

American Jewish History  
Handout - Lesson #4  
Jews, Slavery and the Civil War

1. Introduction
2. Jews in the South
3. Jews and Abolition
4. The First Jewish Chaplain
5. General Order #11
6. Judah P. Benjamin

**Reading #1**

*The Jews of the United States have never taken any steps whatsoever with regard to the slavery question. As citizens, they deem it their policy "to have everyone choose whichever side he may deem best to promote his own interests and the welfare of his country..."*

*The objects of so much prejudice and unrighteous oppression is the Jews have been for ages, surely, they, it would seem, more than any other denomination ought to be the enemies of caste and friends of universal freedom.*

**Reading #2**

*"O, the rottenness of Christendom! Judaism and Romanism are the leading features of Protestantism. I am forced to believe, that, as it respects the greater portion of professing Christians in the land, Christ has died in vain. In their traditions, their forms and ceremonies, their vain janglings, their self-righteousness, their will-worship, their sectarian zeal and devotion, their infallibility and exclusiveness, they are Pharisees and Sadducees, they are Papists and Jews."*

**Reading #3**

The Bible View of Slavery" a Discourse  
A defense of slavery by a Northern Rabbi: Morris Raphall  
January 4, 1861

*On December 14, 1860, Pres. James Buchanan issued a proclamation calling on the people of the United States to observe a day of "humiliation, fasting and prayer throughout the union... In view of the present distracted and dangerous condition of our country.*

*To honor Buchanan's proclamation, Rabbi Morris J. Raphall delivered this address to his current negation in New York.*

*... If they truly and honestly desire to save our country, let them believe in God and in His holy word; and then when the authority of the Constitution is to be set aside for a higher Law, they will be able to appeal to the highest Law of all, the revealed Law and word of God, which afforded supreme sanction to the Constitution. There can be no doubt, my friends, that however much of personal ambition, selfishness, pride, and obstinance, there may enter into the present unhappy quarrel between the two great sections of the Commonwealth - I say it is certain that the origin of the quarrel itself is the difference of opinion respecting slaveholding, which the one section denounces as sinful - aye, as the most heinous of sins - while the other section upholds it is perfectly lawful. It is the province of statesmen to examine the circumstances under which the Constitution of the United States recognizes the legality of slaveholding; and under what circumstances, if any, it becomes a crime against the law of the land. But the question whether slaveholding is a sin before God, is one that belongs to the theologian. I've been requested by prominent citizens of other denominations, that I should on this day examine the Bible's view of slavery, as the religious mind of the country requires to be enlightened on the subject.*

*... The subject of my investigation falls into three parts:*

- First, how far back can we trace the existence of slavery?*
  - Secondly, is slaveholding condemned as a sin in sacred Scripture?*
  - Thirdly, what was the condition of the slave in biblical times, and among the Hebrews?*
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- Is slaveholding condemned as a sin? How this question can at all arise in the mind of any man that has received a religious education, and is acquainted with the history of the Bible, is a phenomenon I cannot explain to myself, and which 50 years ago no man dreamed of. But we live in times when we must not be surprised at anything... Receiving slavery as one of the conditions of society, the New Testament nowhere interferes with or contradicts the slave code of Moses; it even preserves a letter written by one of the most eminent Christian teachers to a slave owner on sending back to him his runaway slave. And when we refer to the history and requirements of our own sacred Scriptures, we find that on the most solemn occasion therein recorded when God gave the 10 Commandments on Mount Sinai... Slaveholding is not only recognized and sanctioned as an integral part of the social structure... But the property in slaves is placed under the same*

*protection as any other species of lawful property, when it is said “thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s house, or his field, or his male slave, or his female slave, or his ox, or his ass, or aught that belong to thy neighbor.”*

*... When you remember that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Job - the men with whom the Almighty conversed... All these men were slaveholders, does it not strike you that you are guilty of something very little short of blasphemy?... My friends, I find, and I am sorry to find, that I am delivering a proslavery discourse. I am no friend to slavery in the abstract, and still less friendly to the practical working of slavery. But I stand here as a teacher in Israel; not to place before you my own feelings and opinions, but to propound to you the word of God, the biblical view of slavery.*

- 1. Concerning the condition of the slave in biblical times and among the Hebrews... The slave is a person in whom the dignity of human nature is to be respected; he has rights. Whereas, the heathen view of slavery which prevailed at Rome, and which, I’m sorry to say, is adopted in the South, reduces the slave to a thing, and a thing can have no rights.*

*The result to which the biblical view of slavery leads us, is*

- 1. That slavery has existed since the earliest time;*
- 2. That slaveholding is no sin, and that slave property exist expressly placed under the protection of the 10 Commandments;*
- 3. That the slave is a person, and has rights not conflicting with the lawful exercise of the rights of his owner.*

#### **Reading #4**

*This is not the first time that we have had occasion to admire the originality of Dr. Raphall; but we never would have given him credit for the originality displayed in the sermon which he delivered on January 4, and published in the New York Herald, and in which he claims for the institution of slavery the sanction of the Bible, in language the most positive and decided....*

*...The question restricts itself exclusively to this: “Is the institution of slavery, per se, a moral evil or is it not?” And here it is that Dr. Raphall earns for himself the sorry reputation of declaring, on the authority of the Divine law, the legitimacy and moral rectitude of slavery, and inveighed sharply against Christian ministers who happen to differ from him. A Jew, the offspring of a race which daily praises God for deliverance from the bondage of Egypt, and whose fellow believers are to*

