

THE SUN IN THE TALMUD

BY JULIUS J. PRICE.

THE Hebrews conceive of the sun as a torch of light suspended in the firmament (Gen. 1:16). The Greeks, however, regarded the worship of the moon, sun and stars so that nations do not become utterly Godless. (comp. Clem. Alex. Stnom. Book vi c. 13). That they must have worshipped (comp. Pliny, H. N. 11, 6, 12) this luminary (Comp. Cicero, Somnum Scip., c. 4) in adoption of non-Hebrew, Canaanitish or Babylonian custom during the periods of their back slidings, may be admitted on the evidence of such ancient names and localities as Beth-Shemesh and Enshemesh. This practice confirmed to the ancient opinion, that the sun was supreme because it led the starry choir, because it was King and guide of all the other luminaries and therefore, master of the whole world (see Julian of Lavdicoe, Cat. codd. Asbn. I. P. 36, L. I.) The Rabbis referring to this idolatrous sun worship say, "when the sun rises and all the kings of the west and the East put on their crowns and worship him; at once God is (Berachoth 7a) angry." But God on the other hand will not destroy the sun because people are foolish in worshipping (A. Z. 54 b.) According to their conception, the sun bows down before God and declares its obedience in His Commandments.

"Antonius (Sanhedrin 91b) Cæsar (Rashi in explaining the Emperor's meaning, states that what Antonius really meant was why is it that the sun should describe a visible circle and set where it rises in the East which would doubtless be more proper than rising in one place and setting in another, Rabbi, however, held that the sun in the east makes obedience to his Creator) asked Rabbi (the editor of the Mishnah): "Why does the sun rise in the East and set in the West?" "Thou wouldst ask the same question if the reverse were the case," was the reply. Antonius said: "I only mean whether it is for any particular reason that he sets in the west." "Yes,"

answered Rabbi, "to salute his Creator who is in the East," for it is said (Neh. ix :6) : "And the host of heaven worship thee."

In order to protect future generations from falling into the errors of their predecessors, the Rabbis forbade the eating of animals slain to the sun (Hullin 40a), and demanded that all vessels with the delineations of the sun upon them should be cast in the salt sea (A. Z. 42b), for we read, (a) "Animals slain in worship to mountains, hills, streams, deserts, the sun, moon, stars and constellations, in the name of Michael, the great prince, or the smallest insect, are sacrifices of the dead," and (b) "If one finds vessels with delineations of the sun, the moon or of a serpent upon them, let him cast them into the salt sea."

The Rabbis tells us that the sun pursues four paths (Peshim 94b). From Nisan to Sivan (Spring) he moves along the mountains to melt the snows. From Tammuz to Ellul (Summer) he moves over the inhabited parts of the earth to ripen the fruits. From Tishri to Kislev (Autumn) he moves over the seas to dry up the rivers. And it is about this time that they ceased to cut fuel for the use of the altar, because owing to the diminished power of the sun, it would not be dried, and the moisture might attract insects which would render it illegal (Taanith 31a). From Taveth to Adar (Winter) the sun moves over the deserts in order not to injure the crops. According to Rabbi Nathan, however, "The sun in the summer season moves in the height of the firmament: hence the whole world is hot and the Spring cold. In the rainy season the sun moves at the lower part of the firmament: hence the whole world is cold and the springs warm" (Pesahim 94b).

The sun passes every day over the whole inhabited portion of the earth. For thou mayest observe, that during the fifth hour (11 a. m.) the sun is in the East: in the seventh (1 p. m.) he is in the West: But during half of the sixth and half of the seventh, he is over the heads of (ibid. 94a) all men."

The sages of Israel (94b), however, affirm that by day the sun moves underneath the firmament and therefore is seen, and by night he pursues his course above the firmament and hence is not (Comp. Rashi a. l.) seen. But the sages of the nations of the world maintain, that by day the sun moves underneath the firmament, and by night underneath the earth. Rav said: "Their view (Rashi a. l. seems to be of the opinion that the springs are warmed by the sun from underneath the earth, is evident from the vapour which one may

see ascending every morning from the rivers) seems preferable to ours; for the springs are cold by day and tepid by night.

Rabbi Yosi says: If one cannot ascertain the different quarters of the earth, he may do so by means of the solar revolution. Where the sun rises and sets on the shortest day, there is the south side. Where the sun rises and sets on the longest day, there is the north side. At the vernal and autumnal equinoxes, the sun rises and sets due East and West; as it is said (Ex. I. 6.) "He (the sun) goes toward the south and turns about to the north," i. e., by day he goes to the south and by night he turns about to the north. Turning (Rashi explains the passage as follows: The north side is where thou seest the sun rise on the longest day of the season ending mid-summer at one point and set at opposite point: because the sun "goes" only by day and he does so always from the east to the south; but by night he "turns about on the convex side of the firmament. On the longest day the sun rising in the northwest corner "goes" east, south and west, and sets in the northwest corner "turning about," in pursuing his course on the convex side of the firmament along the north and reappearing in the morning, no more in the northeast corner but a little lower on the east side which makes the day a little shorter. On that day he sets a little short of the northwest corner and "turns about," that little space (of the west) the whole north and an additional little space (to the east, on the convex side). And so on every day until the end of the summer season (Autumnal equinox) He rises due east and sets due west and then (an equal). But the sun still continues receding towards the south both at his rising and setting), turning, goes the sun," i. e., in the east and west where he sometimes "goes," and sometimes "turns about."

