

DID THE JEWS BELIEVE IN EVERLASTING TORMENT.

Noting, from a back number of the TOWER, that we hold that the doctrine of everlasting torment was engrafted upon the doctrines of the Christian church during the period of the apostacy, the great falling away which culminated in Papacy, a Brother asks whether it does not seem, according to the works of Josephus, that this doctrine was firmly held by the Jews; and if so, he inquires, does it not seem evident that the early Christians being largely converts from Judaism, brought this doctrine with them, in the very out-start of Christianity.

We answer, No; the doctrine of everlasting torment sprang naturally from the doctrine of human immortality, which as a philosophic question was first promulgated in anything like the present form, by the Platonic school of Grecian philosophy. These first decided that each man contained a fragment of deity and that this would prevent him from ever dying; – that live he must, somewhere. This foundation laid, it was as easy to describe a place for evil-doers as for well-doers. But to the credit of those heathen philosophers be it recorded, that they failed to develop, or at least to manifest, that depth of degradation, from benevolence and reason and pity, necessary to paint, by word and pen and brush, such details of horrors and agonies as were soon incorporated into their doctrine, and a belief thereof declared "necessary to salvation" in the professed church of Christ.

To appreciate the case, it is necessary to remember that Greece stood at the head of intelligence and civilization when the Christian church was established. Alexander the Great had conquered the world, and had spread respect for Greece everywhere; and though, from a military point of view, Rome had taken her place, it was otherwise in literature. For centuries Grecian philosophers and philosophies led the intellectual world, and impregnated and affected everything. It became

customary for philosophers and teachers of other theories to claim that their systems and theories were *nearly the same* as those of the Grecians, and to endeavor to remove differences between their old theories and the popular Grecian views. And some sought to make capital, by claiming that their system embraced all the good points of Platonism with others which Plato did not see.

Of this class were the teachers in the Christian church in the second, third and fourth centuries. Conceding the popularly accepted correctness of the philosophers, they claimed that the same good features of philosophy were found in Christ's teachings, and that he was one of the greatest philosophers, etc. Thus a blending of Platonism and Christianity took place. This became the more pronounced as kings and emperors began to scrutinize religious teachings, and to favor those most likely to awe the people and make them law-abiding. While heathen teachers were truckling to such imperial scrutiny, and teaching an everlasting punishment for those who violated the laws of the emperors (who ruled as divinely appointed) we cannot suppose otherwise, than that the ambitious characters in the church at that time, who were seeking to displace heathenism and to become the dominant religious power instead, would make prominent such doctrines as would in the eyes of the emperors seem an equal hold upon the fears and prejudices of the people. And what could be more to the purpose than the doctrine of the endless torment of the refractory?

The same motives evidently operated with Josephus when writing concerning the belief of the Jews. His works should be read as apologies for Judaism, and efforts to exalt that nation in the eyes of Rome and the world. It should be remembered that the Jews had the reputation of being a very rebellious people, very unwilling to be ruled even by the Caesars. They were hoping in God's promise to become the chief nation. Many rebellious outbreaks had occurred among them, and their religion, peculiar from all others, came in for its share of blame for favoring too much the spirit of liberty.

Josephus had an object in writing his two principal works, "Antiquities" and "Wars of the Jews." He wrote them in the Greek language while living at Rome, where he was the friend and guest successively of the Roman Emperors Vespasian, Titus and Domitian, and where he was in constant contact with the Grecian philosophers. These books were written for the purpose of showing off the Jewish people – their courage, laws, ethics, etc, to the best advantage, before the Grecian philosophers and Roman dignitaries. This object is covertly admitted in his preface to his "Antiquities," in which he says:

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"I have undertaken the present work as thinking it will appear to all the Greeks worthy of their study....Those that read my book may wonder that my discourse of laws and historical facts contains so much of *philosophy*....However, those that have a mind to know the reasons of every thing may find here a very curious philosophical theory."

