

Who is Israel? Yankees, Confederates, African Americans, and Jews

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In 1861 Abraham Lincoln, newly installed as president, spoke of Americans as God's "almost chosen people." Two years later, an ardent Confederate, Bishop Stephen Elliott, proclaimed, "[O]ur God was manifesting himself to us almost as palpably as he had done to his own chosen people."¹ African American slaves, too, sang of themselves as "Israel in Egypt's land." And then there were the Jews, who, even as they fought and sometimes died as Unionist and Confederate Americans, dignified themselves with the ancient and honorable title of Israelites.

All parties in the American Civil War—Northerner or Southerner, slave or free, Jew or Christian—laid claim to Hebrew origins. Each read the Israelite saga as the narrative of providence, a lesson plan of piety and patriotism that served as the civil religion for each side. All parties drew on a familiar treasury of biblical events, themes, and tropes in defending their causes. When rabbis and ministers preached, their biblical rhetoric—in its similarities as well as its differences—revealed not only their religious outlooks as Jews and Christians, but also their political perspectives as Unionists and Confederates. As Lincoln famously observed at his second inaugural, Americans North and South "prayed to the same God and read the same Bible."² However much they disagreed on questions of slavery, tariff, or secession, all assumed that they were the favored people of God.

American Zion

Through Israel, Unionists and Confederates alike sought to justify their rival claims as the legitimate heirs of the American Republic. The U.S. Constitution itself was a covenant as well as a social contract, and its authority derived from both the Bible and natural law. As narrative, America's story was a retelling of Exodus. Herman Melville voiced a sentiment etched deeply in the national character: "We Americans are the peculiar, chosen people, the Israel of our time."³ This rooting of Americanism in Judaism—what Jonathan Sarna calls the "cult of synthesis"—traces to the nation's conception.⁴ The analogy between biblical Israel and contemporary America was so commonly and forcefully expressed that it moved beyond the *almost* of metaphor to a spiritual—and to some a literal—truth, an inheritance as well as a heritage.

The Zion that was invoked during the Civil War, however, was contested territory no less than the countryside of Virginia, especially as battlefield fortunes waxed and waned. Confederates, Unionists, African American slaves, not to mention Jews themselves, could choose from many Israelite narratives: Covenantal Israel, the chosen of God; or stiff-necked Israel, sinful and disobedient. Triumphant Israel, the conquering army of the Lord of Hosts; or Wandering

Israel, defeated and in exile. As losses mounted, images of the Israel of Zion marching to its promised Holy Land yielded to those of Wandering Israel lost in the desert or exiled in Babylon. Jews and Christians both sought signs for current events in Exodus, but they hardly agreed on the typology. Were the true Israelites the children of Abraham or of Jesus? Were the prophecies fulfilled by this terrible war those of the Old Testament or the New? And where exactly was Zion? In South Carolina, as Charleston Rabbi Gustav Poznanski once claimed? In America itself, as our founders proclaimed? In the world to come, as the rabbis of the Talmud promised? Or in distant Palestine as a restorationist—and later a political Zionist—movement advocated?⁵

For Christian ministers, America as Zion was an article of faith. With the Second Great Awakening, evangelical Protestantism by the 1830s had become pervasive in both the North and South, and each side saw itself as the agent of God's will. If the Civil War was indeed fought to deliver a chosen people to Zion, then the Exodus narrative provided the providential paradigm. Through their Puritan heritage Northerners felt their birthright as New Israel. Reciting psalms after Union victories, Rev. William Barrows of Massachusetts led "prayers against the enemies of Zion." A stalwart Presbyterian Union general compared the devastating march of his army through Georgia to the Israelite conquest of Canaan.⁶ Although not a sectarian Christian, Lincoln saw unfolding events through a biblical perspective. When Jews protested Grant's antisemitic General Orders No. 11, the president questioned Cesar Kaskel, the leader of the Jewish delegation, "So the children of Israel were driven from the happy land of Canaan?"⁷

Southern Christianity was more intense, less rational, and more given to theological orthodoxy than that of the North. Until secession and civil war, Southern preachers had generally eschewed political preaching, regarding the Old Testament as uniquely applicable to ancient Israel. Yet Southern Christianity, as W.J. Cash observed, had an "essentially Hebraic" spirit. Southerners, he explained, worshipped "Jehovah of the Old Testament," and their moral code was "Mosaic in its sternness."⁸ One North Carolina Presbyterian, expressing a common Southern sentiment, described the Northern Egypt as a place of error, infidelity, fanaticism, and despotism. Southerners looked upon Northerners as secular, materialistic in their pursuit of commerce, and prone to apostasy. New England Unitarianism demonstrated how far Northerners had strayed from orthodoxy. The South's leading theologian, James Henley Thornwell, drew lines of religion along region: "It is a conflict of truth with error—of Bible with Northern infidelity—of pure Christianity with Northern fanaticism."⁹ This was holy war. Pious Southern Methodists—without irony—prayed to be delivered from the Northern "Egypt."¹⁰

If the North was Egypt, the South was Israel. The Confederate anthem "Dixie," despite its slave persona and dialect, expresses a Southern Zionism in

appealing to homeland and memory. “Dixie” looks back longingly to a holy land where “old times are not forgotten” and expresses desire for the people’s restoration: “I wish I was in Dixie.” For Southerners, victorious in the war’s early battles, the Israelite wandering of Sinai was a march to Zion. A Louisiana sergeant expressed his assurance that God would deliver Southerners from the Yankees just as “he had delivered Israelites from the Egyptians.”¹¹ Savannah Episcopal priest Stephen Elliott sermonized, “We are moving forward . . . as did the people of Israel when he led them with a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night.” The stars of Lee’s headquarters’ flag were patterned in an Ark of the Covenant.¹² A minister likened the Confederate Army’s protecting the Southern Ark of the Covenant to the Israelites in the wilderness.¹³ Confederates compared the fleeing Yankees to Midianites, Assyrians, or Philistines, and missing Confederate regiments were referred to as the Lost Tribes of Israel. After First Bull Run, Rev. Edward Reed of South Carolina preached from Deuteronomy, “Happy are thou, O Israel . . . saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help. . . .” A young South Carolina woman, hailing Southern victories, prophesied, “The Days of the Israelites are returning.”¹⁴ Drew Gilpin Faust observes, “The analogy between the Confederacy and the chosen Hebrew nation was invoked so often as to be transformed into a figure of every day speech. Like the United States before it, the Confederacy became the redeemer nation, the new Israel.”¹⁵

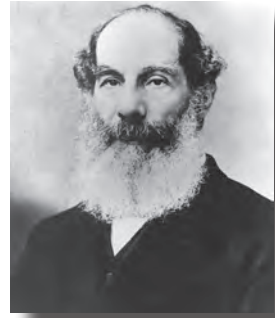
African Americans appropriated the Israelite narrative even more strongly than other parties to the conflict, including Jews themselves. With memories of their African homeland obliterated by enslavement and exile, African Americans read the Hebrew narrative as their own. As early as 1852, Frederick Douglass, in a stirring speech on “The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro,” had recited Psalm 137: “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down. Yea! We wept when we remembered Zion.”¹⁶ Through sermon, liturgy, and, most famously, spiritual, African Americans relived the experience of Hebrew slaves on freedom’s journey. In “Go Down Moses,” slaves sang, “When Israel was in Egypt’s land” and beseeched “old Pharaoh, let my people go.” The postwar “Freedmen’s Hymn” proclaimed, “Shout the glad tidings o’er Egypt’s dark sea, Jehovah has triumphed, his people are free!”¹⁷ The Exodus narrative allowed slaves to embrace a Christianity that was all their own, not their masters’ version.¹⁸ Black church historian Albert Raboteau concludes, “It would be hard to exaggerate the intensity of their identification with the children of Israel.” In 1834 a black Methodist preacher exhorted, “Great is the Holy one of Israel.”¹⁹ From their perspective, African Americans were the favored people of God.

American Jews, enjoying the constitutional fruits of equality and liberty, had been no less assiduous than Christians in envisioning America to be their Zion. American diplomat and journalist Mordecai Noah had excited the public, Christian as well as Jewish, in 1825 when he dedicated a Jewish homeland on an island in the Niagara River and later in 1845 when he delivered an address

advocating the rebuilding of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Though he drew the attention of the press and much pulpit comment, Noah's biographer Jonathan Sarna notes that he had "no followers."²⁰ A Jewish return to the Holy Land had a certain popular appeal, enhanced by romantic travel literature, but was widely regarded as impractical, perhaps suitable for distressed Jews abroad but certainly not for prosperous, emancipated American Jews. Calls and speculation on a Jewish return to Zion reflected a restorationist theology—that the return would be effected through divine rather than human agency. Here again, Jew and Christian conflicted on whether such a restoration was a prelude to the millennial conversion of the Jews. The *Jewish Messenger* cautioned editorially that for "some enthusiasts ... the restoration of the Jews is in intimate and indissoluble relation with their conversion to Christianity, and, through their instrumentality, with that of the world in general." It continued, "Somehow or other, Protestantism believes itself bound up with Judaism."²¹ Jews would have good reason to distance themselves from that restorationist enterprise.