The fixing of the beginning and ending of religious festivals and services necessitates an exact knowledge of rising and setting of the sun. According to the Mosaic Law, every day begins with sunrise and ends with sunset. This confirms to the opinion of Rabbi Yosi that twilight is like the twinkling of an eye; that is to say, with sunset day immediately changes to night. The Rabbis differ as to the duration of twilight. Rabbi Nechimyah says: "The duration of twilight from sunset is equal to the time which it takes a man to walk a half mile." Rav Chanena says: "If a man wishes to know the length of twilight, according to Rabbi Nechemyah, let him descend and dip in the sea just when the sun is still seen from the top of Carmel, and by the time he has emerged, twilight will be over." (Sabbath 35a).

"A fast day is not completed before the sun has (Taanith 12a) gone down," and a wrong decision by the authorities regarding the setting of the sun is considered a great error, for well do the rabbis remark, "If the constituted authorities have decided that the sun had gone down and he shines afterwards, this is not a decision, but an error (Yevamoth 92b).

A solar eclipse is an evil omen to the whole world. As if a king of flesh and blood had prepared a feast for his slaves and placed a light before them: when displeased at them, he orders his attendant to remove the light and leave them in darkness. Tradition teaches, Rabbi Meir says: Whenever the (celestial) luminaries are smitten, it is an evil omen to the enemies of Israel (euphemistically for Israel) because they are habituated to chastisements. When a schoolmaster enters the schoolroom with a thong in his hand, who is afraid? He that is accustomed to be beaten every (Taanith 8b) day.

When the sun is smitten, it is an evil omen to idolaters; and when the moon is smitten, it is an evil omen to the enemies of Israel, because Israel reckons time by the moon and the nations of the world reckon by the sun. If smitten in the east, it is an evil omen to the dwellers of the east; if in the west, it is an evil omen to the dwellers of the west. If his appearance be like blood, a sword, war is imminent: if black, it is indicative of coming famine; if it exhibits both colors, then both calamities may be expected. If smitten at sunset, the calamity is slow in coming; if at sunrise its advance is rapid. Some say that it is just the reverse (Succah 29a). And no nation is chastised by its deities are chastised with it: as it is said (Ex. xii:12) "And upon all the gods of Egypt will I execute judgment." But when the people of Israel do the will of God, they are not afraid of these things; for it is said (Jer. x:2): "Thus saith the Lord: Learn ye not the way of the Gentiles and be not afraid of the signs of heaven."

The sun is generally smitten on four occasions. When a president of a tribunal dies, and is not mourned over according to Rabbinical enactment; when a betrothed virgin cries in the city and no one comes to her assistance on account of self-abuse with mankind; and on account of the blood of two brothers shed at the same time. Other celestial luminaries are smitten on account of forged documents, false testimony, the rearing of small cattle in the land of Israel, and for cutting down useful trees (ibid).

The Rabbis record three occurrences in which the regularity of the sun's daily progress was suspended. According to tradition, the

sun was arrested in its course for the sake of Joshua, so was he also for the sake of Moses and Nicodemon ben (A. Z. 25a; comp. Also Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, vol. iv, p. 10) Guryon. In this connection it might be well to note that Homer (it might be well to note Horace's *Epodes* and *Satires*, 45-46 in this respect) likewise records an incident wherein a like incident occurred through the influence of a Greek Hero.

Our sages have taught: But for the noise occasioned by the whirling of the solar wheel, the hubbub of the city of Rome might be heard: and but for the hubbub of the city, the noise of the solar wheel might be heard (*Yoma* 20b). Again, there are three noises resounding from one end of the world to the other. These are: The noise of the soul when she parts with the body. The noise of the solar wheel, the noise of the hubbub of the city. Some add the noise of children. Some say also, the noise of (*ibid*) Rediia (i. e. Ploughing, Heifer, the name of an angel charged with watering the earth. Comp. Rashi, a. e.) Owing to the prayers of our Rabbis, the noise of the soul at the time of parting with the body has been suppressed.

The sun is benevolent (*Sam.* xxiii:4): and brings forth the fruits of the earth (*Dent.* xxxiii:14). The light is sweet; and it is delightful for the eyes to behold the sun (*Eccl.* xi:7). Sunshine on the Sabbath day is a boon for the poor; as it is said (*Mal.* iv:20: "And to you that fear my name, (i. e., that keep the Sabbath, Rashi), the sun will shine as a boon for healing his wings." (*Taanith* 8b).