

**THE JEWS AND THE MOSAIC LAW:
PART THE FIRST: CONTAINING A
DEFENCE OF THE REVELATION OF THE
PENTATEUCH, AND OF THE JEWS FOR
THEIR ADHERENCE TO THE SAME**

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ISAAC LEESER

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76-12

THE

JEW^S AND THE MOSAIC LAW.

PART THE FIRST:

CONTAINING

A DEFENCE OF THE REVELATION OF THE PENTATEUCH, AND
OF THE JEWS FOR THEIR ADHERENCE TO THE SAME.

BY ISAAC LEESER,

READER OF THE PORTUGUESE JEWISH CONGREGATION IN PHILADELPHIA.

אברתי לחוללים אל ההלל
ולרשעים אל הריבו קרן :

"I said to those who derided, deride ye not;
And to the wicked, raise ye not the horn."

PSALM LXXV. v. 5.

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5594.

ENTERED according to act of congress, in the year 1833, by ISAAC LEESER, in
the clerk's office of the district for the eastern district of Pennsylvania.

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Dedication.

TO RABBI B. S. COHEN,

PRINCIPAL OF THE JEWISH INSTITUTE AT MÜNSTER IN WESTPHALIA.

Respected Friend,

No apology will be necessary for inscribing this volume to you. The friendship with which you were kind enough to regard me when yet a child, is sufficient warrant for me to hope, that a work of maturer years will not be received with indifference by one, who, though from his varied learning well capable of judging, will yet be indulgent to errors, and perhaps misapprehensions, almost inseparable from youthful productions.—It had been my intention to have dedicated this first production of mine, to my late venerated teacher, Rabbi Benjamin Jacob Cohen, your friend and my benefactor; but since it was the will of our Father in heaven, to deprive me of this excellent guide of my infancy, and the world of an active friend, and religion of a zealous defender: I know no one, to whom I could with more propriety dedicate it, than to you. Perhaps you may find, that the sentiments, imbibed in part under your excellent instruction, and which were dear to me when I had the pleasure of daily enjoying a friendly intercourse with you, are yet remembered and cherished by me, at this distance of time and place. If so, you will doubtlessly be pleased at the discovery; and you may be assured, that to receive your approbation will be one of the most pleasing fruits, which I can hope to reap from my labours.—Farewell, dear friend, and believe me, that I find a great degree of consolation in the idea, that the Almighty has preserved you, whilst He has deprived me of my first teacher and friend; and that it shall ever be cause of joy to be informed of your welfare and prosperity to

Your obliged servant,

ISAAC LEESER.

TO THE READER.

This book, now for the first time published, was composed more than four years ago, whilst I was engaged in pursuits quite uncongenial to literature. Many a time, after a day of active application to business, have I spent the hours of night in writing. Books for reference I had but few; and the reader will therefore excuse the brevity with which many points are treated, which no doubt would have received more attention, could I have had authorities to refer to. In some respects this may have been an advantage, as it prevented me from being too much trauemeled by the opinions of others. The reader may be assured, however, that since my residence in Philadelphia I have omitted no opportunity of correcting and altering many passages which I thought required it; and even while the work was going through the press I have made a great number of additions and alterations, at times amounting to nearly an entire page. With all this care I do not flatter myself that the book is free from fault, nor can I even say that it meets my own approbation in every instance; for many a sentence had to pass as it stood, because I did not discover its defectiveness till it was too late. One thing, however, I hope, that no error in point of fact, and no great want of connection in reasoning, will be discovered; at least I have done all I could to avoid it. It becomes me not, however, to be too solicitous of engaging the favourable opinion of the reader: the book itself is before him; and let him condemn or approve, as he may think proper after mature reflection. In conclusion, I must remark, that vanity had but a small share in inducing me to make public a book laying so long dormant; the reasons assigned in the preface, written at Richmond on the day it is dated, are yet operative, as no book of the kind required has made its appearance since then. But my own opinion of the humble value of my labours has not been changed; and I therefore insert the preface, though in some respects it is not quite as applicable as it was four years ago. To say that I should not be highly delighted if I meet with approbation and success, would be the excess of ill disguised affectation; but I may freely say, with justice to myself, that a fair criticism, even if it should strip my work of all value, will not be at all unwelcome to me, although mortifying to my self-love; the object of my enquiry and of this publication is the search for and maintenance of truth, but not the acquisition of fame; and as the humble inquirer for truth, I dare not be offended if I have been found wanting either in talent in my search for her, or in capacity whilst engaged in her service.

Philadelphia, Tishy, 5594.

PREFACE.

In presenting the following pages to the consideration of the public, I deem it unnecessary to inform them who and what I am ; but, at the same time, I think it incumbent upon me to disclose the motives which induced me to add another theological work to the many already in existence ; that it may not be supposed I undertook this difficult task from the mere love of writing, and of becoming an author.