Traditionalist Rabbi Bernard Illowy expressed a more commonplace Jewish belief when he preached that "until the time that it will be pleasing in the sight of the Lord to protract the fulfillment of his promises, this country will be our Jerusalem."²² In 1857 Isaac Mayer Wise would write, "Those who wish to live on this free soil are granted every liberty imaginable, and dare not pray for the restoration of a kingdom." In his *siddur, Minhag America*, Wise banished prayers for the restoration of Zion and the rebuilding of the Holy Temple.²³ By 1870 Rabbi Max Lilienthal of Cincinnati's Broadway Synagogue would write that having "abolished all prayers referring to a return to Palestine ... that the country we live in is our home and our fatherland." Jerusalem, Lilienthal acknowledged, was "the cradle of our religion," but he noted that Christians revered it, too, as a place of "reverential memory."²⁴ Tellingly, when Jews did organize nationally in 1859, they referred to themselves not as Jews or Hebrews but as the Board of Delegates of American Israelites. Similarly, the *Israelite* newspaper, founded in 1854, became the *American Israelite* in 1874. Not until the 1880s and 1890s would a Palestinian Zionism emerge as a political movement.

Rhetorically, at least, rabbis, whether liberal or traditionalist, expressed their faith in the American Zion in ways that did not differ from their Christian counterparts. Nor did the sermons of rabbis committed to the Union or the Confederacy differ much in that regard.²⁵ Northern rabbis extolled the Constitution that brought American Jews freedom and prosperity and thus prayed for the preservation of the Union. Republican government was, as Illowy, then of Baltimore described it, "the happiest system that was ever devised." In response to a national fast day in 1861, Rabbi Illowy, a halakhic authority, declared, "This country will be our Jerusalem. O may it also forever continue to be the holy land, the land of liberty, the house of peace, and the asylum of oppressed and persecuted humanity." He would update the ancient Israelite



Left to right: *Michael Heilprin, Polish-American author, scholar, and philanthropist; Rev. Max Michelbacher of Beth Ahabah Synagogue in Richmond, VA; Rev. Sabato Morais of Cong. Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia*

(Courtesy American Jewish Archives)

custom of visiting the graves of their ancestors by instead walking “among the tombs of the illustrious fathers of this country.”²⁶ Traditionalist Rabbi Sabato Morais of Philadelphia preached on Thanksgiving Day in 1852, “It is this love of liberty, engrafted on the religion of our fathers,” that led Jews “to unite their fate with that of the American patriots who gallantly fought for their rights.”²⁷ Morais beseeched the Almighty, “For surely Thy watchful Providence” has not departed from this country.²⁸ Nine years later, he persisted with this theme: “I have been permitted to enter this new Canaan, every spot of which is sanctified by the footsteps of revolutionary heroes.”²⁹ “Providence,” Isaac Mayer Wise wrote in the *Israelite* in 1860, “reserved this sea-girt continent for the last and highest triumphs of humanity.”³⁰ Rabbi Samuel Myer Isaacs, a defender of Orthodoxy, declared on a Thanksgiving day in 1863 that this land has “been blessed by the Supreme, as no other country in the globe has been favored.”³¹

Rabbinic rhetoric was rife with images of Zion. Rabbis David Einhorn and Isaacs disagreed only on whether this land was “flowing” or “overflowing” with “milk and honey.”³² Washington was “the Jerusalem of America ... its lamp of freedom, the delight of nations,” preached Einhorn, the radical Reform rabbi.³³ “Stand by the flag!”—the Stars and Stripes—Isaacs wrote in the *Jewish Messenger* in 1861, which “has ever protected Israel.”³⁴ From Chicago, Abraham Kohn sent Lincoln a flag on which he inscribed verses from Joshua: “As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee.”³⁵ New York Rev. Morris Raphall lectured in 1860 on the “points of resemblance between the United States and the chosen nation,” repeating the rhetorical formula of “as the Israelites were ... so in the United States.” A year later the rabbi presided at a “special service” during which a “fine American flag” was hoisted over the pinnacle of the Greene Street Synagogue.³⁶

Southern Jews, lauding the Confederacy’s own republican virtues, assented to the vision of their own land as Zion. In 1841 Rabbi Gustav Poznanski, who would later lose a son in Confederate service, declared from the pulpit of K.K. Beth Elohim: “This synagogue is our temple, this city our Jerusalem, this happy

land our Palestine.”³⁷ Endorsing a cult of synthesis, Rev. M.J. Michelbacher of Richmond preached that Jews were God’s “favorite children,” both as “Israelites *and* as citizens” [added emphasis].³⁸ Southern Jews, like Rabbi James K. Gutheim of New Orleans, repeated the common argument that Southerners were fighting a “just” war in “defense of our liberties and rights and independence” against an “unholy” despotic foe.³⁹ In so doing, the rabbi pointed to the example of the Israelite liberation, which he cast as a republican struggle against tyranny. Shreveport Jews publicly denounced those who were “opposed to our holy cause.”⁴⁰ As Confederate volunteer Ike Hermann put it, “I found in this country an ideal and harmonious people; they treated me as one of their own; in fact for me, it was the land of Canaan where milk and honey flowed.”⁴¹

Blessings of Providence

Each side took a providential view of history, so the Israelite story served as a national creation myth. All assumed that the hand of Providence was guiding the war’s outcome, and victories and defeats were read as signs of divine judgment. Although Lincoln expressed a lifelong skepticism about divining the mind of God, he described himself in 1861 as “an humble instrument in the hands of the Almighty, and of this, his almost chosen people.” He called America’s Union “the last best hope of earth.”⁴² In an 1863 Thanksgiving proclamation, Confederate President Jefferson Davis declared that Confederates were “a people who believe that the Lord reigneth, and that His overruling Providence ordereth all things.”⁴³ Confederate artillery officer Edward Alexander reflected, “Our president and many of our generals really and actually believed that there *was* this mysterious Providence always hovering over the field and ready to interfere on one side or the other, and that prayers and piety may win its favor from day to day.” Mary Chesnut, who wrote acutely of the war as the wife of a Confederate statesman, noted ironically in her memoir that Southerners held “not one doubt . . . in our bosoms that we are not the chosen people of God.”⁴⁴ As instruments of the divine, the South was defending its sacred land against an invasion of tyranny and materialism even as Northern armies were fighting to cleanse the South of the sin of slavery and rebellion.⁴⁵

An American republic that had once drawn a wall between religion and state now saw government as God’s agency—more specifically, in service to a Protestant evangelical Christianity.⁴⁶ During the war public prayer grew increasingly sectarian, and Jews felt discomfited as Jesus was invoked on civic occasions.⁴⁷ “In God We Trust” was first engraved on coins in 1864. At camp revivals, which were especially popular in the Confederate Army, preachers evoked ancient Israelite warriors, urged soldiers to be as strong as Joshua or David, and promised them a happier Canaan. R.J. DeCordova of New York’s Temple Emanuel suggested that Jewish soldiers should seek each other’s “communion” so that “the name of Israel’s God may be invoked even in the camp.”⁴⁸ Under God’s banner, these

were armies of redemption. Federal and Confederate soldiers alike inscribed biblical verses onto their flags as they marched into battle. The Union anthem was a hymn, and its soldiers were an army serving the glory of the Lord, whose “truth is marching on.” As historian George Rable notes, “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” could have also served well as the Southern anthem.⁴⁹

Southerners—led by Robert E. Lee—called upon the God of Battles or the Lord of Hosts. “To your tents O! Israel,” Alabama congressman David Clayton wrote to Senator Clement Clay, “and let the God of battles decide the issue.”⁵⁰ The designation of hosts as an army traces to Exodus, although the Lord of Hosts as a divine name is found most commonly in Psalms and Prophets. The Lord of Hosts is thus Yahweh, leader of Israelite armies. J. William Jones—a Confederate camp revivalist who was Lee’s “fighting parson”—began prayer with an invocation to the “God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God of Israel, God of the centuries, God of our fathers, God of Jefferson Davis, Robert Edward Lee, and Stonewall Jackson, Lord of Hosts and King of Kings.”⁵¹ In her poem, “The Battle of Manassas,” Mary Bayard Clarke, wife of a North Carolina soldier, drew a pertinent parallel: “Now glory to the Lord of Hosts . . . and honor to our Beauregard,”⁵² the victor of First Bull Run.

