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Series D: Sermons and Addresses, 1893-1917, undated.

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“The Religion of Israel,” undated.

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# THE RELIGION OF ISRAEL

Every altar now dedicated to God by Israel is a new witness

before all the world of Israel's age-old life, age-old faith, and age-old victory. The years that pass are witness to the number of Israel's years. Contrast Israel's 4,000 years with America's 400 years. Israel is forty centuries old, the United States but one century. What people has so ancient a history; what religion so ancient a law? Forty centuries of life--forty centuries in touch with the history of nations--forty centuries close to the heart of civilization.

What memories it speaks to the thoughtful and what warning to the thoughtless. Memories to the thoughtful! Israel knew the mightiest empires of human history--Chaldea and Egypt, Babylon, Assyria and Syria, Greece and Rome. Israel lived amid a civilization buried thousands of years ago, which has waited these long centuries to be rediscovered. Read the history of the world.

And warning to the thoughtless--a warning to all who see Israel living today amid the great nations. Remember the age-long history of Israel, and pause before you pass judgment upon Israel's destiny.

The world declares Judaism a dead religion. We ourselves lament that Judaism does not vitalize the life of the Jew. The Jew, born of a race that has lived and died for religion; the Jew, founder of religions, the world's teacher of moral law, is not religious in faith, in thought, in life. What of the future? What of Judaism in the days to come? From without speaks the judgment--Judaism is dead. From within sounds the cry, Turn back; American Judaism has developed in the wrong direction; reform has gone too far--it has failed. Therefore, indifference and neglect.

Judaism is not dead and the future of Judaism will witness no turning back from the way which American Israel has chosen. Orthodoxy, with its laws and customs and ritual, and more especially with its spirit, is not destined to be a world religion--will never be the religion of the future of the Jew and non-Jew. Judaism, arrayed in its oriental wrappings, molded by middle age persecutions, is unfitted for occidental life and the spirit of occidental freedom. Those of Israel who today are crying, "Turn back;" who today emphasize most strongly traditional and historical institutions and customs, fail truly to interpret the signs of the time; they misun-

derstand the spirit of this age and this generation. Not backward to the past, but ever forward with eye and heart and soul to the future. Judaism must be face to face with life and life's problems. Its deep emphasis is not upon rendering of texts of the Bible, nor upon interpretation of the law of the rabbins, nor upon the moral law and its many prohibitions.

Let the temple be the living center, the source of power and light to our homes, the inspirer of life, the uplifter of Jewish spirit and of Jewish ideals. From the temple should stream forth the moral force which should bring uplift to the human race. I believe in the open temple, to be a social center for us, the not poor in fortune; as the social settlement is the center for the poor in fortune, disadvantaged by the circumstances of life. We, the not poor in fortune, not disadvantaged by worldly circumstance, are often too poor in spirit and idealism. Here in the temple let us be moved by purest feelings; here think the highest thoughts; here let life be inspired by principles honest and purposes unselfish.

The temple is a living witness to a spiritual and not a material Israel. It is the visible witness and representative of all the altars and temples and synagogues of all the centuries of Israel's history. It is the living witness to Israel's spiritual purpose and Israel's spiritual power. A thousand years stood the glorious temple of Israel, the temples of Solomon and Ezra, and Nehemiah, and Herod; and two thousand years our humble synagogues have stood everywhere throughout the world. Every new temple in Israel is the symbol of the perpetual altar whose perpetual power has never ceased to burn. Physically the Jew has been overwhelmed; spiritually the Jew is triumphant; it is his only triumph; any other victory would be defeat and disaster.

This is the monumental epoch of temple building--the stone of our temple's monument, the survival and the strength of Israel. Important is not the dead stone, but the living spirit; valueless the dead trunk, giant survivor of the king of the forest, if there be no life within it. Magnificent are the sanctuaries of Israel, too often mausoleums for the dead, not temples open to life and living. Our temples are splendid physically, and splendid their opportunities and possibilities. Our congregations hold latent wonderful power in their hundreds of men and women and children. The mighty engine needs steam to drive the giant wheels; our



congregations need the spirit power, the souls of men and women and children, to be the soul power of the temple.

Congregations and temples glory in their successes. They measure it by growth, by number of membership and hosts of children, by financial strength and freedom from debt. A congregation is not a real success, does not do its appointed work until the temple helps to make our lives, our families, our homes a success; until out of the temple their comes a spiritual uplift and moral power, religious lives and religious character. The congregation is a success which creates homes with a spiritual atmosphere, and nobler ideals; which trains a race of men to a manhood more rugged, and a race of women to a womanhood finer and nobler; which gives to sons and daughters higher hopes and purer purposes for life's struggles and ambitions, and brings to fathers and mothers moral cheer and moral courage and makes them stronger and happier through all the difficulties and burdens of life.

