

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks on Combatting Anti-Semitism

The first occurrence of antisemitism in the bible

שמות א

ז. וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל פְּרִוּ וַיִּשְׂרְצוּ וַיִּרְבּוּ וַיַּעֲצֻמוּ בְּמֵאֵד מְאֹד וַתִּמְלֵא הָאָרֶץ אֹתָם:

But the Israelites were fertile and prolific; they multiplied and increased very greatly, so that the land was filled with them.

1. This is the first description of the Jews as they grow from a family to a nation. Whose point of view is narrated here?

ח. וַיִּקְם מֶלֶךְ-חֲדָשׁ עַל-מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדַע אֶת-יוֹסֵף:

A new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph.

2. Why do you think it is important for us to know this information about the new king?

ט. וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-עַמּוֹ הַזֶּה עִם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל רַב וְעָצוּם מְמֹנּוּ:

And he said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are much too numerous for us.

י. הֲבֵיאָה נִתְחַכְמָה לָּו פֶּן-יִרְבֶּה וְהָיָה כִּי-תִקְרָאנָה מִלְחָמָה וְנוֹסֶף גַּם-הוּא עַל-שְׂנְאֵינוּ וְנִלְחֲמֵנוּ וְעָלָה מִן-הָאָרֶץ:

Let us deal shrewdly with them, so that they may not increase; otherwise in the event of war they may join our enemies in fighting against us and rise from the ground.

3. What are the reasons for the Egyptian rejection of the Jews as a nation?

י"ב. וּכְאֲשֶׁר יַעֲנוּ אֹתוֹ כֵּן יִרְבֶּה וְכֵן יִפְרֹץ וַיִּקָּצוּ מִפְּנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

But the more they were oppressed, the more they increased and spread out, so that the [Egyptians] came to dread the Israelites.

4. This pasuk describes more than just the situation in Egypt. Where in History did we see similar developments?
5. What was the reaction of the Jews in Egypt?
6. What other options did they have?

7. Why do you think they reacted this way?

ט"ז. וַיֹּאמֶר בְּיִלְדָכֶן אֶת־הָעִבְרִיּוֹת וַיְרֵאֵתָן עַל־הָאֲבָנִים אִם־בֵּן הוּא וְהַמֶּתֵן אֹתוֹ וְאִם־בַּת הוּא וְחָיָה:
The king of Egypt spoke saying, "When you deliver the Hebrew women, look at the birthstool: if it is a boy, kill him; if it is a girl, let her live."

כ"ב. וַיִּצַו פַּרְעֹה לְכָל־עַמּוֹ לֵאמֹר כָּל־הַבֵּן הַיֵּלֵד הַיֵּאֲרָה תִשְׁלִיכֻהוּ וְכָל־הַבַּת תַּחְיֶינָן:
Then Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, "Every boy that is born you shall throw into the Nile, but let every girl live."

8. Who is leading the attack on the Jews and what format is chosen?

9. Why do you think the attack was in this format?

שמות ב

כ"ג. וַיְהִי בַיָּמִים הָרַבִּים הָהֵם וַיָּמָת מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם וַיֵּאָנְחוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן־הָעֲבָדָה וַיִּזְעַקוּ וַתַּעַל שְׁוַעֲתָם אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים מִן־הָעֲבָדָה:
A long time after that, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites were groaning under the bondage and cried out; and their cry for help from the bondage rose up to God.

A long time after that, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites were groaning under the bondage and cried out; and their cry for help from the bondage rose up to God.

10. This is a new reaction for the Jews. What prompted the change?

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On 27th September 2016, Rabbi Sacks delivered this keynote address in the European Parliament. The speech opened a conference entitled The Future of the Jewish Communities in Europe, hosted by Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament.

["The Mutating Virus: Understanding Antisemitism," Keynote Speech in the European Parliament \(September 22, 2016\)](#)

Watch and discuss the questions below.