In a word, as a shrewd man who himself had become imbued with the spirit of the Grecian philosophies then prevailing, Josephus drew from the Law and the Prophets, and from the traditions of the elders and the theories of the various sects of the Jews, all he could find that, in the most remote degree, would tend to show: —

First, that the Jewish religion was not far behind popular Grecian philosophy; but that *somewhat* analogous theories had been held by some Jews, and drawn from Moses' Law long before the Grecian philosophers broached them.

Secondly, he would fain show that it was not their religious ideas which made the Jews as a people hard to control or rebellious, as all liberty-lovers were esteemed by the Caesars. Hence he attempts to prove, at a time when *virtue* was esteemed to consist mainly in submission, that Moses' Law "taught first of all that God is the Father and Lord of all things, and bestows a happy life upon those that follow him, but plunges such as do not walk in the paths of virtue, into inevitable *miseria*." And, it is in support of this idea and for such

purposes, evidently, that Josephus after saying: "There are three philosophical sects among the Jews, first the Pharisees, second the Sadducees, and the third Essens," proceeds to give an account of their three theories; especially detailing any features which resembled Grecian philosophy. And because the last and least, the Essens, most resembled the doctrines of the Stoics and leading Grecian theories, Josephus devotes nearly ten times as much space to their views as to the views of both Sadducees and Pharisees combined. And yet the Essens were so insignificant a sect, that Josephus himself admits they were few. Whatever views they held, therefore, on any subject cannot be claimed as *Jewish* sanction, when the vast majority of Jews held contrary opinions. The very [R1060 : page 8] fact that our Lord and the apostles never referred to them at all, is good evidence that the Essens' philosophy by no means represented the Jewish ideas. This small sect probably grew up later and absorbed its ideas, concerning immortality and the everlasting torment of the non-virtuous, from Grecian philosophy. It should be remembered that Josephus was not born until three years after our Lord's crucifixion, and that he published his "Wars" A.D. 75 and "Antiquities" A.D. 93 – at a time when he and other Jews like all the rest of the world were eagerly swallowing Grecian philosophy, and science falsely so called, against which Paul warned the church. – Col. 2:8; 1 Tim. 6:20.

Josephus directed special attention to the Essens because it suited his object to do so. He admits that the Sadducees, next to the largest body of Jewish people, did not believe in human immortality. And of the Pharisees' views he makes a blind statement, calculated to mislead, as follows: "They also believe that souls have an *immortal vigor* in them [This might be understood to mean, that the Pharisees did not believe as the Sadducees that death ended all existence, but believed in a *vigor* or life beyond the grave – by a resurrection of the dead.] and that under the earth there will be rewards and punishments, according as they have lived virtuously or viciously in this life; and the latter are to be detained in an everlasting *prison* [not tortured] but that the former [the virtuous] shall have *power to revive and live again.*"

Is it not apparent that Josephus has whittled and stretched the views of the Pharisees, as much as his elastic conscience would allow, to show a harmony between them and the philosophies of Greece? Paul, who had been a Pharisee, contradicts Josephus. While Josephus says they believed "that only the virtuous would revive and *live again*," [Does not this imply *a resurrection* and imply also that the others would not *live* again, but remain *dead*, in the great prison – the tomb?] Paul on the contrary says: "I have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a *resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.*" – Acts 24:15.

We have no hesitancy about accepting the testimony of the inspired Apostle Paul, not only in regard to what the Jews believed, but also as to what he and the early church believed: and we repeat, that the theory of the everlasting *torment* of the wicked, based upon the theory that the human soul cannot die, is contrary to both the Old and the New Testament teachings and was introduced among Jews and Christians by Grecian philosophers. Thank God for the purer philosophy of the Scriptures which teaches that the death of the soul (being) is the penalty of sin (Ezek. 18:20) and that all souls being condemned through Adam's sin were redeemed by Christ's soul (Isa. 53:10); and that only for *wilful, individual* sin will any die again – the second death – an everlasting *punishment*, but not an everlasting torment, as shown in June TOWER.

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