

“ISRAEL MY GLORY”

Israel’s Mission, and Missions to Israel

by

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CHAPTER EIGHT

THE NUMBER AND DISTRIBUTION OF THE JEWS; THEIR SOCIAL INFLUENCE; THEIR RELIGIOUS CONDITION AS JEWS; AND THEIR PRESENT ATTITUDE TOWARDS CHRISTIANITY

Their Number and Distribution

The number of Jews has been variously estimated at five, six, seven, eight to ten or twelve millions. Statisticians have largely guessed at the number, some cautious ones knocking off a million or two; whilst the more sanguine have added a million or two.

It is not possible to take an exact census of the Jews in any country, and ordinary difficulties are increased in getting at their number in out-of-the-way places and in countries only half civilized.

Physically they are a remarkable people. They flourish in every clime. Where statistics have been taken they show a larger proportion of births and a smaller proportion of deaths than those of the general population. The number of still-born children amongst the Jews is only about two-thirds of the number amongst the Gentiles as the proportion of the same total of births in each case. About the same proportion holds as to the children dying within the first twelve months of their age. Indeed they are an exceptional people physically, as well as in other respects, to which their dietary laws and abstemious habits may have contributed.

Their total number at the present time cannot be less than 10,000,000.

Their Political Status and Social Influence

During the last half or three-quarters of a century the Jews have gradually gained civil and religious liberty throughout the civilized world. Russia and Rumania are almost the only exceptions in nominally Christian lands. Their exceptional ability, coupled with their industrious and sober habits and love of learning, is bringing them by large numbers into the front rank of influence for good or for evil in every part of the world.

In the march of intellect the Jews in Europe have taken rapid strides since the opening of the nineteenth century. Their mental endowments, their educational attainments, and their material wealth have awakened feelings of envy and jealousy in the hearts of their Gentile neighbors.

This, sadly, has burst out into anti-Semitism in Germany and into open persecution in Russia and Romania. Indeed there is a Jewish question forcing itself on the consideration of nearly every government on the face of the earth. The rich Jews are the objects of envy and jealousy, and in many cases are socially ostracized and hated; whilst by others, the poor Jews, persecuted and driven from one country to another, are felt to be a burden by all.

The poor Jews are willing to work for much lower wages than will satisfy the Gentiles, specially when the latter are associated with trades unions. This arouses hatred amongst the working classes towards the Jews; the hatred is inflamed by agitators, and thus the Jews are made to feel that they are unwelcome and uncomfortable in all lands.

It must also be confessed that a considerable number of poor Jews sympathize with the Nihilists of Russia, with the Socialists of Germany, with the Communists of France and with the Socialists of our own country. The wrongs and persecutions of ages have predisposed them to listen to demagogues and agitators, who propose to right all wrong by turning society upside down, instead of listening to their own inspired Psalmist, who teaches that God's way is to turn society downside up, He "raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; That he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people" (Psalm 113:7, 8).

These various influences are now at work in raising a Jewish question throughout Europe, which is taking the form of open dislike, not on religious, but on social and commercial grounds, and which, in the overruling Providence of God, are weakening the attachment of the Jews to the lands of their dispersion, and preparing them, in the probable near future, for restoration to the land of their fathers.

Their Religious Condition as Jews

Many Jews are still bigoted religionists, but few if any are to be found of the type of Old Testament saints. Talmudical Judaism is still powerful amongst large numbers of Russian Jews, especially in Poland, and also in the Holy Land. This state of things obtains exclusively amongst those Jews uninfluenced by a higher education and Gentile culture. The power of the Talmud is broken in almost every other country. Numbers of Jews in Germany, France, America, and in England are avowed Rationalists, and care as little for Moses as for the Lord Jesus Christ. Some of these so-called reformers are seeking to abolish circumcision; others have ceased to observe their dietary laws; others wish to change their Sabbath to Sunday; and others advocate mixed marriages.

They are further divided into two separate communities called respectively *Sephardim* and *Ashkenazim*—the former representing the Spanish and Portuguese Jews, and the latter the German and Polish. These respective communities have synagogues, rabbis, including a chief rabbi, liturgy, and even a pronunciation of the Hebrew language exclusively their own. Nine-tenths of the Jews in our country belong to the Ashkenazim.

There is a somewhat influential sect of Jews called *Chasidim*. These are strict and fanatical, and profess to possess miraculous power. They are located chiefly in Austria and Russia.

A small number of Jews are called *Caraites*; are rejecters of tradition, and are located chiefly in the Crimea. These enjoy special privileges and are protected by the Government.

A considerable number in Europe are simply like their Gentile neighbors—money-getters, pleasure-lovers, worldlings, who from habit alone observe some of the sacred days and ceremonies of Judaism.

Some Jews in England have recently succeeded in their demands that prayers for the restoration of sacrifices shall be eliminated from their liturgies; whilst other and more orthodox Jews declare that this is an acknowledgment that the sacrifices were temporary and typical, and will thus confirm the Christian view of them.

Amongst and beyond these varieties there is a truth-seeking portion earnestly desirous of knowing God's way of saving sinners; thoroughly weary of the empty forms and burdensome traditions of modern Rabbinism; and considerably impressed with the power and influence of Christianity in the world, and also with the fact that amongst the best people in the world there survives, and even increases, a strong personal affection for Jesus of Nazareth.

The Present Attitude of Jews towards Christianity

A marvellous change in Jewish thought and feeling respecting Christ and Christianity has taken place during the last half century. In the early part of the present century, Jewish converts were very few, and Christian ministers of Jewish origin scarcely to be found. Now there are scores of thousands of Jewish believers, and hundreds of Christian Jews who preach the Gospel of Christ.

In the early part of this century blasphemy of the name of Jesus was perhaps the rule; now such blasphemy is exceptional. Jews, even eminent rabbis, are speaking and writing in the most respectful terms of Him, designating Him the greatest moral reformer that ever visited our earth.

Then, the New Testament was a prohibited book, or received only to be torn to pieces, or trampled under foot; now, it is gratefully received and read by hundreds of thousands.

The claims of Jesus are more widely and deeply considered to-day than at any former period since apostolic times. The hunger for, and the influence of the Hebrew New Testament is the most encouraging feature in modern missions to the Jews, and is an important sign of the times.

New efforts in Israel's interest are being organized in various lands. We welcome and rejoice over every new effort characterized by zeal, love, faith, and holy enterprise. This changed attitude of the Jews towards Christianity is the result mainly of the changed attitude, not of Christ, but of Christians towards the Jewish people—the result of patient, prayerful, persistent obedience to Christ in the proclamation of His glorious Gospel.

Will nothing induce the Church of Christ, in her desire to evangelize the world, to observe the Apostolic order “**to the Jew first**”?

In the observance of this order she would be on the line of obedience and consequently on the line of blessing. The Jews are accessible in nearly all lands, and the Gentiles in all lands are accessible to the Jews. The demands of the Word of God, and the needs of the world, call with a loud voice to the Church of Christ to “**go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel**”—“**to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.**”

~ end of chapter 8 ~

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