

## JEHOVAH'S INTERNATIONAL LOVE

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Xenophobia, the fear and hatred of strangers, continues to blight modern society, just as it did ancient Israel and her neighbors. Some of the world's trouble-spots show Protestants fighting Catholics, or white Christians fighting black Christians. The question raised by this paper is whether the Hebrew Scriptures provide an answer to bigotry, or whether they only illustrate the problem.

A study of the laws and admonitions to Israel having to do with the *ger* and the *goi*, the sojourner within the tribes and the foreign nation outside, show a high standard of love for the stranger that cannot be challenged. Compliance by the Hebrews came short of these ideals, but throughout most of Old Testament history the Israelites were surprisingly tolerant of their neighbors. The pattern of nationalism starts to develop at the end of the divided monarchy and after the return of the exiled Jews from Babylon.

The ethical problems raised by the conquest of the Canaanites obviously reflect on the theme of Jehovah's international love, but they require a discussion too extensive for this paper. Only four areas will be examined: the Noachian laws, the treatment of the *gerim*, intermarriage with gentiles, and the prophets' views of the *goim*.

### THE COVENANT WITH NOAH

The opening chapters of Genesis are a tribute to the universality of Jehovah's rule. After the judgment upon society by the flood, a new regulation for all nations was established. The Talmud finds seven laws for all peoples in the Noachian Covenant.<sup>1</sup> Usually, however, these are shortened to three: the command to multiply and fill the earth, the right to eat animal flesh, but never the blood, and the sanction against taking human life; anyone guilty of murder must himself be put to death.

These laws were the core of a widely dispersed revelation of the will of God as to the political, religious, and ethical life of the nations. The first law provided for man to spread out and form small cultural and political units; it was implemented at the Tower of Babel. The second law made the sacrifice of animals for food a sacrament of wor-

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1. Steven S. Schwarzschild, "Do Noachites have to believe in Revelation," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, Jan., 1962, p. 298.

ship and a reminder that all life comes from God with the blood as its symbol. In the third law we find the dignity of human life established and with it the "Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself" concept of the societal parts of the Decalogue.

Evidence throughout the Old and New Testaments shows that the Jews expected all gentiles to observe these Noachian laws. Even the Jewish Christians in the Apostolic Age requested that gentile converts observe the rule against eating blood (Acts 15).

The Rabbis still refer to the *Noachite* as any gentile who tries to live by these universal laws given to Noah after the flood. Only on this basis can there be salvation for gentiles. On this subject Steven Schwarzschild has labeled Noachism the "out-patient department of Judaism."<sup>2</sup> He also notes that although a number of talmudic scholars followed the view of Rabbi Eleaser, that all non-Jews would be excluded from the joys of the next world, the majority went along with Rabbi Joshua who said: "All the righteous men in the world will have a share in the world to come."<sup>3</sup> Maimonides held that a gentile needed more than natural theology to qualify for heaven; observing the Noachian code was a part of it, but one also must believe in the Torah as the revelation of God through Moses.

The Rabbis understood that the resident-stranger (*ger-toshav*) would be fully converted, and accept the rite of circumcision within a period of time. If not, he would be named a "heretic of the nations."

#### THE GERIM IN ISRAEL

A sojourner could be anyone living in a land not his own, and where he had no inheritance. Most of the *gerim* mentioned in the Torah and historical books were descendents of the conquered, but not wholly assimilated, Canaanites.<sup>4</sup> A distinction was made between those nations that opposed the march of the Israelites and those nations that aided them. Thus, migrants from Ammon and Moab were to be excluded from the assembly of Jehovah, while migrants from Edom and Egypt could be welcomed (Deut. 23:8).

Numerous laws guaranteed equal rights to sojourners living within Israel. Parity in cases of legal dispute was granted in Israel's courts (Deut. 1:6; 24:17). The Sabbath day's privileges were extended to all sojourners (Ex. 20:10; Lev. 16:29). Sojourners were invited to share in the annual feasts, such as the Feast of Booths in the fall harvest time (Deut. 16:14). Even the opportunity to come before the great altar and worship Jehovah with a sacrifice was given to the *ger*, provided he came properly to the door of the tabernacle (Lev. 17:8).

2. David Castelli, "The Future Life in Rabbinical Literature," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. I, p. 314.