“Heaken [*sic*] to the thrilling words,” echoed DeCordova, “To your tents, O! Israel.”⁵³ Rabbis, too, sanctified the cause in their pleas to the Lord of Hosts. Rabbi Einhorn, Morais, and Michelbacher spoke of the God of Battles, a translation that traces not to Jewish sources—Isaac Leeser had rendered *Adonai tsvaot* as Lord of Hosts in his 1845 English-language Bible—but common among Christian preachers. Its origin apparently traces to *Hamlet*.⁵⁴ On a Fast Day in 1863, Morais, a religious conservative, preached from Psalms, “The Lord of Hosts is with us.”⁵⁵

“Piety cannot exist without patriotism,” preached Michelbacher of Richmond, echoing the popular sentiment that underlay the civil religion of Unionist and Confederate, Jew and Christian alike.⁵⁶ Jews, too, employed Protestant rhetoric in expressing their belief that Providence would decide the outcome of this holy war. After Chickamauga, U.S. Major L.A. Gratz wrote, “God has held his hand over me.”⁵⁷ A Jewish Confederate captain in Louisiana felt equally assured, as he wrote his wife, “God is on our side and will watch over us.”⁵⁸ Michelbacher’s “Prayer of the C.S. Soldiers” called on the “Lord, God of Israel” to “be unto the Army of this Confederacy as thou wert of old unto us thy chosen people!”⁵⁹ In “A Reverie,” Charleston poet Penina Moïse hoped that the God who “through the desert, hath my children led” would show “the blest design of Providence” in crowning the Old Palmetto state with glory.⁶⁰ Anticipating in 1861 Lincoln’s second inaugural address, Rabbi Dr. Fischel of New York’s Nineteenth Street Synagogue recognized the “contradiction” that the “people North and South claimed each for the verdict of its own section of a Divine source.”⁶¹

The Hebrew Bible offered a pantheon of heroes who personified bravery, leadership, and religious virtue. The devout Presbyterian Stonewall Jackson was, in poet Harry Flash's words, "The Moses of the South" who "entered not the Nation's Promised Land ... but broke the House of Bondage with hand."⁶² A popular song went, "Stretch forth thy rod! Amen!—That's Stonewall Jackson's way."⁶³ Still others saw Jackson as Gideon or Joshua. But, then again, Southerners commonly described Robert E. Lee as Moses. To Southerners, Lincoln was pharaoh, but to Northerners and freed African Americans he was Moses. On one Confederate fast day, Benjamin Morgan Palmer assured his New Orleans flock that the Northern Pharaoh Lincoln had hardened his heart against the Confederate states seeking to escape bondage to the Northern tyrant.⁶⁴ Contrarily, Methodist bishop Gilbert Haven, a white New Englander who ministered to African Americans, saw Davis as the Southern pharaoh, overthrown by the Union's Moses and Aaron, Lincoln and Grant, although he sometimes cast Grant as Joshua.⁶⁵ Lincoln's death affirmed his status as a second Moses who led his people to the Promised Land but could not enter.⁶⁶ Hence, the *New York Herald* thought that Andrew Johnson was Joshua, who would take the people into Canaan.⁶⁷ Of course, the Exodus tropes did not work if, as others contended, Lincoln was Father Abraham and Grant was King David. A black regiment marched to the song, "Father Abraham has spoken ... as we go marchin' on."⁶⁸ One New York minister saw Lincoln as King Rehoboam on the throne of Israel's united kingdom while another Brooklyn minister advised Lincoln not to follow Rehoboam's example.⁶⁹

The Unionist and Confederate claims of Israelite heritage brought Jews into their respective national folds, not marginalized as a people apart, and Jews wholeheartedly assented. North and South, Jews insisted on their patriotism, vigorously rejecting any insult that would condemn them as a class apart. In 1862 Savannah Jews reacted to the expulsion of the Jews from Thomasville, Georgia, with a resolution against the "wholesale slander, persecution and denunciation of a people"; and "the most common theme" among Jews to Grant's notorious General Orders No. 11 was "the iniquity of any decree which proscribed an entire religious group because of the misbehavior of a few." Isaac Mayer Wise protested in the *Israelite*, "As a class you have officially been degraded."⁷⁰ In asking for God's favor for his Southern Zion, Rev. Michelbacher appealed to the "God of Israel—not as a single meeting of a part, but as the whole congregation of all the people of the land." While Union and Confederate Christians were legitimating themselves as Israelites, Israelites were validating themselves as Americans and Confederates. When Davis requested a day of prayer in 1863, Michelbacher preached that Jewish "manhood" was "worthy of the magnanimous souls of Lee, Jackson, and others."⁷¹ Jews, too, wished to be counted among the Southerners who felt themselves to be God's chosen. In his 1863 poem, "A Prayer for Peace," Samuel Yates Levy of Savannah made the parallel explicit:

And as thou led'st thy chosen people forth
From Egypt's sullen wrath, Oh King of Kings!
So smite the Armies of the cruel North
And bear us to our hopes "on eagles wings."⁷²

Emma Mordecai eulogized the fallen Confederate Isaac Levy as a "true Israelite ... a soldier of the Lord & a soldier of the South."⁷³

Parting of the Ways

As biblical peoples, Christians and Jews trace their origins to common beginnings but not common endings. In their sermons, the two part ways on Christian typology. According to the Christian reading, Hebrew prophecies—the signs and wonders of the Israelite saga—anticipate Christ's coming. Antebellum millennialists held that God's promises to Israel had been or soon would be fulfilled and that America as a Christian republic would play a providential role in ushering in the kingdom of God, with its thousand years of peace and justice.⁷⁴ Julia Ward Howe, in the "Battle Hymn of the Republic," interwove imagery from both the Old and the New Testaments that prophesied the end of days. She rhapsodized on "the glory of the coming of the Lord"; as Christ "died to make men holy," so soldiers shall die to make men free. The army's "rows of steel" were a "fiery gospel." Although the "terrible swift sword" of the hymn draws on Isaiah 27, it is put into the service of an apocalyptic Christianity. American Christians were the agents of divine election.

While their armies clashed on battlefields, Northerners and Southerners warred over holy text. Clearly, in this the South marshaled the stronger forces. By any literal reading, the Hebrew Bible authorized slaveholding. Even after the escape from Egypt, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were all slaveholders, and to hold otherwise was "unscriptural and fanatical," declared the Southern Presbyterian General Assembly meeting in Macon, Georgia, in 1865.⁷⁵ Yet, Southern ministers noted that the New Testament tacitly accepted it, too. In the late antebellum years they reproached slaveholders not for their ownership of their fellow men and women but for their failure to honor their biblical obligations to them, most notably in preserving families.⁷⁶ The slave issue only strengthened their conviction that the Bible was to be read literally. As a justification for secession, Southerners cited Lot's abandoning Sodom, Jeroboam's revolt, and the division of the united monarchy into the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel.⁷⁷ Just as David had broken the first Israel from King Saul, a Greensboro minister observed, Davis broke a "second kingdom of Israel" from Lincoln.⁷⁸

Jews, however much they employed a Protestant vocabulary, read the Bible differently, and their exegesis reflected that. The Jewish debates on slavery and succession, too, focused on scriptural authority. Reform Jews contended with traditionalists in asserting their legitimacy as spiritual heirs of Sinai. Liberals

and traditionalists conflicted in Southern congregations no less than those in the North, and modern movement labels do not account for the wavering and inconsistency that marked congregational histories. Moreover, in the late antebellum years, traditionalist synagogues arose in the region's major cities with the arrival of Posen and Prussian Jews. In the postbellum years, Reform became the normative religion of native Southern Jews. Of the six congregations in America in 1789, Gary Zola notes, the three northern ones—in New York, Newport, and Philadelphia—held to the traditionalism of their founders, while the three southern—in Savannah, Charleston, and Richmond—all gravitated toward Reform. Given the strength of evangelical, fundamentalist Christianity in the South, Jews rationalized their differences with Christianity. Christian “veneration of the biblical tradition,” as Zola notes, established common ground for interfaith understanding, a “pathway to acceptance.”⁷⁹ The Exodus saga of national liberation and the biblical sanction of slaveholding spoke to their shared values.

