

ANTI-SEMITISM

PART I

THE REASON FOR AND BEGINNING OF ANTI-SEMITISM

By Arlen L. Chirwood

And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my first-born:

And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn (Ex. 4:22, 23).

“Anti-Semitism,” from a strict adherence to the compound structure and meaning of the word itself, can be defined simply as *being against (antagonistic toward, opposed to) the Semitic people*. In a grammatical and etymological sense (as pertaining to race), such a definition would include *all the descendants of Shem* (e.g., the Arabic nations as well as the nation of Israel).

The word “anti-Semitism” though is not really used in a broad sense pertaining to the entire Semitic line. Rather, the word is invariably used in a much more restrictive sense, referring to opposition exhibited toward only *one branch of the Semitic line* — opposition exhibited toward the descendants of Shem through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Webster’s New World Dictionary defines *anti-Semitism* as “having or showing prejudice against Jews,” “discriminating against or persecuting Jews,” “...hostility [toward Jews].” *The Jewish people alone*, among the Semitic people, have been the target of persecution after persecution during the past three and one-half millenniums; and “anti-Semitism” is an expression which has come into use pointing to these persecutions. Other Semitic nations are not in view at all.

“Anti-Semitism” is actually older than the nation of Israel itself. All anti-Semitic acts occurring over the centuries can be traced back to a common point in history. The roots of all Jewish persecution can be found in that which began to occur in Egypt, preceding the birth of Moses and the subsequent birth of the nation of Israel, at a time when *a new king arose over Egypt*, “which knew not Joseph” (Ex. 1:8ff).

Jewish persecution which began under this *new king in Egypt* has been continued by the leaders of nation after nation for over thirty-five hundred years of human history; and the results of such hostile action taken toward the Jewish people have always been the same. Chaos (economic, political, etc.), defeat, destruction, and even annihilation *have always followed* in the wake of nations having a part in anti-Semitism.

The outworking of the principles set forth in Gen. 12:3 *have always come to pass, and they always will come to pass*. A nation lifting its hand against Israel is, in actuality, lifting its hand against itself. Hostility, for example, which is carried to the extreme point of genocide (more than one nation has tried it), is *the most sure way possible to commit national suicide*.

The epitaph written on the tombstones of nations throughout history which undertook anti-Semitic practices reads, “*Fallen because of their vain attitude toward and ill-treatment of the nation of Israel.*”

The Why of Anti-Semitism

Why does anti-Semitism even exist in the first place? Or, why have nations not taken a lesson from history? What is it really all about when a nation (such as Russia, Egypt, Syria, or Iran) exhibits open hostility toward Israel, traveling the same self-destructive path taken by its predecessors? What really lies behind such hostile actions?

Why did the Third Reich during the World War II years single out the Jewish people for destruction? Why has Russia fomented anti-Semitism in her own country and in the Middle East for decades? Why did the late Egyptian president, Gamel Abdel Nasser, immediately preceding the Six-Day War in 1967, announce, “*Our basic aim is the destruction [note: not ‘defeat,’ but ‘destruction’] of Israel!*”? Why did the late Israeli prime minister, Golda Meir, view the situation from her vantage point after the same fashion during

the succeeding Yom Kippur War of 1973 when she said, “*We are defending our very existence [from surrounding nations, supported by Russia]!*”? Why has the leader of Iran in more recent times continued echoing this same type anti-Semitic rhetoric?

Why has Israel been threatened to this extent by different nations over the years, completely ignoring the warnings from Scripture or the outworking of these warnings, the lessons from secular history?

Answers to questions concerning the “Why” of anti-Semitism can be found in *the Word of God alone*. Secular history can comment upon the matter and record a persecution of the Jewish people down through the years, but such history can *never* reveal either the true origin of anti-Semitism or the reason for the continuance (and even acceleration today) of persecution directed toward the Jewish people.

Only the Word of God provides this information. And apart from an understanding of that which Scripture reveals concerning the matter, it is not possible to assess, and place in its proper perspective, a segment of mankind’s hatred for a people which God called into existence for special and particular purposes, which includes being the channel through which God would bless the very nations seeking their destruction.

The Beginning of Anti-Semitism

When God called Abraham out from Ur of the Chaldees, He promised Abraham *a seed and a land*. Abraham and *his seed* were to inherit for an everlasting possession *the land* “from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates” (Gen. 13:14-17; 15:18-21; 17:7, 8). Abraham was to become the progenitor of “a great nation” which would dwell in this land, through which blessings would flow out to all the nations of the earth (Gen. 12:2, 3; 22:17, 18).

God never gets in a hurry to fulfill His promises; nor does God ever forget that which He has promised. Even though the land of Canaan had been given to Abraham and his seed before Abraham even possessed a seed, neither he nor his seed came into immediate possession of this land. Rather, *they were sojourners in and out of the land of Canaan, awaiting the reception of their inheritance at a future time* (Gen. 23:4; 37:1; Ex. 6:4).

