

# **A HISTORY OF THE JEWS**

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A history of the Jews by Paul Goodman

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**PAUL GOODMAN**

**A HISTORY  
OF THE JEWS**





מֹשֶׁה בְּרַבֵּי מִימֹנִידֵי

TRADITIONAL PORTRAIT OF  
MOSES MAIMONIDES  
WITH FACSIMILE OF HIS AUTOGRAPH

A  
HISTORY OF THE JEWS

BY  
PAUL GOODMAN



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TO

MY SON

MAURICE PAUL

THIS HISTORY OF HIS PEOPLE  
IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED



"Remember the days of old,  
Consider the years of many generations:  
Ask thy father, and he will shew thee;  
Thine elders, and they will tell thee."

Deut. xxxii. 7.

"Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I  
have chosen."—Isaiah xliii. 10.

"The life of man is numbered by days:  
The days of Israel are without number."

Ecclus. xxxvii. 25.

"Kingdoms arise and kingdoms pass away, but Israel endureth  
for evermore."—Midrash.

"Man is made man by history. The Jew recognizes that he is  
made what he is by the history of his fathers, and feels he is losing  
his better self so far as he loses his hold on his past history.

"The history of Israel is the great living proof of the working of  
Divine Providence in the affairs of the world. Alone among the  
nations Israel has shared in all great movements since mankind  
became conscious of their destinies. If there is no Divine purpose  
in the long travail of Israel, it is vain to seek for any such purpose  
in man's life. In the reflected light of that purpose each Jew should  
lead his life with an added dignity."—JOSEPH JACOBS.

## PREFACE

THE history of the Jews presents the struggles for light and life of a people small in numbers and negligible in political power but great in achievement and unparalleled in endurance. This people, whom the historians and geographers of ancient Hellas hardly deigned to notice as a strange Syrian tribe, had already then produced one of the most remarkable literatures of all time as well as a body of men who were later on acclaimed as the ethical and religious teachers of mankind. While in their most flourishing political state the Israelites formed only a petty Asiatic kingdom, the descendants of those who served the Pharaohs and whose national existence was wiped out by Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian about 2,500 years ago still represent one of the most active and progressive human groups of to-day.

What the Jews as a *Kulturvolk* mean to the world, not merely as an ancient factor but as one of the living forces of modern times, may be gauged by a comparison of the contributions which the Jews have made during the last century to all aspects of civilization with the almost inappreciable activities during the same period of the historically and politically favoured Greeks.

If we take away the Jews from the realms of thought and life—if we imagine that there had not existed those who gave birth to the spiritual, ethical and dogmatic forces of Christianity; that Mohammedanism, the Arabian replica of a militant Judaism, had never seen the world; that we knew nothing of those and other Hebraic influences which, in name, substance and action, have repeatedly changed the course of History—then both Eastern and Western civilization would appear to us beyond recognition.

The Jews are one of the very rare races with a definite mission in the development of mankind—a mission of which the actors are conscious, if, at times, unwilling agents, destined to play the part of historic advocates for the freedom of the human conscience, in contravention of their own jealous and uncompromising adherence to ethical Monotheism and to the moral purpose of human life—the imperishable Jewish contributions to the foundations of civilization.

The Jews have, however, not only given birth to prophets of the mission of Israel, but, strangest of all, they have also produced the

greatest adversaries of their own claims and corporate existence. Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles, who boasted of being a Hebrew of the Hebrews, was the dogmatic founder of the world-conquering religion of which Jesus the Messiah (Christ) was the spiritual and ethical inspiration; Spinoza, the most dissolving philosopher of the modern age, broke the trammels of supernaturalism; Karl Marx, the scientific creator of the Socialist movement, became the cosmopolitan prophet of the disinherited of the whole human race.

In spite of the extraordinary kaleidoscopic changes in Jewish history—from the conquest of the now extinct and forgotten Canaanites to the combat with the widespread and powerful forces of modern Anti-Semitism—an extensive survey of it presents a cycle of manifestations and problems that continually repeats itself. In substance, Jewish history is concentrated on the never-ending struggle between the universalistic and particularistic tendencies of Jewish thought and life, and, from the conflicts between Prophecy and Priesthood to those of Nationalism and Assimilation, we discern the same heroic effort to save the Jewish life by losing it. Never has such solidarity been exhibited between the scattered atoms of a race that frequently even lack molecular attraction, yet never has a people risen to such sublime heights, with entire oblivion of itself. It is because throughout this Jewish struggle for life there appears one underlying, fundamental purpose—the fulfilment of law and prophecy in their workings in History.

Jewish history has shared the fate of the Jews in that it has been treated either from an offensive or defensive, and, too frequently, from the double-edged didactic, point of view. In the following pages, the course of Jewish history has been traced without reference to the question whether the Jews have the right to exist. The subject of Judaism as a world-religion has been fully treated by me elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> but, irrespective of the justification or condemnation of Judaism, our interest is surely due to the history of a people which, according to the natural law of the survival of the fittest, has justified itself by its very existence.

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P. G.

London,

November 14, 1909.

<sup>1</sup>*The Synagogue and the Church, being a Contribution to the Apologetics of Judaism* (Routledge, 1908).