being of noble ancestry.

That they survived notwithstanding all the vicissitudes to which they were exposed in dispersion among hostile peoples, proves that their aloofness, their being peculiar, has been justified, has been of God.

A. THE PECULIAR NATURE OF WORK AMONG THE PECULIAR PEOPLE

To be an ambassador of God and particularly to the Jews is the greatest privilege which a human being may attain. But this also involves great responsibility, devotion, spiritual fortitude, an abundance of love and patience, and last but not least a fair knowledge of this extraordinary people.

Remember, the approach to the Jew must be altogether different from that to any other people. The African tribesman, for example, having no deep-rooted prejudices against Christ or Christianity, may after some hesitation cautiously try to get acquainted with the missionary and listen to what he has to tell him.

Things have radically changed everywhere in recent years. The “natives” no longer fear or revere the “white man.” Up until a few years ago they considered the white missionary as a member of the superman race, possessor of extraordinary might, wisdom and wealth, who would dispense to them money, food, clothing, medicine, education and other advantages that make the white man great, if they (the natives) would accept the white man’s God.

It is not so with the Jew. He is quite satisfied with himself. He is sure that the missionary has nothing to offer him except a religion which his teachers have taught him to abhor, to despise, and to shun. He has always been conscious of being the elite, and above all other nations, an aristocrat whose noble lineage goes back thousands of years, who possessed the highest degree of true culture long before the nascence of the people who now are so boastful of their civilization.

He has always been firmly convinced that his people are the wisest of people and that he is superior to all other nations in noble virtues, such as purity of mind and body, sobriety, charity, etc. Prejudice, fortified with some experience, has taught him that he has nothing to gain by abandoning Judaism and going over to “another religion,” but on the contrary, he has everything to lose. “Judaism” is not just a belief in certain doctrines or a performance of certain rites (on special occasions) but it is his very life and being. We shall see later in the chapter on Sects that even the present-day Jew who is slack in the observance of the traditional laws and customs still feels as one with those of past generations who zealously clung to those laws and customs. “Going over” to Christianity is considered by all Jews (observant or non-observant) as desertion to the enemy’s camp, as high treason, as an unpardonable sin.

Furthermore, whereas the Gentile after having become Christian may often remain with his kinfolds as peacefully and amicably as before, the Jew, on becoming a Christian, might immediately and cruelly be ostracized from his people; his parents would lament him as dead and curse his memory, and his friends would turn to be his implacable adversaries. In short, he would become an outcast and everything would be done to make his life miserable.

There surely are discouragements and inconveniences in evangelizing the Jew, but there are also a great many advantages in this particular field which outweigh all the disadvantages (and which one does not find in other fields).

In the Jew, contrary to the foreign “native,” you will find generally an intelligent, clean and sober person with whom you as a Christian have much in common. You may discuss with him politics, economics, social and civic affairs and often also literature, music and art, etc., which may be of interest to both of you. And above all, there is the Bible (in this case the Old Testament) which is regarded as holy by both of you. Moreover, the subject of Christianity is not foreign to him although much of his knowledge about it is badly distorted.

Furthermore there is that great advantage in “converting” a Jew, in that one may have the assurance of not only having saved a precious soul, but of having also given birth to a new missionary. It is, as we have shown, difficult to convince the Jew that his conception and evaluation of Christ and Christianity has been wrong. But as soon as he is convinced of his error, and his ignorance turns into knowledge, there is no holding him back from rushing out and calling, “Eureka, I have found it!”

First he wants to exculpate, exonerate himself before his people by proving why he has accepted Jesus as his Messiah. By so doing he is a missionary indirectly. Then, as his self-defense is usually of no avail, because his people will always think of him as an apostate, a renegade, or at best a demented character, he usually takes to the direct mission work to show his people that not only is he not to be blamed for his acceptance of the Messiah, but rather he ought to be emulated by all his people, since Jesus the Messiah is the only Way, the Truth, and the Life, and that in following Him, one fulfills the true Jewish faith, becomes a completed Jew.

And he is well equipped for his mission work, because it took him a long time of arduous study, inquiries and arguments before he finally was sure that Jesus is not only his personal Saviour but also national Messiah and the only hope for his people.

But whether Jewish mission work is difficult or not, whether it is pleasant or not, advantageous or not, we must remember that we are on marching orders and we are not to argue with our Superior on High. Our Sovereign who commissioned us is not paying us a prize for each and every soul we bring to Him. Our orders are to preach, to sow the seed. The results of our preaching and sowing are in the hand of God, not in our hand. (Even if our seed has fallen on barren rocks we have done well because we have carried out His orders).