Jewish religious debates seemed to take the opposite tack of Christian sectional schisms. Southern Reform Jews, who lived distant from rabbinic authority, expressed wariness of Northern Jewish traditionalists even as Southern Christian traditionalists were wary of Northern Christian liberals. Rabbinic travelers to the South expressed shock at the laxity they found there. South Carolina Jews had resisted efforts in the 1840s and 1850s to create a national Jewish union, plans that Abraham Moise of Charleston said would “sweep away all Jews south of the Potomac.”⁸⁰ In 1846 Sarah Moses of Philadelphia, visiting her sister Miriam Cohen in Savannah, saw growing Jewish religious divisions that, as Diane Ashton notes, reflected “the deepening national conflict.” Moses wrote her aunt Rebecca Gratz in Philadelphia that Southern Jews felt that Northern Jews disparaged them because “they do not adhere to all the forms prescribed by the rabbis,” while Southern Jews felt that “Northern and Conforming Jews lose all spirituality in blind adherence to what their fathers did before them.”⁸¹

Political Preaching

Whatever one's position on slavery or secession, political preaching sanctified the cause. “The Exodus as we know it in the text,” Michael Walzer writes, “is plausibly understood in political terms, as a liberation and a revolution—even though it is also, in the text, an act of God.”⁸² Northern abolitionists had long joined African Americans in seeing the slavery crisis as a reenactment of the Israelite liberation. They spoke in evangelical tones in insisting that slaveholding was a sin and emancipation was a duty. Henry Ward Beecher sermonized that Northern people were wandering the wilderness like the children of Israel until they could enter a land of peace and freedom.⁸³ Northern preachers pointed to the ancient division of Judah and Israel not as a precedent but as an admonition. A Cincinnati minister cited the rebellions of Absalom, Jeroboam, and Judas as

cautionary tales of evil and insisted that the “Cause of the United States” and the “Cause of Jehovah” were the same.⁸⁴

Judaism did not have Christianity’s great tradition of sermonizing. A generic prayer for the government had been traditional in Judaism at least since the Babylonian exile, and by the fourteenth century it had found its way into the *siddur*. In American synagogues such prayers were commonly recited before the open ark. Yet, Jews had been wary of bringing politics into the sanctums of religion. In an 1860 Thanksgiving sermon Rabbi Gutheim, who lamented the gathering clouds of war, pledged silence on “the political questions of the day.”⁸⁵ In the 1 February 1861 *Israelite*, after the presidential call for a national fast day, Wise headlined “No Political Preaching,” a principle that he honored at times in the breach, to the consternation of his congregants. Isaac Mayer Wise was nonetheless relentless in deploring Christian ministers who used their pulpits as partisan platforms. Yet, on the issues of slavery and secession, rabbis, like Christian clergy, commonly engaged in political preaching. North and South alike reacted to the military and political events of the day and responded patriotically to repeated presidential calls for national days of prayer, fasting, or thanksgiving.⁸⁶ “The sermons assumed more of a political complexion than usual,” the *Jewish Messenger* noted after President James Buchanan’s 1860 appeal, “the allusions to the excited condition of the country, and hopes expressed for the perpetuity of the Union, were naturally to be expected.”⁸⁷

Rabbis often made their political points in veiled language, much as they might note that petitionary prayers are not customary on the Sabbath—before beginning a petitionary prayer. “Announcing his determination to avoid, however, as heretofore, discussing political questions in the pulpit,” Rabbi S.M. Isaacs of New York’s Wooster Street Synagogue “proceeded to unfold his theme ... for the preservation of the Union.”⁸⁸ In 1861 Rabbi Morais had called on God to “dictate to the Senators and Legislators of these United States words of reconciliation,” seemingly endorsing the compromise efforts of the peace parties. Without mentioning names, he also implicitly criticized evangelical abolitionists in deploring those whose “blind fanaticism and narrowed intolerance” would abridge the “religious liberty” granted by the Constitution.⁸⁹ Rabbi Illowy’s fast day sermon in 1861 was so well received in the South as a politically polemical defense of secession against the “misguided” North that a New Orleans congregation summoned him to its pulpit.⁹⁰ When dedicating the synagogue in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1862, Rabbi Gutheim began and ended with perfunctory blessings over Israel, but the gist of his sermon was a prayer for the “beloved” governments of the Confederate States of America and the state of Alabama.⁹¹ Morris Raphall’s sermon in defense of slavery included a “great reproach” to the “sturdy fire-eater who in the hearing of an indignant world proclaims ‘Cotton is King.’” He also attacked an abolitionist reverend

doctor in Brooklyn—obviously, Beecher—who disparaged the morality of the Old Testament.⁹²

Rabbinic sermons embraced the synthesis that Jews felt between their American and Israelite heritages. Presidential or gubernatorial appeals for patriotic sermons were made for specifically American holidays such as Thanksgiving or Independence Day rather than for Jewish festivals. Fortunately, some Jewish holiday, however minor, was always nearby. Rabbi Morais noted that when such special prayers were requested, “by happy coincidence, [they] corresponded with a season hallowed by the religion of Israel.” For “both occasions” he added, the “voice of the lovers of American Union harmonized in devotional outpourings.”⁹³ Thus, the Philadelphia Union League asked Morais for “a stirring oration on political topics” as the Confederate Army approached Gettysburg in early July 1863. The rabbi demurred on a specifically political speech but thought it more fitting to preach the word of God. With the battle’s outcome yet unknown, he delivered a sermon that blended the Fourth of July and the seventeenth of Tammuz, when the Assyrians breached the walls of Jerusalem. “Encircle Pennsylvania with Thy mighty shield,” he implored God.⁹⁴ In extolling the “example of the Maccabeas,” [*sic*] Rabbi Raphael Lasker of New York’s Thirty Third Street Synagogue emphasized—if he did not reinvent—Hanukkah as a holiday symbolizing America’s own “restoration.”⁹⁵ In a celebratory synagogue sermon at war’s end titled “Flag and Union,” Rabbi Lilienthal elevated his rhetoric as he drew inspiration from the Passover season: He lamented prewar political partisanship, reflected how abolitionist radicalism once opposed was now vindicated, and endorsed Lincoln’s call for national reconciliation.⁹⁶

The political issue most amenable to biblical exegesis was slavery. Jewish religious ideology, whether liberal or traditional, did not necessarily predict one’s stand on slavery or secession. As Jonathan Sarna notes, Jews could justify their stands on slavery on the basis of “compromise and unity” as well as “in defense of sacred principles.”⁹⁷ Slavery was the aggravating issue in dividing Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians into sectional governing bodies. Jewish religious orientations, however, had not yet hardened into sectarian or movement lines nor did Jews coalesce sectionally. National Jewish organizational efforts had been sporadic and unsuccessful, and Jews spoke with many voices, most notably on the slave issue.⁹⁸ In response to an 1861 presidential call for a national fast day to preserve the Union, Raphall famously preached an exegetical defense of slavery, offering Moses and the Ten Commandments as evidence of its divine sanction. Jewish and even more especially Christian proponents of slavery cited Raphall, deferring to a rabbi as the authority on Hebrew scripture. In another fast day sermon Rabbi Illowy, speaking in Baltimore, asserted in capitals that the “TRUE PATH OF TRUE RELIGION” from Abraham to Moses to Ezra affirms the inviolability of slavery.⁹⁹ Although the Confederate-sympathizing Illowy soon relocated to the South, Raphall remained a Union patriot. He could

not justify going to war on the slave issue, which he did not regard as a “sin,” but he also argued that the Hebrew Bible condoned a code more humane than the heathen practices of the South.¹⁰⁰ Raphall, whose son, a career federal officer, would lose an arm at Gettysburg, did find in the Bible “abundant warrant for denouncing rebellion” as sin.¹⁰¹ On the slave issue, Southern Jews, whether liberal or traditional, read their Bibles literally and preferred the Orthodox interpretation of scripture. Planter Solomon Cohen, a traditionalist who was a friend of Isaac Leeser and president of Savannah’s Mickve Israel during the war years, wrote, “God gave laws to his chosen people for the government of their slaves and did not order them to abolish slavery.”¹⁰² To the contrary, Isaac Mayer Wise, although a Democrat and Southern sympathizer, argued, “Moses was opposed to slavery.”¹⁰³

Slavery advocates, Jewish abolitionists contended, were returning Jews to Egypt. Abolitionist Michael Heilprin questioned why “must the stigma of Egyptian principles be fastened on the people of Israel by Israelitish lips themselves.”¹⁰⁴ Rabbi David Einhorn, who fled Baltimore because of his anti-slavery views, reproached Raphall with a reminder that a Jew “praises the Lord daily for the deliverance of Egyptian yoke of slavery.”¹⁰⁵ Another abolitionist rabbi, Bernhard Felsenthal of Chicago, preached that it was not Jews alone but the American nation itself that was freed from Egyptian bondage.¹⁰⁶ On Thanksgiving 1863 Einhorn, refuting “ancient custom” in the name of “moral progress,” preached of the “God who loves liberty and who hates slavery.”¹⁰⁷ In contrast to the Protestant evangelical abolitionists, Jewish opponents of slavery tended to be religious liberals, often immigrant Reform Jews whose experiences in the European revolutions of the 1840s shaped their American political views.¹⁰⁸ They, too, rooted American republicanism in Israel.

