

“How odd of God – The enigma of Jewish history”

By

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‘How odd of God

To choose the Jews;

But not so odd -

They aired His views!

He didn’t have

A PR man,

So He hit upon

An inspired plan:

To touch the heart

Of Abraham,

To spearhead

His programme,

And to ensure

That his clan,

When it settled

In Canaan,

Remained forever

In the van

Of moves

To elevate man,

So nations
Might be guaranteed
A peaceful world
For their seed.

But who loves
A 'holier than thou',
With texts, for most,
Too high-brow,
Who, in ancient Egypt,
Refused to tow
The idolatrous
Status quo;
Who were the world's first
Monotheists,
And theological
Theorists;
Who built a Temple
To the Most High,
Accepting His law,
Without asking, 'why?'
Who pursued wisdom
And human rights,
With virtue, never
Beyond their sights?

Was it any wonder

They were God's choice,
When, to the down-trodden,
They lent their voice?
Does it surprise
That they were feared,
And at their life-style,
Heathens jeered;
That their land was invaded,
And upon their heads,
Insults cascaded?

A people that challenged
The greatest of nations –
Undermining their very
Moral foundations -
Assyria, Persia,
Babylon and Greece,
Allowing the Romans
No moments of peace –
Does it perplex
That, every time,
They found themselves
In the firing-line?

Then a teacher appeared,
Out of the blue,
Named Joshua -

In Greek,
Jesu.
The accepted traditions
Of Jewish law,
He sought to revise –
And crowds,
He'd draw;
Performing miracles,
Healing the sick;
With twelve disciples -
His chosen clique.

They promoted him
As 'king of the Jews';
For the Romans,
That wasn't,
At all, good news!
That was an act
Of pure sedition;
A threat to the Emperor's
Position.

His crucifixion
Touched many hearts;
Slogans were hurled
At the Roman ramparts.
Voices were joined,

Of association
With the new Christian
Dispensation.

So, two fronts, now,
Challenged the Jews;
Armed struggle with Rome,
And divergent views
On Sabbath, circumcision,
And dietary law,
And the divinity of Jesu –
A concept most raw.

*How odd of God
To choose the Jews;
Hard-wired with
Divergent views.*

Christianity grew
Exponentially due
To its vigorous
Missionary thrust,
While Judaism turned
In on itself,
In a climate of
Mutual distrust.

Denounced for the crime

Of Deicide,

The Jews were

An object of hate;

For two thousand years,

Persecution ensued -

With a venom

That wouldn't abate.

Clothes,

Yellow-starred;

Menial trades;

Money-lenders;

Renegades;

Pauper peddlers,

Tax-collectors,

Christ rejecters,

Well infectors;

Spreaders of

The Black Death;

Desecrating the Host

With every breath.

So, on their way

To the Crusades,

Christian knights made

Their violent raids

On Jewish homes

Without the aid

Of barricade

Or stockade.

Devoid of training

In defence,

All resistance

Was useless.

Bows or swords,

Unable to wield -

They were massacred

In home and field.

They decreed the eviction

Of the remaining Jews;

Wretches that couldn't

Pay their dues.

They cancelled

All debts,

That, to them,

Were owed,

Before driving them onto

Exile's highroad.

German Protestants

Stepped into the fray;
Luther determined
To make the Jews pay;
Authoring tracts,
Saturated with hate:
'Let Jews never enter
A Christian land's gate'.

His work was regarded
As holy writ;
Authoritative, passionate,
Full of spirit.

He infected the psyche
Of subsequent ages -
Pogroms applauded
By leading sages.

Is it any wonder
Such historic hate -
Generated by king,
Subject and prelate,
And sourced
By theology's
Great weight –
Led, inexorably, to
The crematoria gate?

Islam viewed Jews
With greater respect;
Appreciating
Their intellect;
'People of the Book',
Was the phrase
They coined,
Though separation
Was enjoined.

It offered refuge
To the exiled,
With many differences
Reconciled;
A similar concept
Of God,
They shared;
Their respective traditions,
Readily compared;
Though the order of the day
Was segregation,
With the Jews perceived
As a *dhimmi* nation,
'Inferior',
by Sheikh Umar's
Declaration.

Yet Jews prospered

In every trade;

Ever doing

As they were bade.

Bankers, doctors,

Merchants galore;

Scholars, politicians,

And a conquistador!

Religions being

What they are,

Each generation

Bore its scar.

Into *Mellah* – ghettos

Jews were segregated,

And, often,

Barely tolerated.

Extremist sects

Were not unknown:

Almohads stirred up

Violence,

Full-blown.

A massacre in Granada

In 1066;

The Jews of Meshed

Found themselves betwixt

The choice of death,
With no appeal,
Or Islamic conversion -
A situation,
Surreal!

In more recent times,
When the Shah was deposed,
The Jews of Iran
Rightly supposed
That choice of a Mullah,
Of fundamentalist bent,
Was a warning to leave,
By common assent.

The Crusader wind,
Again,
Sharply blows,
As extremism
Just grows and grows;
With medievalism
Reincarnated -
And Jews,
By all sides,
Equally hated.

How odd of God

To choose the Jews;

Chosen for what? -

To be accused

Of special favours

By Him bestowed?

Of laying claim

To a higher code?

Elusive favours,

That's for sure;

Favours that have

No allure;

That only the faithful

Can discern,

Assured that paradise,

They'll earn;

Who believe they hear

Messiah's call,

Urging them on

To walk tall,

For they possess

The wherewithal,

To save themselves

When others

Fall;

To commit themselves

To His will,

And hear His voice -

Though small

And still.

How odd of God

To choose the Jews;

Of all the concepts

That amuse

So many, Lord,

Even I declare

That this is one

That I can't square

With all the anguish

And despair

Bred by the Holocaust

In full glare

Of a world,

To whose hate,

Jews were heir.

'The mysteries

Are all Yours,

Lord';

Beat into ploughshare,

Every sword;

Let nations know

It's not so odd

To choose a nation

That has trod

The path of God –

But felt the rod!

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