

WHAT IS ANTI-SEMITISM?

Anti-Semitism is the single most-enduring and lethal genocidal hatred that has coursed through civilizations since the earliest times. Why is this? What are its origins, and why is it as pervasive and virulent as ever? Further, does it have any eschatological significance?

Most people know that anti-Semitism describes any and all forms of hatred toward Jews. So why don't we call it anti-Judaism? Let's begin by examining the word Semite. It comes from the Latin word *Sem*, which corresponds to the English Shem, who was one of the three sons of the patriarch Noah. So a Semite is simply a descendant of Shem. The Bible tells us that all humanity has descended from Shem, Ham, or Japheth (Gen. 9:19). So technically speaking, anti-Semitism should mean antipathy toward a significant portion of the world's inhabitants, not just Jews. Then why doesn't it?

Continuing the story in Genesis 9:20-24, we read that following the Flood, Noah became a vintner, and at some point became extremely drunk on his own wine. While in this vulnerable state, he was raped by another man. When Noah sobered up, he was able to name his rapist. By God's inspiration, Noah then pronounced a curse upon his rapist and his descendants, and a special blessing on his son Shem (v25-27). This passage is often misunderstood because it contains two pronouns, both of which have been mismatched with their antecedents.

Before going any further, it should be noted that the Bible nearly always lists sons in the order of their birth. A notable exception to this is the familiar list of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, which is not a list in birth order (Gen. 5:32; 6:10; 9:18; 10:1). We know this because the formal genealogy in Genesis 10 lists the sons in a different order: Japheth, Ham, and Shem. Further, Japheth is called the "elder" brother (10:21).

We are told that Noah was 500 years old when he had Japheth, Ham, and Shem (Gen. 5:32). Unless they were triplets, which seems unlikely, then it was at age 500 when Noah **began** to have his three sons. We are further told that Noah lived 350 years following the Flood, and that he died at the ripe age of 950 years (Gen. 9:28,29). Therefore, we may deduce that Noah was 600 years old, and his eldest son was 100 years old, when the Flood ended. And yet we read that Shem was 100 years old **two years after** the Flood (Gen. 11:10). If Shem was the firstborn son, then he would have had to be 102. Don't feel bad if you go back and reread this paragraph in order to follow the logic.

Now let's return to the passage in Genesis 9 where Noah issued his curse and blessing. Curiously, we read a parenthetical sentence in verse 18: "And Ham was the father of Canaan," which does not seem to relate to the context. With that in mind, verse 24 says, "So Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what **his** younger son had done to him." Many believe the antecedent to "his" is Noah, and that the "younger son" is Ham. If this were true, then why is Canaan cursed (v25), instead of Ham? The answer is because the pronoun "his" refers to Ham, not Noah, since Canaan is **Ham's** "younger son" (Gen. 10:6). This now explains the parenthetical sentence mentioned above.

Canaan was the homosexual rapist. Only his descendants were cursed by being a servant class, not all the other sons of Ham. Canaan's sons are listed in Genesis 10:15-19. Notice that among his descendants were the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, cities so overtaken with the perverseness of homosexuality that God personally destroyed them. The apple had not fallen far from the tree, even though centuries had passed since Canaan's sin. By the time of Moes, the Canaanites' perverseness had graduated to include child sacrifice and bestiality, along with the now familiar homosexuality (Lev.

18:21-30). Under Joshua, the Hivite tribe of Cannanites which inhabited Gibeon were designated as a servant tribe to the Israelites (Jos. 9), thus fulfilling Noah's curse.

Now let's examine Noah's blessing of Shem, "And he said: 'Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem, (And may Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth) and may **he** [God] dwell in the tents of Shem; and may Canaan be his servant'" (Gen. 9:26,27). Many commentators assign the pronoun "he" to Japheth instead of God, which then makes the words meaningless. There is no evidence that the descendants of Japheth ever "dwell[ed] in the tents" of Shem. On the other hand, there is ample evidence that God did. More on that later.

Shem himself is never described as a godly man of faith. So let's understand: the "God of Shem" is a reference to those **descendants** of Shem whose God would be the LORD. This is the reason why Shem, the youngest son, is nearly always listed first. Not because he was special, but because God would one day choose some of his descendants and make **them** special. Moreover, one of Shem's descendants would be the Messiah! Now, how do you think Noah's blessing of Shem went over with Japheth and Ham? Would it be natural for them to rejoice and be happy for their little brother? More likely, they might have become the world's first anti-Semites! We will see that anti-Semitism has its roots in jealousy and envy.

