

THE SECRET OF ISRAEL'S SURVIVAL

Rev. Dr. Mendel Silber Discusses Question Before Congregation at Temple Emanuel on Occasion of Annual Commemoration of "The Feast of the Law."

The congregation of Temple Emanuel celebrated the anniversary of the Feast of the Law, Shevouth on Wednesday evening. The feast commemorates the traditional date of the reception of the law and the handing down of the tablets from Mount Sinai. Dr. Mendel Silber, Rabbi of Temple Emanuel, delivered the following address before the congregation:

"All flesh is like grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of God shall stand forever."

Is. 40:6.

When these words were spoken by the great prophet, they could not be fully appreciated by the people. For at that time, the broad walls of Babylon still stood. The banks of the Tigris and the Nile were adorned with cities, whose greatness even then was of ancient days. Greece and Rome were just starting, young and vigorous in their career, and no symptoms of decay or ruin were visible of the earth but now look around and survey the world. See whether time has not ratified the doom pronounced by the prophet on all terrestrial glory. What is the earth but a wide burial ground of cities, nations and empires? Where are now the temples of Egypt? They are crushed and gone.

Pyramids Slowly Sinking.

Not a foot-fall is now sinking in the once populous No; and even the pyramids of that land are slowly sinking into the earth as if they were unwilling to be any longer a burden on the soil, or, to expose their immense but useless bulk to the eyes of men. The sun of Babylon has set the golden city has ceased; and the image of her glory is reflected no longer.

From the placid bosom of the Uprates, her broad ramparts and lofty towers are levelled to the ground, and the spot where they stood is marked by gigantic and shapeless bulks, whose dark shadows are projected far upon the wild when the evening closes in upon the desolate plains of Chaldea. The waves now wash the ruins of Tyre and the hoarse murmur of the sea around the bare peninsula seems to lament her fate, crying, alas! alas! for the crowning city.

The towering and rock-built ramparts of Petra have been scaled, the Palaces of Edom are prostrate, her tombs empty. Greece lies in ruins around her own Acropolis and the Aegean rolls its wave upon a desolate shore. Even Rome has besought her own soil to cover her and after all her glory, is now fain to hide herself in the dust.

All flesh is grass and all the goodliness thereof as the flower in the field. The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of God shall stand forever.

Old Israel Survives.

Amidst all the changes we have seen, amidst all the revolutions on earth, the empires which have perished and the races of men which have become extinct, amidst all these changes, Old Israel survives. What a perplexing riddle! What a strange phenomenon! A handful of people with the whole world in arms against it still survives and flourishes, and, what is more, in spite of dispersion, is still one Nation. How are we to account for this peculiar survival of this peculiar people? A people accepting misery and hardship with stoic calm, combining the characteristics of the thinker with those of the martyr, eking out existence under conditions which no other Nation ever has or ever could have found adequate. Here is an enigma, the like of which the world's history does not duplicate. Never has a people been surrounded by such circumstances as the Jew has been surrounded by, and yet, the Jew is still alive. Fire could not consume his strength; water could not quench his ardor, bribery was of no avail, compulsion and coercion proved ineffective, flattery did not move him, threats did not deter him. For centuries the Jew has been held in the darkest gloom, bereft of all that makes life worth living. For centuries the Jew has been outraged and oppressed, banished now from this place and imprisoned in that, deprived of his money, deprived of his teeth, dragged at horse's tails, hanged, tortured, burned alive—and still the Jew lives today.

Fulfillment of Prophecy.

Do we not then see in this a fulfillment of the prophecy? All flesh is grass and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of God shall stand forever.

All the nations that had their being at the time Israel began to play its part on the world's stage, were only zoological types, merely flesh and as such, they withered like grass and their glory faded like a flower. Israel was a spiritual type, whose sole possession was the word of God and as such he could not suffer annihilation. Bereft of country and dispersed as the Jewish nation has been for centuries, it will continue to live because a higher principle permeates it, a principle that is the root of its being and the sum and substance of its living.