In drawing parallels between ancient Hebrew and modern African American emancipation movements, Jewish abolitionists such as Heilprin and Einhorn tacitly endorsed the African American claims to the American Zion.¹⁰⁹ Yet, more commonly, Jews, including rabbis—whether pro- or antislavery, Northern or Southern—refuted such African American and Israelite comparisons, sometimes justifying their arguments with biblical texts. They drew sharp racial lines between Hebrews and Africans, at times in viciously disparaging terms. In 1863, the *Jewish Record* of New York, a Democratic newspaper, expressed its contempt: “We know not how to speak in the same breath of the Negro and the Israelite.” Those who do so “insult the choice of God himself in endeavoring to reverse the inferiority which he stamped on the African, to make him the compeer, even in bondage, of His chosen people.” The publication especially objected that “the holy name and fame of the Prophet Moses should be desecrated by a comparison with the quixotic achievements of President Lincoln.”¹¹⁰

Such racial attitudes also reflected Jewish animus toward the abolitionists who spoke in a high Christian tone. Isaac Mayer Wise, while professing to

be no friend of slavery, aimed his wrath at evangelical Christian abolitionists who would extirpate Jews from the American body politic. Isaac Leeser in *The Occident* tirelessly agitated for Jewish rights while remaining indifferent to the antislavery cause. Indeed, Henry Ward Beecher had argued that bondage was old covenant but liberty was new. In their Christian crusade against slavery, these “fanatics,” Wise argued, would remove the constitutional liberties that granted Jews equality and freedom. Abolitionism to Wise was but one piece of the larger effort to convert America into a “Christian country” through legislation, temperance, the military chaplaincy, and public prayer to “God and Jesus.”¹¹¹ Rabbi David Einhorn shared that concern in attacking Christian sectarians of the National Reform Association, who in 1864 had proposed amending the Constitution to recognize “the American nation as a Christian nation.”¹¹² New York’s *Jewish Record* alleged that with the Confederacy defeated, New England fanatics would disfranchise Jews.¹¹³

Whether Jews exaggerated abolitionist antisemitism is moot. Louis Ruchames, surveying the literature, finds repeated and persistent antisemitic stereotyping in the writings of leading abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison and Edmund Quincy. Garrison wrote disparagingly of those “groping in Jewish darkness”; he perceived no difference between ancient and modern Jews. Others, such as Samuel May or Nathaniel Peabody Rogers, viewed Jews sympathetically either through personal acquaintance with exemplary Jews or through their human-rights principles. Even Garrison praised Jews such as Rabbi Gustav Gottheil, an English rabbi who was author of the abolitionist *Moses versus Slavery*. Abolitionist editor Rogers, committed to universal “mankind,” rejected the belief that Jews constituted a “chosen people” and disparaged Mordecai Noah’s various restorationist enterprises; he advised Jews to pursue their rights as Americans. “In Christ Jesus,” he quotes Paul, there is only “Humanity,” not “hostile distinctions.”¹¹⁴ Even from sympathetic voices, Jews might feel justifiably anxious that the terms of their equality were Christian.

Jews vigorously rejected any aspersion that would dispossess them from their American homeland. The truly repellent antisemitism of the Civil War era was economic, as Jews were charged with hoarding and speculating as prices rose exorbitantly and goods became scarce. Jews were accused of being purveyors of “shoddy” merchandise, particularly as suppliers of uniforms to the armies. Antisemites often employed imagery that would dislodge Jews not only as patriots but as true and worthy Israel. In one Northern antisemitic cartoon, “Moses” is a hook-nosed antipatriot who would rather sell to the army than take up arms.¹¹⁵ Another cartoon features Judah Benjamin leading a Confederate “Exodus to Nashville.”¹¹⁶ Ohio Senator Benjamin Wade denounced Judah Benjamin as an “Israelite with Egyptian principles.”¹¹⁷ When employed by antisemites, the “Israelite” label, regarded as more dignified than that of “Jew,” became ironically a term of deprecation.

Israel in Triumph and Defeat

As disputed, negotiated territory, Israel was a model to emulate and an example to avoid, the fulfillment of prophecy and a cautionary tale of bad faith. When victorious, both Northerners and Southerners had taken heart from triumphant, liberated Zion; but after battlefield losses they reproached themselves as sinful, stiff-necked Israel. Defeat, ministers North and South inveighed, owed to God's chastising wrath, and they called upon their flock to repent. Drawing on Hebrew tradition, Abraham Lincoln proclaimed three fast days and Jefferson Davis, nine. The Confederate Congress, governors, and field generals, most notably Lee, declared still more days of abstinence, repentance, and thanksgiving. The jeremiad sermon appropriate to such fast days began in the North as a Puritan custom that was adopted by Quakers, Catholics, and Unitarians.¹¹⁸ The custom spread to Southern pulpits. A preacher's obligation, as Marc Saperstein observes, requires him to "rally the people" to the army and government, even when misguided, and to "invoke God's judgment and rebuke the listeners" during times of failure and confusion.¹¹⁹ Humility would abate God's wrath. First Bull Run had been lost, Northern ministers argued, because it was fought on a Sunday, desecrating the Sabbath.¹²⁰ The jeremiad grew especially prevalent across the South as defeats mounted. In repenting, secessionists sought to free themselves from "Yankee sins."¹²¹ At Confederate camp revivals, preachers enumerated the shortcomings that could account for lost battles: Their list included cursing, gambling, drunkenness, or profaning the Sabbath, and they offered as negative examples the rebellious children of Israel along with the Philistines and Ninevites.

Through the jeremiad, Northern and Southern Jews reproached themselves, as Rabbi Einhorn put it, for their "lust for earthly gain" and lack of Sabbath observance. In a sermon, "War with Amalek," Einhorn linked the Union's military campaign against "enslavement of Race" to the Jews' eternal struggle against the "enslavement of the Spirit."¹²² Observing that, "alas, it is already the fourth year that a civil war rages in our beloved country," Rabbi Dr. Gunzberg of Rochester admonished his congregants that "our rapid soaring up was the cause of our ruin, for truly we have ... turned away our eyes from Thee."¹²³ Defeats could be explained not by the injustice of the cause but by the moral failings of its adherents. In his 1863 prayer poem, the ardently Confederate Samuel Yates Levy lamented,

We know our sins are manifold, Oh Lord,
And that thou wrath against us is but right,
For we have wandered wildly from thou word
And things committed wrongful in thy sight.

The mourning country was “in sack cloth robed.”¹²⁴ In the North, New York editor and Cantor Samuel Myer Isaacs on a thanksgiving day in 1863 held up the example of King David in chastising his congregants for calling on God only “in our distress” but “ignoring his very existence when it has been well with us.”¹²⁵

Of course, Southerners and Northerners could not both be the chosen people. In 1863, as Confederate defeats mounted, the Lutheran Synod of North Carolina responded, “Our Zion now seems to languish.”¹²⁶ As war wound to its end Southerners abandoned claims of being the triumphant, conquering Israel but consoled themselves as the defeated Israel, exiled in Babylon. Perhaps God, the president of the Lutheran Synod speculated, would make Southerners a separate and independent people as he had the ancient Hebrews.¹²⁷ The civil religion of the Lost Cause was a “cultural nationalism” that imagined a covenanted people, like the Jews, of one blood and lineage, united by customs and institutions and “longing ... for a national existence.” At the heart of the lost cause, Charles Reagan Wilson writes, was “our Southern Zion.”¹²⁸ North Carolina’s Civil War Governor Zebulon Vance looked on the war-weary people of his state as “this suffering and much oppressed Israel.”¹²⁹ In 1866, Rector W.B.W. Howe of St. Philip’s Episcopal Church in Charleston made the comparison explicit: “Individuals, nay, the mass, might prove untrue to the ancient covenant, but a remnant always survived, through whom, as from holy seed, the nation renewed its youth.”¹³⁰ The Israelite analogy of the surviving remnant allowed vanquished Southerners to maintain their first principles without doubting the rightness of slavery or secession. In 1890 Presbyterian James McNeilly noted that even when God’s chosen people were in Babylonian captivity, “that fact did not prove the heathen to be right in the cause nor that the Israelites were upholding a bad cause.”¹³¹ “For good or ill, a Southerner is like being a Jew,” claimed Raleigh editor Jonathan Daniels.¹³²

Southern Jews assented to the typology of the South as Zion in Babylonian exile. In 1863, Rev. Michelbacher made abeyance to Moses, but the prophet he mostly invoked was Nehemiah, drawing parallels between the Confederacy and exilic Israel. Comparing the South to besieged Jerusalem, he recalled how Nehemiah pled for social justice for the war-suffering poor. Just as the walls of Jerusalem were once under assault, so, too, the North was now attacking the South. Using a term common to both Jewish and Christian discourse, Michelbacher spoke of Nehemiah as the prophet who “regenerated” the people both civilly and religiously. Henry Hyams, the former lieutenant governor of Louisiana, also drew upon the Babylonian exile: “As Israelites, we are passing through another captivity which relives and reenacts all the troubles so pathetically poured forth by the inspired Jeremiah.” He hoped that this “unhappy land” would “one day conquer and overcome its present vanquishers—despite our present degradation,” even as the Israelites were redeemed from “Bondage.”¹³³

Southern Jews embraced lost cause memorialization by helping to erect monuments, joining Confederate revivals, and observing Confederate Memorial Day. Veteran Moses Ezekiel described his work as a Confederate memorial sculptor as “one of the most sacred duties of my life.”¹³⁴