Jealousy and hatred between brothers over God's favor is a recurring biblical theme. Cain killed Able, the son who found favor with God. Ishmael, the firstborn son of Abraham, was seen "scoffing" at Isaac, the son of promise (Gen. 21:8,9). Esau vowed to kill his younger twin brother, Jacob, over his lost blessing from God (Gen. 27:41). Joseph's older brothers sold him into slavery because he was his father's favorite, and a man of faith.

Later, among the twelve tribes of Israel, which sprang from Jacob's twelve sons, the tribe of Judah was chosen by God for special favor. Prophesying about the descendants of his twelve sons, Jacob said, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah" (Gen. 49:10). Meaning, the royal line of the kings of Israel would be Jewish, beginning with king David. And that lineage would culminate when "Shiloh comes," a reference to the Messiah—Jesus! This is why anti-Semitism came to be focused on the Jews.

Let's back up and examine the world's longest-running feud and see how jealousy and envy led to implacable hatred, and became a root of anti-Semitism. It began when the patriarch Isaac's wife, Rebekah, became pregnant with twins, who seemed to fight with each other even in her womb. So she inquired of God, who said, "Two nations are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; one people shall be stronger than the other, and the older [Esau] shall serve the younger [Jacob]" (Gen. 25:22,23). These words would have sowed strong seeds of jealousy between the brothers and their descendants.

The apostle Paul explained why God did this with the brothers when he wrote,

"For the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of God who calls, it was said to her [Rebekah], 'The older shall serve the younger.' As it is written, 'Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated'" (Rom. 9:11-13).

God did not hate Esau in any human, emotional sense. After all, he had not done anything evil yet. God chose to **favor** Jacob and not to favor Esau, as was His prerogative (v14-24).

Esau and Jacob did feud throughout their life. Jacob's name means loosely "cheater," and indeed he did cheat his brother out of his inheritance and his father's blessing (Gen. 25:29-34; 37). Jacob eventually had to flee for his life from his vengeful brother. Happily many years later the two reconciled (Gen. 33:3,4). Unfortunately, Esau's descendants never got over their envy. Over 200 years later, and just weeks after the Israelites left Egyptian slavery, some of Esau's descendants, the Amalekites (Gen. 36:12), attacked the weakest of Israel (Ex. 17:8-14; Deut. 25:17-19). Forty years later the Edomites, so-named for Esau's nickname, refused Israel's passage through their land (Num. 20:14-21), thus forcing a long and arduous detour.

Several hundred years later, Samuel told king Saul to destroy the Amalekites, though he spared their king, Agag (I Sam. 15:1-9). Remember that name. A few years later, one of Saul's lieutenants, Doeg the Edomite, led a slaughter of the entire priestly city of Nob (I Sam. 22:18,19). Centuries later, following the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of the Jews by the Babylonians, the Edomites displayed their own form of *schadenfreude*—they applauded (Psa. 137:7). The book of Esther tells the story of the plot to annihilate the Jews during the reign of Persian king Xerxes. The plot was hatched by none other than one Haman, who was a descendant of Agag, the Edomite king (Est. 3:1,6,10,13).

The Bible devotes an entire book, albeit a small one, Obadiah, to this blood feud. Ezekiel 35 speaks of Esau's descendants' "envy" and "anger" (v11) as having spawned their "ancient hatred" (v5). It is almost as if anti-Semitism was in the DNA of the Edomites, though we know that is unscientific. So how do we account for this generational hatred? Its source is Satan, who hates God, all mankind, and especially those whom God favors.

The Bible reveals that Satan was originally created as a beautiful and powerful and righteous archangel named *Helel*. At some point in the distant past he became unhappy with his creator, and along with one third of the angels, rebelled against God (Isa. 14:12-15; Ezek. 28:11-19; Rev. 12:4). Angels were created to be "ministering spirits" (Heb. 1:14). Their purpose and responsibility was to be servants, of God and "those who will inherit salvation"—Christians. Angels were never offered to be heirs of God, nor His Spirit-born sons, and thus "joint heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:14-17). In Hebrews we read, "You make him [man] inferior to angels for a little while" (2:7; *Williams*). But man's potential far exceeds angels, because we are told Christians will one day "judge angels" (I Cor. 6:3). Did Satan come to consider that unfair, and let his pride get the best of him, leading to envy and jealousy? God had favored an inferior creation over his angels. This would seem to be the ultimate source of anti-Semitism.