In olden times, the Talmud tells us, whenever some national crisis arose, our fathers would take a school boy fresh from his studies and say to him: "Repeat the text thou hast learnt in school." By the answer the child gave them, they would be able to foretell the outcome of the crisis, not by a kind of divination, but through a lesson their history had taught them. They had learned that as long as the word of God by which they had been preserved throughout the ages of persecution, continued to be taught and studied, as long as their religion remained intact, they had to fear no tyrant, no crisis. They knew that as long as there was but one Jewish child to whom the word of God was taught and who would quote but one verse thereof, they need not fear, for the device of their enemies, would be destroyed, their words of malice and evil intention would not stand, for their God, who had been with them throughout the ages, would continue to be with them forever.

But, friends, what is this higher principle of Judaism I spoke of a while ago? Does it consist of a splendid edifice to which we pay our periodical visits? Is it the weekly prayers we offer?

Principle of Judaism.

Not the principle of Judaism is a sum of religious, moral and philosophic ideals of which the Jewish people is to be the exponent. The principle of Judaism consists in a sum of historic memories, recollections of what is the course of many centuries, the Jewish

people experienced, thought and felt. The principle consists in the consciousness that Judaism which has accomplished great things for humanity in the past, has not played out its part, and therefore must not perish.

But if the Jew was preserved in his intellectual freshness by the word of God, the ideal inculcated in Judaism, he was preserved in his moral vigor by the purity of his domestic relations. Whatever virtue our domestic friends may deny us, they cannot but admit the preeminence of the Jewish domestic purity. Like a bold promontory, singular and unapproached, does Israel stand out in this respect, in the history of the ages. For he has been conscious of his special duties as a people chosen by God to lead a holy life, true to his charge: "Ye shall be unto me a Kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

The Jew was selected from all the nations to be a kingdom of priests and as such, he had to live up to higher ideals than those which satisfied other men. And let it be said here, that it is in no arragant temper that we claim to be a chosen people. What we mean by it, is not that we are better than others, but that we ought to be better.

The King's Retinue.

Israel, the rabbis, say, "Is the King's retinue, whose house duty it is to look expectantly for royal commands." To be thus near the king is a privilege, to be sure, but it also imposes special duties and these duties for the Jew start at home. A pure home, the purity of domestic relations, was the first condition upon which the relations between God and Israel could be maintained. "Ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" became the guiding rule of his life and astrong influence in the preservation of his identity.

Seedplot of all Morality.

Whatever is great and good in the institutions and usages of mankind is an application of sentiments that have drawn their first nourishment from the soil of the family. For the family is the school of duties. The sacredness of its ties is the condition of the physical soundness and the moral vigor of nations. The family is the miniature commonwealth upon whose integrity depends the safety of the larger commonwealth. It is the seedplot of all morality. Reverence for superiors, respect for equals and regard for their root in the pure family. In the child's intercourse with its parents, the sentiment of reverence which is the essence of all piety and all idealism, is instilled and the habit of obedience to rightful authority formed. In the companionship of brothers, deference to the rights of equals is attained and the relation between brother and sister give birth to the sentiment of chivalry, regard for the rights of the weaker, which forms the basis of magnanimity and every generous and tender quality that graces humanity. A people, therefore, that always stood out as a model of purity in their domestic relations, a people whose families contained all the qualities that make nations solid and strong, must survive even without country or political power.

Lives Up to Code.

A people that live up to a code wherein the crime of adultery is punished with death, wherein the scale of forbidden marriages is so widely extended that even the shadow of impurity be excluded; a people among whom the undutiful son was to be stoned to death in the presence of the whole congregation; a people that extirpated almost the entire tribe of Benjamin to atone for an outrage upon feminine virtue committed within its borders such a people, was well qualified to outlive the ages of cruel persecution. Israel, who in the truest and wisest sense lived the life of a priestly kingdom and a holy nation, whose homes were always pervaded by a moral atmosphere that was never contaminated, no matter how mean their outward appearance; such a people, friends, could not be crushed or annihilated. And even through their country was taken from them by cruel force, what of it? They fortified themselves in their pure home, whose strength no tyrant and no mob, no inquisition and no persecution could shake or shatter. Deprived of any visible, rallying point, with no political or religious center to cement their union, the stainless and spotless Jewish home became the rallying points and centre of union. There the scattered atoms gained consistency and strength to withstand the pressure of the world. Thither they would come to restore their torn and lacerated spirits. There was the well-spring of their power and there lay the strength of their existence.

This, my friends, is the secret of Israel's survival and this must be our standard if we are to continue our course as a chosen people, for, even though "all flesh may wither as the grass, and all the goodliness thereof fade like the flower of the field," the word of God shall stand forever.