According to Rabbi Jonathan Sacks:

"Antisemitism means denying the right of Jews to exist collectively as Jews with the same rights as everyone else. It takes different forms in different ages. In the Middle Ages, Jews were hated because of their religion. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century they were hated because of their race. Today they are hated because of their nation state, the state of Israel. It takes different forms but it remains the same thing: the view that Jews have no right to exist as free and equal human beings".

11. What format of antisemitic behavior do you recognize in the pesukim above? Use Rabbi Sack's definition as a guide.
12. What are the reasons for antisemitism Rabbi Sacks identified and what can you add about the reasons for antisemitism in Egypt?

Rabbi Sacks on Anti-Semitism as a Virus

What is antisemitism? It is less a doctrine or set of beliefs than a series of contradictions. In the past Jews were hated because they were rich and because they were poor, because they were capitalists and because they were communists, because they kept to themselves and because they infiltrated everywhere, because they held tenaciously to a superstitious faith and because they were rootless cosmopolitans who believed nothing.

The best way to understand antisemitism is to see it as a virus. Viruses attack the human body, but the body itself has an immensely sophisticated defence, the human immune system. How, then, do viruses survive and flourish? By mutating.

Future Tense: Jews, Judaism and Israel in the 21st Century (Schocken, 2012): p. 92.

13. What is the main argument of Rabbi Sacks in this quote?
14. Can you compare the process antisemitism took in Egypt to a virus attack?

Antisemitism is not about Jews. It is about anti-Semites. It is about people who cannot accept responsibility for their own failures and have instead to blame someone else. Historically, if you were a Christian at the time of the Crusades, or a German after the First World War, and saw that the world hadn't turned out the way you believed it would, you blamed the Jews. That is what is happening today. And I cannot begin to say how dangerous it is. Not just to Jews but to everyone who values freedom, compassion and humanity.

15. From the onset of the Jewish nation it had to face fear, hate, and rejection by others. What can we learn from these collective experiences of antisemitism?
16. What is the message we can send our youth as they enter the real world?
17. How can we better communicate with the non Jewish world in order to foster positive relationships?

18. The following paragraph was written by Rabbi Sacks about Europe but we now see very similar conditions in the US. What should be our reaction?

Let me ask you this. Whether you are Jewish or Christian, Muslim: would you stay in a country where you need armed police to guard you while you prayed; Where your children need armed guards to protect them at school? Where, if you wear a sign of your faith in public, you risk being abused or attacked? Where, when your children go to university, they are insulted and intimidated because of what is happening in some other part of the world? Where, when they present their own view of the situation they are howled down and silenced?

Rabbi Sacks explains how the antisemitism virus has mutated to its current form:

The new antisemitism has mutated so that any practitioner of it can deny that he or she is an antisemite. After all, they'll say, I'm not a racist. I have no problem with Jews or Judaism. I only have a problem with the State of Israel. But in a world of 56 Muslim nations and 103 Christian ones, there is only one Jewish state, Israel, which constitutes one-quarter of one per cent of the land mass of the Middle East. Israel is the only one of the 193 member nations of the United Nations that has its right to exist regularly challenged, with one state, Iran, and many, many other groups, committed to its destruction.

The ultimate weapon of the new antisemitism is dazzling in its simplicity. It goes like this. The Holocaust must never happen again. But Israelis are the new Nazis; the Palestinians are the new Jews; all Jews are Zionists. Therefore the real antisemites of our time are none other than the Jews themselves. And these are not marginal views. They are widespread throughout the Muslim world, including communities in Europe, and they are slowly infecting the far left, the far right, academic circles, unions, and even some churches. Having cured itself of the virus of antisemitism, Europe is being reinfected by parts of the world that never went through the self-reckoning that Europe undertook once the facts of the Holocaust became known.

Watch this clip of a sermon by Rabbi Louis J. Sachs and reflect on what he adds to the previous resources.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dmQeDifo8JQ>

19. How does the Talmud reference in the clip helps you understand new antisemitism.

20. Have you been witness to this new form of antisemitism?

21. What questions or concerns can you share after reading these resources?