And we must bear in mind that God’s commission is not to be trifled with. (See Ezekiel, chapters two and three).

“Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.

“Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Again, When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul” (Ezekiel 3:17-21).

On the other hand, we are entitled to expect visible success of our faithful labor as the Psalmist assures us: **“They that sow in tears shall reap in joy”** (Psalm 126:5).

Yet, just as we ought to know the kind of field we are about to cultivate, we ought to know how to plow and harrow it, find the opportune time for sowing the seed, etc., we ought to have a knowledge of the Jewish field, and it is our hope and prayer that this book will provide this knowledge.

Hence let us get better acquainted with the present-day Jew and his background. This book is not going to tell you “all about the Jews.” Many large volumes could not do that. Our intention is to open a window through which you may have a glimpse of the life of this unique people. You’ll have to widen the view, to see more and more of it, from every angle. We thus hope that this book will spur you on to further, deeper study of the Jew’s history, the longest and the most interesting history of any nation, of his literature, the richest of any nation, and of his religious life, the most devoted life of any nation.

The more you learn to know this peculiar people, the more you will understand the Holy Scriptures, the more you will grasp why God has chosen this people, and to what sublime purpose. And, last but not least, you will better understand the New Testament people — all Jews — their thoughts, their actions.

B. A GLANCE AT JEWISH HISTORY

The history of the Jewish people is the most eventful, the most colorful, even the most tragic history of any other people past or present. It is a most spell-binding, entrancing story of narrow escapes, of miracles, real miracles, and you would do well to acquire a fair knowledge of it. Without the knowledge of his long, most eventful history as background, you would know little of the present day Jew.

Jewish history is composed of two parts:

1. The Bible which is the history of the Jews from the very beginning until after their return from the Babylonian exile. The Apocrypha (especially the book of the Maccabees) and the New Testament books reveal a great part of their life during the Second Commonwealth.

2. Post-biblical history.

But, bear in mind that while the Bible is an inspired, holy book, the later history books are to be taken critically, with a “grain of salt.” The Bible, although written by Jews, is no respecter of persons. When something was wrong with the Jews or with their leaders the Bible records it truthfully in unequivocal words. Sometimes it even appeared that the authors were too severe, too exacting, even too censorious in regard to their people. It is not so with the later histories in which one will not find much fault with the Jews. If anything went wrong among Jewry it was almost always someone else (the “goy”) who was to be blamed. As regards the relations between Jews and the Gentile world, the Jewish nation is pictured as an innocent lamb among seventy wolves. (In Jewish tradition the Gentile world is composed of seventy nations).

This conception of Jewish self-righteousness all through the exile is to a large extent justifiable. If the Jews ever were mercenary, parsimonious, usurious, tricky, with which they often have been charged, they were forced to it by their adversaries. It was a matter of self-defense and survival; but whatever they were, they never were worse than their enemies and accusers, and often not as bad.

Their life in exile was one continuous struggle for survival. And whereas they did survive, it proves either that they are the fittest people on earth, according to “modern” theories of evolution, or, as we believe, God has preserved them miraculously for some purpose which we well know.

C. WHO IS A JEW?

Now we have spoken of the “Jew” taking it for granted that you know who is a Jew. To a certain extent you do. Everyone “knows” who is a “Jew”; and yet, Jews themselves have lately raised the question, “Who is a Jew?”

It was in the new State of Israel where there arose the demand for an answer to this question. And the answer to “Who is a Jew?” is now being discussed with much concern and acerbity by the Jews all over the world. So you see that even among the Jews themselves there is no consensus as to “Who is a Jew?”

Some say that only he who observes the laws of “Judaism” or rather “Rabbinism” is a Jew, whether of Jewish or Gentile descent. Others say that the observance of religion does not matter; it is only race which makes one a Jew. And there are various modifications of these two opinions.

Judaism has undergone various radical changes during the ages. One of the greatest changes, as previously mentioned, transpired during the eighteenth century when the Jews in Western Europe were enfranchised. Availing themselves of the rights to citizenship most of them left their ghettos with the intent to become knitted into one nation with the people of the country in which they sojourned. Gradually they abandoned all their own laws and customs that served to keep them apart from their Gentile neighbors, retaining but a few non-essential customs to be observed as a sort of “Judaism.”

During this eighteenth century, while thousands abandoned traditional Judaism, straying into agnosticism and other “isms,” about 300,000 Jews in Western countries accepted Christianity as their religion. So it was wherever their neighbors were Christian enough to show them a good example of what Christianity really is.