Let's consider the story of Abraham, who was a type of God the Father, and Isaac, a type of Christ. Late in life Abraham found himself without a natural heir, so he figured to make his chief servant, Eliezer, his heir (Gen. 15:1-4). But God told him, no, your heir will be your natural born son, who turned out to be Isaac. We have no indication that Eliezer resented his circumstances, but it goes to illustrate the situation in which Satan found himself. The passage in Isaiah above tells us that he felt he should inherit the very throne of God!

Satan is called "the god of this age" who has blinded the minds of all unbelievers (I Cor. 4:4). Further, he is "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2). Not unlike God, whose Spirit turns the minds of the faithful toward His will, so Satan possesses a powerful spiritual influence which blinds the minds of a world of unbelievers and turns them toward his will, his attitude of envy and hatred toward those whom God favors. This is why so-called anti-Semitism has continued for centuries past the time when the Jews fell out of God's favor.

The Bible tells us that the Babylonian captivity in the 6th century B.C. was the result of God divorcing his wife, the Jewish nation, for infidelity with other gods (Jer. 3:1-11). It is implied that she married these gods, and therefore by law, she could not remarry God (Deut. 24:4). That has been and still remains the relationship between God and the Jews—divorced. They are collectively God’s ex-wife, no longer the apple of His eye, no longer in his favor. From God’s perspective, the modern Jewish state of Israel is just another Gentile nation in the world.

So ironically, anti-Semitism has been misplaced for over 2,500 years since this divorce. There is nothing special about the Jews in God’s eyes. There has long since been no reason for jealousy and envy. This is not to say that observant Jews do not still consider themselves as God’s chosen people. They do. But in reality, God long ago replaced them with a new fiancée He plans to marry—the New Israel! Let’s understand.

Paul wrote a rather enigmatic statement, “...For they are not all Israel who are of Israel” (Rom. 9:6). The first Israel in this sentence is the New Israel—comprised of Christians from all races and nations, and the second is the Jews. Paul meant that most ethnic Jews are not Israel in God’s reckoning. Moreover, Paul wrote,

“For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. Therefore if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew which is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God” (Rom. 2:25-29).

Paul is saying the Jews keep only the letter of the law, while to this day, most continue to be breakers of the “**righteous** [spiritual] requirements of the law.” So he concludes, they are not truly circumcised, and therefore not Jews, but rather are Gentiles to God. Conversely, any person, Jew or Gentile, may become a **spiritual** Jew when circumcised in heart. It is only these Jews who are special to God, and who have been given His favor in Christ. That is why the apostle Peter wrote, “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own **special** people” (I Pet. 2:9).

A significant component of God’s favor is found in the prophecy we read about earlier, “He [God will] dwell in the tents of Shem” (Gen. 9:27). This is not literal since there is no evidence that Shem was a godly man of faith. But God did visit the tent of a man of faith who descended from Shem, namely Abraham (Gen. 19:1-8). Moreover, God dwelled in His own tent within the camp of Israel during their forty years of wandering.

Both Paul and Peter likened the temporary human body to a tent (II Cor. 5:1; II Pet. 1:13,14). And Jesus said, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word; and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (Jn. 14:23). As spiritual Jews, as well as sons and daughter of Abraham, the Semite, all Christians are therefore spiritual Semites in whose tents God dwells. And every Christian longs to hear the voice from heaven which will announce, “Behold, the tabernacle [tent] of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God” (Rev. 21:3). This is the ultimate fulfillment of Noah’s prophecy: God dwelling with His people individually through His Holy Spirit.

As a result of the special favor God shows Christians, the Bible prophesies that as this age draws to a close before Jesus returns, anti-Semitism—enmity against Jews—will undergo a metamorphosis that will take the form of enmity against **spiritual** Jews. In Revelation 20:7-9 we read,

“Now when the thousand years [Christian age] have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.”

When Satan is freed in the last days, he and his angels will launch a second rebellion against God, which will end ignominiously (Rev. 12:7-9). We then read, “And the dragon [Satan] was enraged with the woman [Christians], and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring...” (v17). This is Satan’s final revenge against the people whom God favors. His “final solution” is a holocaust, an annihilation of the spiritual Jews—Christians. But this conflagration will turn on Satan and his minions and destroy them, because victory and salvation belong to God!