Apocalyptic Israel

The enormity of the mayhem and bloodletting heightened feelings of imminent apocalypse, as did the promise of a new birth of peace and freedom. Neither the South’s defeat nor Lincoln’s assassination disabused either side of their faith. Rather, these tragedies were seen as the mysterious workings of a wrathful, inscrutable God. Northern and Southern preachers employed a “Protestant apocalyptic vocabulary, a rhetorical strategy of warning followed by the promise of victory for the faithful and the help of eternal peace.”¹³⁵ Christian typology provided the paradigm. Preachers looked beyond Exodus to apocalyptic signs in Daniel, Job, Jubilees, Michael, Revelations, and Chronicles. “It mus’ be now de kingdom coming, an’ de year ob Jubilo!” went a popular 1862 song, written in an African American dialect, that celebrated the impending emancipation.¹³⁶ Northern abolitionist preachers, in particular, saw Christians as true Israel, not the Jews themselves who were largely indifferent to the antislavery cause. Henry Ward Beecher preached that the “far lower” Old [Covenant] kept man in bondage” but “with immeasurably higher aim ... the New yields liberty.” Emancipation, an Iowa congress member asserted, would bring a “red sea passage” that would not only free the slaves but providentially take the country to “that higher civilization and purer Christianity which the Republic is to attain.”¹³⁷ In victory, Northerners saw millennial signs that drew less on Jewish imagery than on Christian. Even Frederick Douglass adopted apocalyptic language in prophesying that emancipation was but a prelude to global freedom.¹³⁸

Jewish discourse was hardly oblivious to the apocalyptic national mood. Union soldier Isidor Busch, referencing the Zoroastrian deities of good and evil, described his abolitionism as “part of that everlasting war between Ormuzd and Ariman, between light and darkness, between right and wrong.”¹³⁹ Jews dissented from the Christian typology that anticipated Christ’s second coming. When, at war’s end, Phoebe Yates Levy Pember notoriously retorted that Southerners should “join the Jewish church” since it “did not enjoin forgiveness on its enemies,”¹⁴⁰ she was implicitly rejecting Christian millennialism. Rather, she would have Southerners “put their trust in the sword of the Lord and Gideon,” whose conquest of the Midianites ensured the survival of the Israelite nation.¹⁴¹

Jewish messianic and apocalyptic rhetoric during the war commonly spoke of a national rather than of a universal, supernatural savior; this reflected the traditional Jewish belief that the Messiah would be a Cyrus rather than a

Christ. When Rev. Michelbacher called on the “God of Israel . . . the only true God, and Saviour . . . to bring salvation to the Confederate States of America,” the “crown” of victory that he had in mind was not the eternal salvation of the Christian kingdom of God but “independence with lasting honour and prosperity” for the Confederacy.¹⁴²

The coincidence of the war’s end and Lincoln’s assassination encouraged theological speculation and political preaching. That the Great Emancipator’s martyrdom came in April 1865, just as Jews were celebrating Passover, seemed providential for Jews even as Christians interpreted the Good Friday death as a divine sign for them.¹⁴³ For Christians, George Rable notes, the biblical typology shifted from Exodus to the New Testament.¹⁴⁴ Easter presented an all-too-obvious opportunity for ministers to draw comparisons between the resurrected Christ and the martyred president.

Jews had commonly likened Lincoln to Father Abraham, King David, and most often to Moses, who died at the precipice of the Promised Land; but they, too, described him in messianic terms. In a funeral oration delivered days after Lincoln’s death, Rabbi Lienthal preached, “A great man has fallen in Israel!”¹⁴⁵ Baltimore Rabbi Benjamin Szold reflected that Lincoln “was so devoted to freedom, that we may, indeed, consider him a son of Israel.” Isaac Mayer Wise, a Copperhead who had often disparaged the president, now claimed proudly that “Lincoln supposed himself to be a descendant of Hebrew parentage.”¹⁴⁶ Again, the messianic crown conferred on Lincoln alluded to a national redeemer, not a supernatural deity. Rabbi Einhorn of Philadelphia thought Lincoln “the Messiah of his people.” For Wise, the martyred president was the “Messiah of this country,” while his neighbor Lienthal proposed inscribing on the martyred president’s grave, “the savior of the country.”¹⁴⁷

Nonetheless, some Jewish memorials to Lincoln were so rhetorically extravagant that they approached, if not breached, theological boundaries between Christianity and Judaism. In Judaism the concept of Messiah is inchoate and complex, and rabbis exercised considerable liberty in tapping its metaphorical possibilities. Rev. Raphall drew on Christian imagery when he spoke not of the bullet that penetrated Lincoln’s brain but of the “dagger [that] pierced the breast of Abraham Lincoln.”¹⁴⁸ By 1905 Rabbi J. Leonard Levy of Pittsburgh, who was born in the year of Lincoln’s death, enshrined the president as “the savior of the nation, America’s suffering Messiah.”¹⁴⁹ The notion of a suffering Messiah has almost no roots in Judaism but was explicitly Christian. In their polemics rabbis had expressly rejected the Christian typology that the suffering servant of Deutero-Isaiah alludes to Jesus, arguing that it refers to either Israel itself or a divinely appointed national hero who would restore the nation from its exile. In 1899, Rabbi Joseph Krauskopf of Philadelphia went further, placing upon Lincoln “his crown of thorns.”¹⁵⁰ Krauskopf was a radical reformer, an advocate of Sunday worship, whom a Christian woman recommended to

Hebrew Union College as a man with “all the Christian virtues.”¹⁵¹ The spirit of religious syncretism that prevailed after the war led rabbis to speculate on whether the era of Jewish-Christian reconciliation was imminent or distant, and their rhetorical excesses in extolling Lincoln as a savior, the Great Emancipator, anticipated that resolution.

The Persistence of Zion

In believing themselves to be God’s chosen people, Unionists, Confederates, and African American slaves were following a long tradition. Oppressed peoples—or at least peoples who regard themselves oppressed—historically have identified with the Jews of the Exodus saga. Michael Walzer in *Exodus and Revolution* argues that the Israelite narrative had long provided a paradigm for Protestant, Puritan, French, and American revolutionaries as well as for Zionists, Marxists, African nationalists, and American civil-rights activists.¹⁵² National creation narratives commonly begin with a myth of divine election. In *The Chosen Peoples*, Todd Gitlin and Liel Leibovitz inventory nations that have felt “singled out by God to be His chosen people.” They include not just the peoples of the United States and Israel but the Boers of South Africa, Russians, French, Germans, and even Saudi Arabians. Beyond biblical peoples, they find similar myths of election among Chinese, Hindus, and Navajos.¹⁵³ Liberian Edward Wilmot Blyden, the nineteenth-century “father of pan-Africanism,” found affirmation for his own people’s aspirations in the “marvelous” Zionism of the Jews.¹⁵⁴ William Hutchinson and Hartmut Lehman in *Many Are Chosen: Divine Election & Western Nationalism* note that virtually every European nation—except the multinational, confederated Swiss—have believed themselves divinely selected. Typically, such nations identify with Israel.¹⁵⁵ In the nineteenth century Anglo-Israelitism, a belief that the British nation was lineally descended from the Ten Lost Tribes, became popular. Indeed, Jews themselves often expressed their local patriotism by describing their places of residence as a Zion or Jerusalem—for example, Vilna was the Jerusalem of Lithuania. Such identifications, however, were not necessarily incompatible with a commitment to restore Jews to their Palestinian homeland politically or religiously.

To paraphrase Lincoln, the Zionist prayers of Unionists, Confederates, African Americans, and Jews themselves could not all be answered. Not all peoples could be chosen. Emancipated African Americans did not find the South or even America to be their Promised Land. Disillusioned, African Americans nonetheless clung to the belief in their chosenness and looked across the ocean to Africa as their Zion.¹⁵⁶ By the 1920s Marcus Garvey’s pan-African movement claimed four million members. Southern Christianity retained its Hebraic spirit that would later express itself in Christian Zionism, Noahide and messianic-Jewish movements, and a philosemitism that historically has made the region relatively accepting of its Jews. North Carolina’s Civil War governor spoke of

the Jews as “wondrous kinsmen” and extolled them as the “spiritual fathers” of Christianity. In the North “the political preaching and religious activism of the war,” George Fredrickson writes, evolved into a “Christian mission to convert the world.”¹⁵⁷ Efforts to amend the United States constitutionally into a Christian nation peaked by the 1890s and have remained a persistent subtheme. The missionary spirit expressed itself in both a conservative evangelism and a liberal universalism to spread Christian civilization through imperialism abroad and the Social Gospel movement at home.

