

"Anti-Christan Polemics"

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Anti-Christian Polemics

THE medieval world was a world of polemics and religious disputations. There is hardly a century since the rise of Christianity in which Christian works were not written against Judaism and replied to by Jews. Disputations occurred frequently, too frequently for the Jews, who entered with no alacrity into such discussions in which their opponents were also the judges. They could hardly hope to emerge with honor to themselves, nor was intimidation always absent.

The most famous of polemical works is the Hebrew *Hizzuk Emunah* or *Faith Strengthened* by Isaac ben Abraham of Troki (1533-1594), the most distinguished writer among the Karaite Jews of Poland and Lithuania in the sixteenth century. He was obviously a person of some secular training; he certainly knew the New Testament in the Polish. His Hebrew style is almost classical in its plastic simplicity.

Isaac evidently set out to refute all the basic theological principles of Christianity which differ from Judaism, and at the same time to demonstrate the superiority of his own faith. He certainly succeeded in writing the most complete anti-Christian handbook, and that with a minimum of diatribe—no mean accomplishment. It made quite a stir in the theological world and has since been translated into Latin, Yiddish, Spanish, English, and German. Refutations of it have been written in every century; the latest, a two-volume work, *A Manual of Christian Evidences for Jewish People*, by A. Lukyn Williams, appeared in 1911-1919. Voltaire, who probably knew this book in its Latin form, says of it: "The most inveterate unbelievers have cited almost nothing which is not in the *Fortress of Faith* (*Faith Strengthened*) of Rabbi Isaac." The following five selections are typical of Isaac's approach.

1. A certain Greek once addressed me in the following words: "Do you know wherefore you have no longer a king of your own people? It is because you have rejected the faith of Jesus Christ and His kingdom, for He was the king of Israel. On this account the empire of Israel has been destroyed."

I replied to him: "It is known and evident from the words of the prophets that, in consequence of our manifold iniquities, our kingdom was destroyed in the time of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, when this king led Zedekiah, King of Judah, captive to Babylon.

"This event took place more than four [almost six] hundred years before the existence of Jesus. The Jews were then successively subjects of the Babylonians, Medes, and Greeks. Long before the birth of Jesus we had been kept in servitude by the Romans. You may see that proved in your Gospel of Luke 3:1: 'In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, etc.' See also John 19:15: 'Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your king? The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but Caesar.' Now, as to your ascribing to Jesus the government of Israel, we are at a loss to know who made him king, and where he ruled over Israel, seeing that the authorities sentenced him to death as they would the humblest person. As a matter of fact the Roman kings were responsible for his death and the death of his disciples and apostles, and in spite of this the Roman state still persists.

"But you, the people of Greece, were the first to acknowledge Christianity and you still continue your faith in him; and nevertheless, your government has been destroyed, and you have no longer a king of your own people: for a Mohammedan ruler, the Turkish sultan, who is now in possession of the Holy Land, extends his sway over Greece.

"Similarly, although the kingdom of Hungary holds to the faith of Jesus of Nazareth, nevertheless it has been rent and ruined. It has no native Hungarian sovereign as of old, but is ruled by the king of the Turks. There are many other Christian states which formerly elected their own kings, and now are subjected to the Ottoman power. On the other hand, you see the Mohammedans not only disbelieving the doctrines of Jesus, but even mercilessly persecuting the followers of his faith, and notwithstanding this, the empire of the Turks enjoys undisturbed prosperity."

11. Matthew 5:43: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy.'" Truly, you may also see in this verse that Matthew has made a false statement, for nowhere in the Pentateuch or in the Prophets have we found the statement that you should hate your enemies. On the contrary, it is written in Exodus 23:4-5: "If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again. If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under its burden,

thou shalt forbear to pass by him; thou shalt be sure to help him get it up." See also Leviticus 19:17-18: "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart: thou shalt surely rebuke thy neighbor and not bear sin because of him. Thou shalt not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. I am the Lord." Again, in the Book of Proverbs 24:17: "When thine enemy falleth do not rejoice, and when he stumbleth let not thine heart rejoice." And Proverbs 25:21: "If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink."

iii. Matthew 10:34: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." The same matter is treated in Luke 12:51.

Thus you see from his own statement that he could not be the Messiah inasmuch as he had not come to bring peace on earth, but a sword. For, regarding the expected Messiah, Zechariah in 9:10, says: "And he will speak peace unto the nations." Concerning that Messianic period it was prophesied by Isaiah in 2:4; and by Micah in 4:3: "Nation shall not lift up the sword against nation, etc."

From his own statement that he will "set a man at variance against his father, etc.," he evidences even more that he was not the Messiah, for in the age of the expected Messiah there will appear the prophet Elijah, concerning whom it is said, Malachai 3:24: "And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children unto their fathers."

iv. Matthew 13:55-56; it is related here that the Jews said of Jesus: "Is not this the carpenter's son? And is not his mother called Mary, and his brethren James, and Joseph, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us?" See also Mark 6:3.

This verse refutes those who believe that Joseph never had any relations with Mary, before or after the birth of Jesus. If this were true, who then gave birth to his brothers and sisters?

v. Matthew 27:46: "And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?'—that is to say, 'My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?'" See the same passage in Mark 15:34.

By this exclamation, Jesus clearly announced that he was not a

God, but was like other mortals, who invoke God in the day of trouble.

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