



Hebrew Scriptures

The Curse on the Jews

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Fateful words were pronounced by the small crowd of Jews gathered in the Praetorium: “His blood be on us and on our children” (Matthew 27:25). This curse has often been used by Christians to promote the idea that the Jews were rejected by God, and therefore to justify anti-Semitism. The effect of this curse has thus been moved beyond the actual event of the crucifixion, down through the centuries that follow through to the Crusades, the Inquisition, the Holocaust, and forever.

The argument of the curse has ignored not only the immediate context of the gospel story, but also the general biblical context of curses, as well as the biblical view of theodicy.

According to the testimony of the Gospels, this curse was pro-

nounced by a small group of Jews, under the initiative and pressure of the chief priests who were ultimately responsible for it (Matthew 27:20). The book of Acts confirms this version of the facts, since the chief priests,

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responding to Peter’s testimony about Christ, allude to that curse upon themselves: “You . . . intend to bring this Man’s blood upon us” (Acts 5:28). Only the high priests were (or will be) affected by the curse they initiated. For only the high priests were “politically” threatened by this Messiah who was “to bring an end to the sacrifices” and hence to the legiti-

macy of their leadership. As for the rest of the people, if we believe Jesus Himself, we know that they did not know. This is why Jesus Himself implored God’s forgiveness: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34). Too often this final supplication is forgotten when we refer to the curse on those Jews. And yet, which one of these two prayers was the most worthy to be heard and answered, the “prayer” of these few ignorant and deceived Jews, or the prayer of the Son of God on the cross?

In fact, the idea of a curse that pursues the Jews throughout the ages contradicts the biblical teaching of curses. For it also calls into question the character of the historical God and His compassion: “The Lord is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgressions”

(Numbers 14:18). This does not mean God does not take iniquity seriously and tolerates it. For the same text continues, “He by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation.” In other words, the curses of God do not (they should not) go beyond the fourth generation at the most. Yet the defenders of the Rejection Theory, more zealous than God Himself (and therefore replacing Him), have carried the curse into the gas chambers of Auschwitz.

The idea that the suffering of the Jews is evidence of the curse and of their sin contradicts the biblical view of theodicy, which is more nuanced and “human.” Indeed, along with the curses found in the book of Deuteronomy that sketch the clear-cut framework of covenant—if you obey, you will be blessed and happy; if you disobey, you will be cursed and unhappy—the Bible also includes the book of Job and the story of the crucifixion in the New Testament. These examples alert us to any kind of theology that uses the suffering of a person as proof of God’s judgment and evi-

dence of their guilt. Job’s defense against his three (four) friends and Jesus’ cry on the cross should help us understand that suffering, the Holocaust, AIDS, tragic accidents, and the crucifixion of Jesus are not necessarily proof that the victim has sinned. If the principle is true that sin leads to suffering and to God’s reproach, the reverse is not automatically valid: the suffering of a person *does not* indicate this person has committed a crime and is rejected by God. The suffering of the Jews *does not* mean

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that they are guilty and have been rejected by God. That the Jews were the victims of the Holocaust does not mean that they were under a curse because they had rejected Jesus. In fact, a good number of these Jews were also Christians who had accepted Jesus in their hearts.¹ They were not victimized because of their beliefs, their politics, or their military or social threat, but simply because of who or what others *imagined* them to be.”² In fact, the verdict

of Jewish guilt as a result of their suffering is all the more suspect when it is carried along by professed Christians who have been the perpetrators of that very suffering. They use it as a divine justification for their crime of indifference.³ The evocation of God in that context is indecent. As Jules Isaac put it: “Human iniquity is enough; don’t involve God in it!”⁴

¹See Johanna R. Dobschiner, *Selected to Live* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1973); Rose Warmer and Myrna Grant, *The Journey: The Story of Rose Warmer’s Triumphant Discovery* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1978); etc.

²Rabbi Lester Bronstein, “Belief in the Human Spirit,” in *Sacred Intentions*, ed. Kerry M. Olitzky and Lori Forman (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 1999), p. 137; emphasis supplied.

³As Ellen White put it: “The heathen and those called Christians, alike have been their foes. Those professed Christians, in their zeal for Christ, whom the Jews crucified, thought that the more suffering they could bring upon them, the better would God be pleased” (*Early Writings* [Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1945], pp. 212-213).

⁴Jules Isaac, *Genèse de l’Antisémitisme: Essai historique* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1956), p. 172.

Rabbinic Wisdom

“He who is cruel to the compassionate ends by being compassionate to the cruel.”

(Midrash Shmuel, 18)