For Jews, the Civil War experience intensified and accelerated universalizing religious trends. As the national crisis heated up in 1860, a rabbi, Morris Raphall, was invited for the first time to deliver the opening prayer of a session of Congress. Robert E. Lee had allowed furloughs to Jewish soldiers to observe their New Year. In the Union Army, Jews, having won the struggle over the chaplaincy, led Sabbath services for Christian soldiers. A Catholic priest granted absolution to Jew and Protestant alike. Drew Gilpin Faust notes how “Civil War death . . . narrowed theological and denominational differences.”¹⁵⁸ Myer S. Isaacs, a rabbi’s son, reflected on the war’s ecumenical meaning at New York’s Wooster Street Synagogue on Thanksgiving Day, 1863: “Israelite and Christian grasped each other’s hand in cordial confidence, working together, fighting together the battles of the Union, pouring their blood on the battlefield.”¹⁵⁹ Grief and shared afflictions had united America’s diverse peoples in a “republic of suffering.”¹⁶⁰

As ministers preached that America was duty bound to bring “Christian civilization” to the world, rabbis asserted that Israel was to be the light of the nations.¹⁶¹ “We have not been, nor do we desire to be a peculiar nation; we do not desire to return to Palestine,” Rabbi Einhorn preached in 1864, “but, as proclaimed by the prophet, be among the nations as the dew from God.” Einhorn referred to “our sublime world-historic mission.”¹⁶² Isaac Mayer Wise joined with liberal Protestants in predicting a “new era” of religious synthesis, of universal fellowship, where Judaism would become the “common property of the American people.”¹⁶³ In its Pittsburgh Platform of 1885 Reform Judaism anticipated a universal, messianic redemption, “a kingdom of truth, justice and peace for all men.”¹⁶⁴ Jew and Christian, Southerner and Northerner, the enslaved and the emancipated—all continued to see the constitutional liberty and equality of this land as the fulfillment of prophetic Judaism and found in the narrative of ancient Israel the providential story of the American republic.

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Notes

¹Quoted in David Chesebrough, ed., *“God Ordained This War”: Sermons on the Sectional Crisis, 1830–1865* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 254.

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³Quoted in Peter Grose, *Israel in the Mind of America* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1983), 4.

⁴See Jonathan Sarna, “The Cult of Synthesis in American Jewish Culture,” *Jewish Social Studies* 5, nos. 1/2 (Fall 1998/Winter 1999): 52–79. The terms Old and New Testament will be used in this essay, rather than the modern Hebrew and Christian Bible, since that was the contemporary context.

⁵Solomon Breibart, *Explorations in Charleston’s Jewish History* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2005), 58.

⁶*Ibid.*, 154; Rable, *God’s Almost Chosen Peoples*, 351.

⁷Quoted in Robert Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 265.

⁸Wilbur J. Cash, *Mind of the South* (New York: Knopf, 1941), 58–59, 342.

⁹*Ibid.*, 190. Quoted in Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 39.

¹⁰Rable, *God’s Almost Chosen Peoples*, 38.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 314.

¹²Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates*, 32.

¹³Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865–1920* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1980), 43.

¹⁴Rable, *God’s Almost Chosen Peoples*, 8, 76.

¹⁵Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 29.

¹⁶For the text of this speech, see <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h2927t.html> (accessed 15 August 2011).

¹⁷Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 319.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 28, 31.

¹⁹Alfred J. Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones: Reflections on African-American History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 33–34.

²⁰Jonathan Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew: The Two Worlds of Mordecai Noah* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1981), 152–157.

²¹*Jewish Messenger*, 23 March 1860.

²²<http://www.jewish-history.com/Illoway/sermon.html> (accessed 4 January 2012).

²³Quoted in James G. Heller, *Isaac M. Wise: His Life, Work and Thought* (New York: The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1965), 565; *American Israelite*, 24 July 1857.

²⁴David Philipson, *Max Lilienthal, American Rabbi: Life and Writings* (New York: Block Publishing, 1915), 469.

²⁵Naomi Cohen, *What the Rabbis Said: The Public Discourse of Nineteenth-Century American Rabbis* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 114–115.

²⁶www.jewish-history.com/Illoway/sermon.html (accessed 11 March 2011). Illoay carried the republican argument so far that he endorsed the Southern state’s right to secede.

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- ²⁸Ibid., 175; http://sceti.library.upenn.edu/pages/index.cfm?so_id=1661&PagePosition=40&level=2 (accessed 28 December 2011).
- ²⁹*Jewish Messenger*, 4 October 1861.
- ³⁰Sefton Temkin, “Isaac Mayer Wise and the Civil War,” in *Jews and the Civil War: A Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sarna and Adam Mendelsohn (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 177.
- ³¹Samuel Myer Isaacs, “Sermon,” in *Jewish Preaching*, 187.
- ³²Ibid., 187–188, 207.
- ³³Ibid., 207.
- ³⁴Bertram W. Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), 51.
- ³⁵Irving Cutler, *The Jews of Chicago: From Shtetl to Suburb* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 19.
- ³⁶*Jewish Messenger*, 7 December 1860 and 24 May 1861.
- ³⁷Breibart, *Explorations*, 58.
- ³⁸M.J. (Maximilian J.) Michelbacher, “A Sermon Delivered on the Day of Prayer, Recommended by the President of the C.S. of A., the 27th of March, 1863, at the German Hebrew Synagogue, ‘Bayth Ahabah’” (Richmond, VA: MacFarlane & Fergusson, 1863), <http://docsouth.unc.edu/imls/michelbacher/menu.html> (accessed 15 August 2011).
- ³⁹Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War*, 49.
- ⁴⁰www.jewish-history.com/civilwar/standby.htm (accessed 10 March 2011).
- ⁴¹Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates*, 52.
- ⁴²Rable, *God’s Almost Chosen Peoples*, preface; quoted in James Moorhead, “The American Israel: Protestant Tribalism and Universal Mission,” in *Many Are Chosen: Divine Election & Western Nationalism*, ed. William Hutchinson and Hartmut Lehmann (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 10.
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- ⁴⁴Rable, *God’s Almost Chosen Peoples*, 81.
- ⁴⁵W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Vintage, 1941), 58–59, 342.
- ⁴⁶George Fredrickson, “The Coming of the Lord: The Northern Clergy and the Civil War Crisis,” in *Religion and the American Civil War*, ed. Randall Miller, Harry Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 122.
- ⁴⁷Ibid.
- ⁴⁸*Jewish Messenger*, 24 May 1861.
- ⁴⁹Rable, *God’s Almost Chosen People*, 88.
- ⁵⁰Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates*, 33.
- ⁵¹Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*, 133.
- ⁵²Quoted in Terrie Dopp Aamodt, *Righteous Armies, Holy Cause: Apocalyptic Imagery and the Civil War* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2002), 166.
- ⁵³*Jewish Messenger*, 24 May 1861.
- ⁵⁴David Einhorn, “A Sermon on Thanksgiving Day, 26 November 1863,” in *Jewish Preaching*, 205, 205 fn. 30.
- ⁵⁵Sabato Morais, “Sermon,” in *Jewish Preaching*, 169.
- ⁵⁶<http://docsouth.unc.edu/imls/michelbacher/michelba.html> (accessed 10 February 2012).

- ⁵⁷Quoted in Jacob Rader Marcus, *Memoirs of American Jews, 1775–1865*, vol. 3 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1956), 234.
- ⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 152.
- ⁵⁹Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates*, 211.
- ⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 225.
- ⁶¹*Jewish Messenger*, 11 January 1861.
- ⁶²Aamodt, *Righteous Armies*, 178.
- ⁶³Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates*, 33.
- ⁶⁴Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples*, 16.
- ⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 47.
- ⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 384.
- ⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 375, 386.
- ⁶⁸Aamodt, *Righteous Armies*, 178.
- ⁶⁹Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples*, 39, 47.
- ⁷⁰“Resolution of Savannah Jews,” clipping in M.J. Solomon’s Scrapbook, 1861–1863, 406, David M. Rubinstein, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, NC; Stephen V. Ash, “Civil War Exodus; The Jews and Grant’s General Order No. 11,” in *Jews and the Civil War*, 374; quoted in Barbara Straus Reed, “Jewish Press Coverage of an Anti-Semitic Act: Grant’s Order No. 11,” in *The Civil War and the Press*, ed. David Sachsman, S. Kittrell Rushing, Debra van Tuyl (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Press, 2000), 336.
- ⁷¹Michelbacher, “A Sermon Delivered on the Day of Prayer.”
- ⁷²Samuel Yates Levy, “A Prayer for Peace,” typescript, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.
- ⁷³Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates*, 199.
- ⁷⁴James Moorhead, “The American Israel,” 150–151. Postmillennialists, more prevalent in the antebellum years, anticipated a thousand-year reign of peace as a prelude to Christ’s return. Premillennialists who held dispensationalist views still believed in the fulfillment of Israelite prophecies as a prelude to Christ’s coming, which would be followed by the thousand years of peace and justice. See Fredrickson, “The Coming of the Lord,” 115.
- ⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 392.
- ⁷⁶See Eugene Genovese, *A Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998).
- ⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 36.
- ⁷⁸Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism*, 28.
- ⁷⁹Gary Phillip Zola, “The Ascendancy of Reform Judaism in the American South During the Nineteenth Century,” in *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: A New History*, ed. Marcie Cohen Ferris and Mark Greenberg (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2006), 179.
- ⁸⁰Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 104, 110–111.
- ⁸¹Diane Ashton, “Shifting Veils: Religion, Politics, and Womanhood in the Civil War Writings of American Jewish Women,” in *Jews and the Civil War*, 297.
- ⁸²Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples*, 154; Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 7.
- ⁸³Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples*, 357.
- ⁸⁴George Fredrickson, “The Coming of the Lord: The Northern Protestant Clergy and the Civil War Crisis,” in *Religion and the American Civil War*, 123.