Abraham dwelt as a *stranger* and a *pilgrim* in both the land of Canaan and the land of Egypt for one hundred years, and the seed of Abraham dwelt as *strangers* and *pilgrims* in both of these lands for four hundred years. It was after this, after the end of the four hundred-year sojourn of the seed of Abraham, that God set about to fulfill His promise given to Abraham four hundred and thirty years prior to the termination of this time — a promise given at the time of Abraham's call, while he was still in Ur of the Chaldees (*cf.* Gen. 12:1-3; 15:13, 14; Ex. 2:23-25; 3:6-8; 4:22, 23; 12:40-41).

(The "four hundred years" in Gen. 15:13, 14 provide the time of the sojourn of *Abraham's seed* [from the birth of Isaac to the Exodus from Egypt]; the "four hundred and thirty years" in Ex. 12:40, 41 cover the same period but include an additional thirty years preceding the four hundred years, dating to *Abraham's call* in Ur at the age of seventy.

Thus, *the full sojourn* — that of both *Abraham and his seed*, called collectively, "the children of Israel" — was "four hundred and thirty years." And this period of time was marked off by God to the very day: "...even *the selfsame day* it came to pass..." [Ex. 12:41; *cf.* Gal. 3:17, 18].

The Israelites were in Egypt two hundred and ten of the four hundred years of Gen. 15:13 (*cf.* Gen. 25:26; 47:28). Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh, prior to the seven years of plenty (Gen. 41:46). The children of Israel (all the house of Jacob) went down into Egypt about nine or ten years later, during the time of famine (Gen. 41:53-57; 42:3; 43:15; 45:6-13; 46:26-28; 47:27, 28). Thus, the death of Joseph at the age of one hundred ten (Gen. 50:24-26) was about seventy years into the two hundred and ten years which the Children of Israel spent in Egypt.

It was *following* Joseph's death but *preceding* Moses' birth (about sixty years later) that "there arose a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph" (Ex. 1:8; *cf.* Ex. 1:15-2:10). Moses was eighty years old at the time of the Exodus (Acts 7:20-37). Thus, the emergence of the new king over Egypt occurred probably as much as a century (or possibly even slightly longer) before the time God stepped in and called Moses to lead the people out.

The new king who arose over Egypt between the time of Joseph and the time of Moses was *an Assyrian* rather than an Egyptian (Isa. 52:4). The Assyrians had come down and conquered Egypt, taking over the government and establishing a new dynasty of a different nationality.

In Stephen's address before the religious leaders in Israel some sixteen hundred years later (Acts 7:1ff), attention was called to this fact through the use of the Greek word *heteros*. The word "another [*another* king...which knew not Joseph]" (v. 18) is a translation of this Greek word (the Septuagint Version [Greek translation] of the Old Testament also uses this same word in Ex. 1:8).

The word *heteros* refers to "another of a different kind"; and the reference is to *a different kind of king*, one of a different nationality, bringing into existence a different dynasty. An Egyptian dynasty had previously been in power; but the Assyrians came in, took over the government, and a new dynasty of a different nationality came into existence.

This is the reason that the governing power in Egypt looked upon the Israelites as "more and mightier than we" (Ex. 1:9). This statement would not be true if *all Egypt* were in view. "We" in this verse has to do with *the Assyrians living in Egypt and controlling the affairs of state*.

It is in Exodus chapter one, during the reign of "the Assyrian" in Egypt, that anti-Semitism in its true form first appears in Scripture. And this is the point in Scripture where one must begin in order to properly understand why the Jewish people have been targeted for persecution after persecution throughout a period which has spanned millenniums.

The growth, prosperity, and potential power of the Israelites in Egypt had become such that it caused the Assyrians controlling the affairs of state to look upon them as a possible threat to their continuance in power (should they one day side with the enemies of the Assyrians [the Egyptians]). To prevent such from occurring, the Assyrians first attempted to stem the growth and, in this manner, check the potential power of the Hebrew people through a rigorous form of enslavement.

After a time, when it became evident that this was not the answer (for "the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew"), they then

resorted to a plan whereby all of the Hebrew male children would be slain at birth. It was during these days that Moses was born, hidden by his parents, and eventually, through the providence of God, was reared under the very protection of Pharaoh in the palace itself (Ex. 1:7-2:10).

Once this persecution began in Egypt, there is no indication in the Word of God to anything other than that it continued without interruption (in a very stringent manner) right up to the time of the Exodus. It existed during years preceding Moses' birth, at the time of his birth, during the forty years while he was growing up in the palace, and during the forty additional years which he spent in Midian.

In fact, the persecution became so intense during the latter years, that the cry of the Israelites "came up unto God by reason of the bondage." And, when this occurred, in complete accord with later promises to Israel, God kept His Word (*cf.* Lev. 26:39-42; II Chron. 7:12-14):

"God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.

And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them" (Ex. 2:24, 25; *cf.* vv. 11-23).

This is the place in the Book of Exodus where attention is directed back to Moses (3:1ff); God, at this time, called Moses to not only deliver His people from Egyptian bondage through leading them out of Egypt but also to lead them into the land covenanted to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The four hundred and thirty-year sojourn of the children of Israel was about to end; and once this period of time ended, the Israelites were to go forth under Moses to possess the land of Canaan and therein realize the purpose for their very existence.

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