3. Schwarzschild, *op. cit.*, p. 299.

4. Johs. Pedersen, *Israel, Its Life and Culture*, Vol. I, p. 41 (Oxford, 1926).

More important to our theme than these laws granting equality were the admonitions to show special love and charity to the stranger. He is frequently listed with the poor and the destitute. The Lord God Himself is described as follows: "He is not partial and He takes no bribes; He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing" (Deut. 10:18). So at harvest time some of the grain and fruit was to be left behind in the fields for the benefit of both the poor and the strangers in Israel (Deut. 24:19; Lev. 19:10). Then, when the larger, three-year tithes were brought in, the *gerim* received gifts of food alongside the Levites, since "neither had any portion in the land" (Deut. 14:29).

On the negative side of the picture, it is not hard to find abuses of these laws. The foreigner was not released of his debts after seven years, as in the case of a "brother" (Deut. 15:3). However, the term here employed is not *ger* but *nochri*, evidently neither a convert or a sojourner within the tribes. King David conscripted only the *gerim* when he needed manpower to collect materials for the temple (I Chron. 22:2). But, was this discrimination against foreigners, or recognition of their superior skills? Of course there were always the "wicked men" in Israel that evoked the wrath of the psalmists or prophets by oppressing sojourners along with the orphans and widows of Israel (Psa. 94:6; Jer. 7:6 et al.).

The highest expression of this ideal is perhaps the language of Numbers 19:33: "The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native (*ezrah*) among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

#### INTERMARRIAGES

The practice of miscegenation was not condemned, unless it brought an unbeliever into the tribes who rejected the Faith of Jehovah. Nowhere is nationalistic feeling the basis for refusing marriage with someone of another nation or race. If the great concern of the Hebrews was to preserve a pure blood-tie with Father Abraham, this fact is not evidenced in the Scriptures. With every warning against marriage to the peoples of the land comes the reason: "For they will turn your sons from following after me to serve other gods" (Ex. 34:12; Deut. 7:4).

A passionate love affair took place between the prince of Shechem and Dinah, the daughter of Jacob. The law of seduction, not adultery, applied and they were free to marry, but on condition that the prince be circumcized and, as the text reads, "become as we" (Gen. 34:15).

No reprobation was leveled at Tamar, the Canaanite daughter-in-law of Judah who deceived him to bear a son according to the Levirate Marriage law. "She is more righteous than I," confessed the patriarch. Genetically, therefore, through Perez, all of the house of Judah has been as much Canaanite from Tamar as Hebrew from Judah.

The same case may be seen in the line of Joseph. Since the mother of Manasseh and Ephraim was the daughter of an Egyptian priest, the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim were half Egyptian.

Moses did not legislate against mixed marriages. How could he when his first wife was a daughter of Midian and his second wife was a Cushite? His most famous son was Gershom, meaning "Sojourner, who became the head of one of the three main orders of Levitical priests. The Cushite wife could have come from Egypt with the "mixed multitude" that was eventually amalgamated by marriage into the tribes. Another example from this time would be Caleb, the Kenite, whose conversion and loyalty to Israel made him worthy of a special portion of the promised land at Hebron (Josh. 14:13).

Rahab, the harlot of Jericho, belongs to the royal line of David, according to the geneology of Matthew. Ruth adds still another blood taint to the same family, but both of these foreign wives were fully converted to the Faith of Israel.

Such cases of intermarriage must have been even more common among the less prominent Israelites. The Levites, for example, were free to arrange marriages for their daughters with foreigners (Lev. 22:12) even when the man was a *zer* and not qualified to partake of the holy food of the priests.

A new pattern of racial segregation was set by the decrees of Ezra and Nehemiah. The struggling, post-exilic community could no longer afford to be tolerant of its pagan neighbors. The reasons given, of course, were religious, but the precarious status of the Jews during the fifth century added to the urgency to follow a hard line. Both leaders and priests in Jerusalem were required to divorce their Canaanite wives and send them away with their children (Ezra 10:44). Nehemiah 13 argues that although Solomon was chosen by God, "nevertheless his foreign wives made even him to sin."