Some time last fall (1828) a gentleman of this city showed me an article in the *London Quarterly Review*, in which our nation (the Jews) were very much abused, and their moral and religious character shamefully vilified. Though I felt very indignant at the time, I deferred noticing it publicly, until the article in question was republished in a New York paper, on the 26th of December last. I then thought it was high time to notice it, as I verily believed that its circulating without a reply would be extremely injurious to the interest of my brethren in this country. I therefore undertook, without being solicited by any one, the task of refuting the accusations it contained. I was at first very doubtful of success ; but I had soon the satisfaction of discovering that my feeble efforts had met with favourable notice. A few weeks after the publication of the first essay, I was gratified with the mild and temperate piece which appeared under the signature of "A Professor of Christianity." After replying to him, I understood that several persons at a distance had read and approved of my labours. I must confess that I felt pleased at this mark of approbation from strangers, which I in the first instance hardly expected to receive from friends ; but since it was so, I came to a determination to republish my two essays, to rescue them from the perishable state in which they had appeared. It being hinted to me by a friend*

* Mr. B. H. Judah, late librarian of the Richmond Library Company, who has died since this book was written ; and I have to express here the obligation I am under to him, Mr. Jacob Mordecai, and Mr. Abraham H. Cohen, late Reader of the Richmond congregation, for many valuable suggestions.

that in that case I ought to add some proofs in favour of our observing the proper day of the week as the Sabbath, I followed his suggestion, and began immediately to embody my thoughts relative to the truth of the mission of Moses; and though I intended to say but little, the subject grew by degrees under my hands, till it assumed the shape in which it is presented to the *indulgent* reader. I had scarcely commenced, when I saw the reply of the "Professor of Christianity" to my second essay, but was prevented from answering him then, on account of the editors of the *Richmond Whig* (in which paper these four essays first appeared) having closed their columns against the further continuation of the controversy.*

Whatever opinion may be formed as to the merits of this my first work, I would beg my readers not to pronounce me guilty of presumption, in attempting to write on so grave and difficult a subject, as theology. My motives are simply these. I have beheld with grief and *shame* the efforts made of late by many, who dishonour the name of Israel, to lessen the respect our nation has ever felt for the law of Moses and the traditions of our ancestors. I waited, but found no one in this country, older than myself, attempting to enlighten the minds of my brethren; I could therefore no longer remain silent—I felt called upon to act, and I obeyed the inward call, not unmindful of what Hillel the ancient said: "And in a place, where there is no man, try even thyself to be a man." (Abothe II.) The infidel, indeed, clothed in his panoply of unbelief, thinks himself invulnerable, he defies the word of God, and exultingly asks for proof of the truths of revelation. But in times of old the Philistian Goliath was conquered by David, who, armed with a sling only, but coming in the name of the God of Israel, threw the stone, which entered the head of his *powerful* and armed antagonist, who sunk before the future king of Israel. Even so have I attempted to approach the armed infidel; who knows, but God may effect some good work through me, for He is ever powerful to assist them, who rely upon Him in truth and sincerity.—I dare not even flatter myself with the hope of success; but if I fail, I may con-

* I must once for all acknowledge the liberality of Mr. John H. Pleasants, the senior editor of the *Whig*, who so kindly offered to publish my essays; and I seize with unfeigned pleasure the present opportunity (the first that has offered) of returning him thus publicly my heart-felt thanks for the handsome manner in which he drew public attention to my first essay. I also think it an act of justice to mention, that I believe him to have been actuated by the best motives in discontinuing the controversy.

sole myself with the idea, that I have been defeated in a good cause ; this disappointment even may stimulate me to make a second attempt, when I shall endeavour to avoid those faults which caused my failure in this first undertaking.

The liberal Christians (and to those alone I address myself) will easily discover, that the little I have said in relation to Christianity, was indispensably necessary to my plan. They moreover cannot be offended, at a liberal and candid view being taken of their belief by a Jew ; for if he is wrong, they can easily reply to him ; and I will just remark, that any strictures or hints, in relation to this book, shall be thankfully received by me, provided they be made in the spirit of candour and conciliation.

The body of the arguments, as far as the plan of arranging them is concerned, is altogether mine, as are also many of the arguments themselves. I will not assert, that the same have not been used before ; but I may say with truth, that I have not intentionally borrowed from others. I consulted no books, besides those mentioned in the text, and even those I had not always before me ; but quoted perhaps as often from memory, as from actual inspection. Be that as it may, I can assure the public that I have advanced neither argument nor assertion, which I did not subject to frequent examinations, and have asserted nothing which I in conscience did not believe founded in fact to the best of my knowledge. It would be the height of presumption in me to say, that I have made no *mistake*, for that only can be the case with inspired writers ; and if I err not altogether, I do not remember to have read any book from a profane writer, where some error or other had not been committed. Should I have the good fortune, however, to see a second edition of this work called for, I will make those corrections and alterations, which may have been discovered to be necessary.

In some places I have followed the English version of the Bible, in others again I have attempted to translate the original myself ; either because I did not consult the English at all, or because the common translation seemed to me incorrect.

No man can be more aware of the difficulty of doing justice to the subject under discussion, than myself ; yet this did not deter me from the attempt, it rather stimulated me the more ; first because I never saw a book in the English language written by a Jew, that treated of the evidences of his religion, if perhaps we except David Levy's answer to Thomas Paine, and Rabbi de Cordova's little book, Reason and Faith : and therefore I resolved to write, with the hope that some