- ⁸⁵Quoted in *Jewish Preaching*, 144, fn. 6.
- ⁸⁶Naomi Cohen, *What the Rabbis Said*, 13–32.
- ⁸⁷*Jewish Messenger*, 7 December 1860.
- ⁸⁸*Jewish Messenger*, 4 October 1861.
- ⁸⁹http://sceti.library.upenn.edu/pages/index.cfm?so_id=1661&PagePosition=40&level=2 (accessed 29 December 2011).
- ⁹⁰Rabbi Bernard Illowy, “The Wars of the Lord, Fast Day Sermon at Baltimore, Jan. 4, 1861,” <http://www.jewish-history.com/Illowy/sermon.html> (accessed on 15 August 2011).
- ⁹¹M.J. Solomon’s Scrapbook, May 16, 1862, p. 445. Newspaper clipping in Scrapbook, dated but otherwise unattributed.
- ⁹²*New York Times*, 5 January 1861.
- ⁹³http://sceti.library.upenn.edu/pages/index.cfm?so_id=1661&PagePosition=40&level=2 (accessed 29 December 2011).
- ⁹⁴Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching*, vii–viii.
- ⁹⁵*Jewish Messenger*, 13 December 1861.
- ⁹⁶Philipson, *Max Lilienthal*, 403–404.
- ⁹⁷Sarna, *American Judaism*, 111.
- ⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 110.
- ⁹⁹On Raphall, see Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War*, 16–17. Raphall, who defended ancient Israelite slavery, remained a Unionist and criticized American slavery for not conforming to biblical practice, which he regarded as more humane; Illowy, “The Wars of the Lord”; on Illowy see also Isaac M. Fein, “Baltimore Rabbis during the Civil War” in *Jews and the Civil War*, 183–184.
- ¹⁰⁰*Jewish Messenger*, 24 May 1861.
- ¹⁰¹*Ibid.*
- ¹⁰²Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates*, 35.
- ¹⁰³Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War*, 25.
- ¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 18–19.
- ¹⁰⁵Isaac Fein, “Baltimore Rabbis during the Civil War,” in *Jews and the Civil War*, 186.
- ¹⁰⁶Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War*, 23.
- ¹⁰⁷David Einhorn, “Sermon Delivered on Thanksgiving Day,” in *Jewish Preaching*, 202, 211.
- ¹⁰⁸Jayme Sokolow, “The Antebellum Abolitionists,” in *Jews and the Civil War*, 126.
- ¹⁰⁹Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War*, 21.
- ¹¹⁰*Jewish Record*, I, 20, 23 January 1863. Quoted in Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War*, 27.
- ¹¹¹Sefton D. Temkin, *Isaac Mayer Wise: Shaping American Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 178–179. See *Israelite*, 18 October 1861; 24 January 1862.
- ¹¹²David Einhorn, “War with Amalek,” in *Jewish Preaching*, 214.
- ¹¹³Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War*, 27.
- ¹¹⁴Louis Ruchames, “The Abolitionists and the Jews: Some Further Thoughts,” in *Jews and the Civil War*, 147, 154.
- ¹¹⁵Gary Bunker and John Appel, “‘Shoddy’ Antisemitism and the Civil War,” *Jews and the Civil War*, 315.
- ¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, 316.
- ¹¹⁷Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates*, 64.
- ¹¹⁸M.J. Michelbacher, “A Sermon Delivered on the Day of Prayer.”

- ¹¹⁹Ibid., 102.
- ¹²⁰Ibid., 78.
- ¹²¹Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples*, 190.
- ¹²²David Einhorn, "War with Amalek," in *Jewish Preaching*, 211, 219.
- ¹²³*Jewish Messenger*, 24 May 1864.
- ¹²⁴S. Yates Levy, "A Prayer for Peace."
- ¹²⁵Samuel Myer Isaacs, "Sermon," in *Jewish Preaching*, 184.
- ¹²⁶Ibid., 309.
- ¹²⁷Ibid., 350.
- ¹²⁸Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*, 3, 97.
- ¹²⁹Selig Adler, "Article and Correspondence Zebulon B. Vance and the Scattered Nation, 1941–1944," p. 22, typescript, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio. Research in this typescript appeared in an article published in the *Journal of Southern History*, 1941.
- ¹³⁰Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*, 67.
- ¹³¹Ibid., 71.
- ¹³²Quoted in Leonard Rogoff, *Homelands: Southern Jewish Identity in Durham and Chapel Hill, North Carolina* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2001), 86.
- ¹³³Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates*, 333.
- ¹³⁴Sarna, *American Judaism*, 123.
- ¹³⁵Aamodt, *Righteous Armies*, 5.
- ¹³⁶For lyrics and background, see <http://freepages.music.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~edgmon/cwkingdom.htm> (accessed 22 March 2012).
- ¹³⁷Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples*, 156.
- ¹³⁸Ibid., 225.
- ¹³⁹Sokolow, "The Antebellum Abolitionists," 137.
- ¹⁴⁰Ashton, "Shifting Veils," 290.
- ¹⁴¹Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates*, 300.
- ¹⁴²Michelbacher, "A Sermon Delivered on the Day of Prayer."
- ¹⁴³Sarna, *American Judaism*, 122.
- ¹⁴⁴Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples*, 376.
- ¹⁴⁵Max Lilienthal, "The Assassination of Lincoln," in *Abraham Lincoln: The Tribute of the Synagogue*, ed. Emanuel Hertz (New York: Bloch, 1927), 111.
- ¹⁴⁶Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War*, 189; Isaac Mayer Wise, "Funeral Address" in *Abraham Lincoln*, 98; Lilienthal, "The Assassination of Lincoln," in *Abraham Lincoln*, 111.
- ¹⁴⁷David Philipson, *Max Lilienthal, American Rabbi: Life and Writings* (New York: Bloch Publishing, 1915), 442.
- ¹⁴⁸*Jewish Messenger*, 7 December 1866.
- ¹⁴⁹J. Leonard Levy, "Abraham Lincoln," in *Abraham Lincoln*, 305. Delivered before Congregation Rodeph Shalom, Pittsburgh, PA, 16 April 1905.
- ¹⁵⁰Quoted in Isaac Fein, "Baltimore Jews in the Civil War," in *The Jewish Experience in America*, vol. III, ed. Abraham Karp (Waltham, MA: American Jewish Historical Society, 1969), 329; Wise, "Funeral Address," in *Abraham Lincoln*, 95; J. Leonard Levy, "Abraham Lincoln," in *Abraham Lincoln*, 291; Joseph Krauskopf, "Birthday of Lincoln and Darwin," in *Abraham Lincoln*, 242.

¹⁵¹<http://americanjewisharchives.org/aja/FindingAids/JosephKrauskopf.htm> (accessed 23 December 2011).

¹⁵²Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, 5–6.

¹⁵³Todd Gitlin and Liel Leibovitz, *The Chosen Peoples: America, Israel, and the Ordeals of Divine Election* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), xiii–xiv.

¹⁵⁴George Bornstein, “The Colors of Zion: Black, Jewish, and Irish Nationalisms at the Turn of the Century,” *Modernism/Modernity* 12, no. 3 (2005): 369–384.

¹⁵⁵See William Hutchinson and Hartmut Lehmann, *Many Are Chosen: Divine Election & Western Nationalism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).

¹⁵⁶Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones*, 35; Yvonne Chireau “Black Culture and Black Zion: African American Religious Encounters with Judaism, 1790–1930, an Overview,” in *Black Zion: African American Religious Encounters with Judaism*, ed. Yvonne Chireau and Nathaniel Deutsch (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 19.

¹⁵⁷Fredrickson, “The Coming of the Lord,” 123. The antisemitism that arose most virulently after the war was racial rather than religious. As the South encoded into law customs of discrimination against blacks, Jews were increasingly segregated socially, especially as allegedly swarthy, newly arrived east European immigrants raised anxieties.

¹⁵⁸Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 8.

¹⁵⁹*New York Times*, 27 November 1863. Myer S. Isaacs, Esq., was the son of Rabbi S. M. Isaacs.

¹⁶⁰See Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*.

¹⁶¹Fredrickson, “The Coming of the Lord,” 124.

¹⁶²Einhorn, “War with Amalek,” in *Jewish Preaching*, 216, 221.

¹⁶³Sarna, *American Judaism*, 124.

¹⁶⁴“Pittsburgh Platform,” Jewish Virtual Library, http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/pittsburgh_program.html (accessed 19 August 2011).