*this hour groaning under the heavy yoke of slavery in most of the cities of the old world and crying to the Almighty for help, undertakes to parade slavery as a perfectly sinless institution, sanctioned by God, and to confront those presumptuous people who will not believe it, with somewhat of an air of moral indignation! A more extraordinary phenomenon could hardly be imagined. But when the speaker, in the midst of his oratorical effort, became himself aware of the grandeur of his undertaking, and from a bosom overflowing with lovingkindness, the following words escaped his lips, "I find, and I'm sorry to find, that I am delivering a pro slavery discourse, but I stand here to propound to you the word of God," then surely the crown of martyrdom must have descended upon his head, had not the black skullcap at the time covered the enviable spot.*

*...In the history of the Creation, of which our pious speaker, engage in his own creative efforts, takes not the least notice, we read "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him, male and female created He them. And God blessed them and God said unto them, be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." This passage at least is devoid of any information respecting dominion over Negroes, excepted it be assumed that the latter are included in the class of animals that creep upon the earth.*

*... The Jewish is conservative from principal, and intensely so in a land which, in spiritual and material blessings, offers to him everything that he can desire. He wishes for peace, almost at any price, and trembles, perhaps more than any other, for the perpetuation of the Union - like a son for the life of his mother, sick unto death. I also share your patriotic sentiments with my full heart, and join you in the fervent supplication, that God may answer right speedily our prayers for peace. But whatever party we may follow, we are not permitted to let the sanctuary of our religion be dragged into the political arena, and made subservient to the interests of this or that party, as has been attempted with such publicity, and from his consecrated place, in the instance stated above. The immaculate virtue of Mosaic principles has been our pride, and our boast, and our weapon these thousands of years. This weapon we cannot yield without supplying our enemies with formidable means of attack; this pride and this boast we dare not, and will not, suffer to be taken from us. It was unpardonable; the greatest triumph of our opponents, and our certain destruction; to dearly exchange to the unstable and evanescent favors of the moment. Might it not be said, and with justice, as it has already been said, in reference to the lamentable event which has called forth this disclaimer; look at these Jews! There, where they are oppressed, they cannot find words enough to*

*boast of the humanity of their religion; but when they are free, there preachers pronounce, on the authority of that “solemn and most holy occasion,” on Sinai, the Divine sanction of slavery; while Christian ministers in the South, and in the presence of the representatives of the people advised moderation, sometimes openly deprecate or plead the forces of circumstances in extenuating of the established institution.*

*I am not a politician, and have nothing to do with politics. But to proclaim in the name of Judaism, that God has consecrated the institution of slavery! Such a shame and reproach the Jewish religious press is in duty bound to disown and disavow, if both are not to be stigmatized forever.*

### **Reading #5**

*Now that I have visited all the hospitals in Virginia, I have a distinct idea of what has to be done, and what can be done. The number of Jews in the Army is very large... As a general rule, they are not known as Jews, but hundreds with whom I have conversed express their anxiety and hope that some provision may be made for them, so that in case of sickness or death, they may not be left to the mercy of strangers...*

*Since they entered hospitals... They have in addition to the sufferings of disease, to submit to the torture of religious controversy, forced upon them by Christian clergyman, who are anxious “to save their souls.”*

### **Reading #6 - Grant's General Order #11**

*Headquarters 13 Army Corps  
Department of the Tennessee  
Oxford, Mississippi. December 17, 1862*

- 1. The Jews, as a class, violating every regulation of trade established by the Tennessee Department, and also department orders, are hereby expelled from the department.*
- 2. Within 24 hours from the receipt of this order by post commanders, they will see that all of this class of people are furnished with passes and required to leave; and anyone returning after such notification will be arrested and held in confinement into an opportunity occurs of sending them out as prisoners, unless furnished with permits from their headquarters.*

3. *No passes will be given these people to visit headquarters for the purpose of making personal application for trade.*
4. *The Jews, as a class, violating every regulation of trade established by the Tennessee Department, and also department orders, are hereby expelled from the department.*
5. *Within 24 hours from the receipt of this order by post commanders, they will see that all of this class of people are furnished with passes and required to leave; and anyone returning after such notification will be arrested and held in confinement into an opportunity occurs of sending them out as prisoners, unless furnished with permits from their headquarters.*
6. *No passes will be given these people to visit headquarters for the purpose of making personal application for trade.*

### **Reading #7**

**Lincoln:** And so the children of Israel were driven from the happy land of Canaan?

**Kaskel:** Yes, and that is why we have come under father Abraham's bosom, asking protection.

**Lincoln:** And this protection they shall have at once.

### **Reading #8 - Response with Lincoln's Authority**

*War Department  
Washington, January 4, 1863*

*Major General Grant,*

*A paper purporting to be a General Orders, No. 11, issued by you December 17, has been presented here. By its terms it expels all Jews from your department. If such an order has been issued, it will be immediately revoked*

*H.W. Halleck  
General-in-Chief*

## **Reading #9**

*It may be proper to give you some explanation of the revocation of your order expelling all Jews from your department. The president has no objection to your expelling traders and Jew peddlers, which, I suppose, was the object of your order; but, as it in terms prescribed in the entire religious class, some of whom are fighting in our ranks, the president deemed it necessary to revoke it.*