This movement toward a fierce patriotism during the intertestamental period raises a question for critical theories that discover P-material within the Pentateuch. How could the scribes of post-exilic Judaism originate or compose passages that are definitely universalistic in nature, such as Genesis 9:1-17?<sup>5</sup>

#### THE GOIM AND THE PROPHETS

The Hebrews were never as tolerant of the nations outside her borders as they were with individual foreigners that settled within her land. Jonah's bitterness toward the Assyrians was more than likely a typical attitude for the Israelites during the divided kingdom. So it will be in the words of the prophets that the international concerns of Jehovah

5. Selby and West, *Introduction to the Bible*, p. 67 (Macmillan, 1971).

make themselves known. The love of God for Nineveh made Jonah a classic.

Amos views his own nation just as guilty as the others of "three transgressions and four." Jehovah exclaimed, "Are you not like the Ethiopians to me?" (Amos 9:7). He would punish all sinful nations, but then restore them: "In that day I will raise up the house of David that is fallen... that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all of the nations who are called by my name (Amos 9:11). This international aspect of the kingdom was linked to the conversion of gentiles by the apostles of the early church (Acts 15).

The prophetic writings of Hosea, Joel, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Jeremiah have only words of condemnation for the corrupt nations around them and silence as to their place in the future Messianic kingdom. But Micah, on the other hand, looked forward to the "latter days" when peoples and many nations would come flowing into the "mountain of the Lord" (Micah 4:1). Zephaniah also predicted the day when there would be "a change in the speech of the peoples," so that all of them would call on the name of the Lord. "From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my supplicants shall bring my offering" (Zeph. 3:9, 10).

No prophet speaks so frequently of the inclusion of the *goim* as does Isaiah. Of the Servant passages Gerhard von Rad comments: "On the one hand the Servant had a mission to Israel. Behind this mission, however, already lies a second, namely to be a light to the gentiles and to mediate Jahweh's salvation to the ends of the earth."<sup>6</sup>

The famous vision in Ezekiel of Gog, king of Magog, coming with the distant nations to war against Israel, is only half the story. The next scene shows those same nations, "Magog and those that dwell in the coastlands," acknowledging the Lord God (Ezek. 39:6). There is a curious reference to the *gerim* at the close of Ezekiel's prophecy. As he designates the land to be parceled out to each tribe in the restoration, the *aliens* are included. He says: "They shall be to you as the native-born sons of Israel" (Ezek. 47:21-23). Once again future, ideal Israel is not to be defined on the basis of blood-ties to Father Abraham, but on the reality of a true faith in the God of Abraham regardless of one's race.

This wider application of faith and repentance may also be seen in the witness of Daniel to the royal families of Babylon and Persia. When Daniel predicted the downfall of four great world powers, he did not imply their utter destruction. The "Son of Man" will rule over these nations and "all peoples, nations, and languages will serve Him" (Dan. 7:13, 14).

Finally, the prophet Zachariah spoke of the coming King who would "command peace to the nations; His dominion shall be from sea to sea"

6. Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, Vol. II, p. 253 (Harper and Row, 1965).

(Zech. 9:9). There will be war and opposition from the enemy nations followed by judgment. Then, he predicted, "Everyone that survives of all the nations shall go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord of Hosts" (Zech. 14:16).

The international love of Jehovah is to be traced in these great Hebrew prophets, not in the nationalistic feelings of the average citizen in Israel. If the prophets emphasized future, apocalyptic, rather than immediate, blessings to the other nations, it was because they saw no man-made, political answers. The Day of the Lord was never part of the distant future to them, but an imminent reality that would soon bring universal benefits to all peoples along with Israel.

#### CONCLUSIONS

1. Gentiles are not left in ignorance as to the will of God. There were moral standards given to the nations for life, worship and behavior. In particular these were reflected in the laws from God to Noah after the flood.

2. Israel merits commendation for her laws regarding the treatment of migrants and strangers. Not only were the *gerim* offered parity in the courts and in worship, but they also got special consideration with the poor and needy of Israel.

3. Intermarriage with foreigners was both legitimate and commonplace among the Hebrews. During the Exodus and times of the judges and kings, Israel was a melting-pot of many bloodstreams that united under the worship of the Lord.

4. Jehovah's redemptive love was international in Old Testament times, just as it was at Pentecost and will be in the world to come. Most of the prophets clearly saw the inclusion of the gentile nations in the Messianic kingdom. Their universal vision became the grounds for the apostolic mission to the gentiles which Christ commanded in His Great Commission.

5. The Old Testament is no more a racist book than the New Testament. Whenever the text speaks of human failure in this regard, such as Jonah's, it is placed in tension with the love of Jehovah for all men everywhere.