The temple is witness before all the world of the Jews' loyalty to Judaism. It proclaims what the Jew has done in history, what contribution he has made to the civilization of the world.

The Jew today is the living representative of the 100 generations of Israel. Four thousand years old, he is 4,000 years young. He lives not because of might, or of number. The old biblical prophecies that Israel should be as the sand of the sea and the stars of the heaven have never found fulfillment. Israel's power is spiritual and not physical; Israel's triumph is spiritual and not physical. This is the meaning of the Maccabean story of this feast of dedication. The Syrian hosts were many and mighty, the Judeans were weak and few. The few and weak triumphed over the many and mighty. The strength of Israel was the strength not of force and of arms, but the all-conquering power of the spirit<sup>and</sup> of the soul. There have been many peoples mighty than Israel and nations more numerous; they have aged and they have declined; they have passed away.

The Jew was when Egypt built her magnificent temples and tombs and pyramids; the Jew was when Babylon reared her wonderful palaces and walls and her beautiful hanging gardens; the Jew was when Rome was founded upon the seven hills; the Jew was when out of Greece a young Alexander went forth to conquer the world. There were giants in those days; these are the great names of the great people of antiquity and of all of history. And the great nations of Europe, of medieval and of modern times--England

and France, Spain and Portugal, Germany and Italy, and Russia, persecuted, tortured, expelled and slaughtered their unfortunate Jews. How true the song of the poet Byron:

Tribes of the wandering foot and weary  
breast  
How shall ye flee away and be at rest?  
The wild doe hath her nest, the fox his  
cave  
Mankind their country--Israel but the  
grave.

Israel but the grave! The great nations of antiquity are only memories now; Israel lives and lives with power. The pyramids stand as sentinels fronting the sands of the desert; the beautiful hanging gardens and palaces have long since been buried beneath the ruins; the Parthenon crowns the Acropolis, symbol of vanished glory; the Forum stands in the old Capital city of Rome, and nearby the arch of Titus, erected to commemorate the Roman triumph over old Jerusalem. On the arch of Titus is pictured in stone the seven-branched candelstick, symbols of the spoils of the temple carried through the streets of ancient Rome. The Forum and Arch of Titus speak of Roman pride and Roman power and Roman splendor that are no more. Jerusalem, too, is fallen; and has been rebuilt; but the temple of the God of Israel stands not on the hill of Zion. The Jew lives alone of all the peoples of antiquity, child of the ancient world race, unquestionably the most wonderful race in human history. Forty centuries old, in the midst of all the people of the earth; forty centuries old in history law and custom. Forty centuries young--young with power, with enthusiasm, with idealism and devotion to God.

Judaism is 4,000 years old--Judaism is 4,000 years young--4,000 years old, but its heart is not congealed. It responds to every environment, it assimilates every civilization, it accepts every new truth. Judaism is hold in history and tradition, in forms and ceremonies; it seems enwrapped in a shroud of death; but stripped of the mummy wrappings it is found not dead nor dying, but living. Within the last half century, within the memory of living men, Judaism has passed through a reformation and a transformation in this land under the leadership of Isaac Mayer Wise, the master figure in American Israel, the father of your chosen leader, Judaism experienced a reformation which would have been the death of a religion less sound and less vigorous of heart.

Judaism is the old mother of religions in this twentieth century, emphasizing a new age--the age of old Jewish teachings. It pro-

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claims the unity of God and the unity of all life and all history. It teaches that God rules, not a tribal and not a Palestinian God, not a God of the Hebrews, but one God of all the universe. God is the father and man is the son of God--every man is the son of God. It does not humanize deity, it does not deify humanity. It proclaims man, created in the image of God--man under a divine appointment--a moral, responsible being. It emphasizes the dignity of man; the human race is not lost and nations are not doomed. Judaism has no faith in a fallen humanity, but in rising human kind.

Four thousand years young, in every age influenced by and influencing life and thought. It taught the civilized world to interpret life and history ethically. It taught mankind that the conduct of individuals and the conduct of nations are to be weighed in the scales of justice. The ethical ideals and the ethical hopes which are the ideals and hopes of intelligent men and women in our age, came out of Egypt or Babylon or cultured Greece or conquering Rome; they came out of the fundamental moral laws taught in ancient Judea. The world's passion for purity and holiness, mankind's thirst for God and hunger for righteousness are born of Israel.