If the Jewish communities in these “free” countries did not totally disappear, it is due mostly to the repeated infusions of Judaism by the influx of Jewish immigrants who came from Eastern Europe (Russia, Poland, Rumania and others). There the Jews remained disqualified for citizenship. There they remained in their ghettos apart from the Gentiles outside the ghetto walls. There they were left to themselves, and traditional Judaism remained the greatest factor of Jewish life — the most precious treasure worth keeping and living for.

As these poverty-stricken habitations became more and more overcrowded, many had to depart and “go West” in the hope of finding their fortune abroad. These were the wanderers who instilled some new life into the dry bones of Western Jewry.

Thus the Jews of East European countries have for many generations served as a reservoir of traditional Judaism from whose constant overflow, their Western brethren who living in freedom were inclined to assimilate and be absorbed among the non-Jewish population, were somewhat restrained and resuscitated. They retained some semblance of Judaism making concessions to their traditions.

Then came that great catastrophe which practically wiped out “Eastern” Jewry, which had so long served as the mainspring and mainstay of Judaism.

First came the Nazi German horrible onslaught which exterminated about six million of those Jews — the majority of European Jewry. Then came Russian Communism which cruelly suppressed all vestiges of Judaism, thus forcing the three million Jews living under its sway to dissociate from their brethren abroad and assimilate and disappear as a people.

This double catastrophe was potent enough to instill despair into Jewish hearts all over the world and incline them to give up the struggle for remaining “Jewish.”

But God does not want the Jewish people to despair and disappear. A new star of hope rose on their horizon, twinkling and auguring new life and a glorious future: It was the establishment of the “State of Israel.”

D. THE STATE OF ISRAEL AS FACTOR OF NEW TRENDS IN JUDAISM

The State of Israel was to serve not only as a place of refuge, a haven of rest for all Jews who could not and would not stay in exile, that is, in Gentile lands, but also as a center of Jewish culture and religion which would shine as a beacon light to Jewry all over the world. It was to be a paradigm of how to live as Jews, and as the prophets envisaged it long ago; from Zion would come forth the Law, and the Word of God from Jerusalem (see Isaiah 2:3).

It was hoped that there would be established (reinstated) a supreme authority like the Men of the Great Synagogue or the later “Sanhedrin” * who would judge and decide on all matters pertaining to Judaism.

*** A body of authorized rabbis sitting in the “seat of Moses” as ordained in Deuteronomy 17:8-13 and acknowledged by Jesus (Matthew 23:2). According to tradition it was instituted by Ezra and Nehemiah.**

This hope is suffering much disappointment and setback because most rabbis, especially in the Diaspora, tenaciously hold to their medieval tenet that “Judaism” means all the laws and customs introduced into Jewish life throughout the ages. And this is the type of Judaism they want to perpetuate in Israel. Behind these rabbis stand most of the Jews in the Diaspora, who themselves are very lax in observing the innumerable rabbinic laws, but who expect their brethren living in Israel to do so. To them it is a kind of proxy religion, as if to say, and some say it expressly, “We of the Diaspora provide the funds to preserve your State so that you in turn preserve our religion — with which we cannot be bothered here. We pay and you pray.”

But the great majority of Israeli Jews who for the first time in the last nineteen centuries have tasted freedom, do not like to be fettered and enslaved again by any people, including the rabbis. Moreover, most of the Jews who settled in Israel since the establishment of the Jewish State have previously been weaned away from traditional “Judaism,” as have most Jews in the Western world.

However, the greatest obstacle to “Judaism” as the rabbis understand it and strive to enforce it is the “State” itself, or rather, the life in a modern state. For example, the observance of the rabbinic laws governing Sabbath rest would paralyze all modern communication and transportation, and cause untold trouble to the individual inhabitants of Israel, as well as grave danger to the security of the State as a whole. The same may be said about many other rabbinic laws which might endanger the functions of the State and the welfare of its inhabitants.

But whatever the temporary differences, difficulties and perplexities, the Jewish people tenaciously hold on to the great hope and ideal of Zion becoming not only the religious center of the Jewish people, but also becoming a “Light to the Nations.”

How will this hope materialize? Many still believe that the Messiah will soon come and establish the glorious “Messianic Age.” Others are skeptical; many disbelieve in supernatural changes. Yet the “State of Israel” as the rock upon which will be established the salvation of Israel, and by it, the whole world, is the hope, the only hope which now keeps the Jews and Judaism alive. Our next chapter on Types and Segments will present a closer view of present-day Jewry in its diversities and in its unity as a whole.

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