

## Chapter Thirteen

*What the Jews think about Elias and believe about their future hoped-for Messiah*

At that time there was staying in the city a fellow of the Hebrew race who had had himself baptized a year before and in this holy cleansing had himself named Erasmus. He was well educated, of fine appearance, and of honorable behavior; about twenty-four years old, and also rather poor and needy, so that he often was obliged to make do by playing the toady. He taught some merchant's children both to write and to speak Hebrew, by which he, *taliter qualiter*, made shift, and had from several chiefs of the East India Company promises to have, the next time some East Indian ships departed, a post with the fleet such that he might not only make a good income at it but also move upward and gain fame in the bargain. Now because he was well versed in both the Christian and the Jewish religions, and especially since he hated the Jews and was mortally hated by them in return, he revealed all their superstitious secrets to all with whom he became acquainted and who for amusement desired to hear them from him, and in fact I once encountered him in a merry company of young merchants to whom he was relating a whole heap of ridiculous things about them.

Now when I dared not undertake anything in my love affair either with money or force or in any other way, and had therefore decided to seek by intrigue or deceit my salvation, or rather damnation, with this superstitious and thus so silly folk, in which my invisibility would stand me in good stead, I deemed it necessary to make the acquaintance of this fellow, in order to learn thoroughly from him about the Jews' beliefs, customs, and transactions, so that I might be able to place and set nets and snares with which I thought

to cheat Eliezar out of his daughter's chastity. I accordingly invited Erasmus in a friendly way to my lodging, and pretended that I had a great desire to learn from him to read and write Hebrew, and he was quite willing and indefatigable in serving each as best as he could.

In two days I knew the Hebrew alef-beth perfectly, and in other ways continued to learn so quickly that my teacher himself wondered at it. And when we ate together or strolled idly about, I gave him cause to say something about the Jews' beliefs, devotions, hopes, and usages, which things I inquired after so eagerly that Erasmus asked me in jest whether I wished to become a Jew, too. But I shall tell you, most honored reader, so that I do not abuse your patience, naught more of this than what I think may serve you in explication of my history.

About the person of Elias, Erasmus told me that the greater part of the Jews believed, but without foundation and solely from the inherited sagas of their forefathers, that Elias had been alive already in Abraham's time and had been his faithful servant and the oldest hired hand of this family, and according to Genesis 24 had fetched Rebecca, Bethmel's daughter, from Mesopotamia for Isaac to take to wife; also, that at the time when Sodom and Gomorrah still stood he had much teased and tormented them on account of their godlessness, and because the Sodomites along with other vices were so much against hospitality that they made a public law that all those who invited a stranger to a banquet and treated him like a friend, such as for example the robber Cacus did, should lose life and limb, and therefore they had guest bedsteads varyingly both long and short in which strangers who happened to come there to spend the night were obliged to lie, which guests, if they were not just as long as the bed, they either stretched till they reached this length or, if they were too long, they cut off at the head or the feet till they just fit the bed; and such law and evil customs they had introduced so that

they alone might waste in debauchery the rich superabundance of their lands, which flowed with milk and honey, and so that nothing of it might redound to the advantage of any foreigner or neighbor; and also so that they might carry on all the more unhindered and wantonly, when they became heated by wine for this purpose, their various lewd Sodomitic practices unwitnessed by a stranger, before whom they still did feel some shame. So this Elias, Abraham's servant, in order to mock them and so show them how unwisely they legislated, and also to hinder them as much as possible in their sins, had appeared at a general feasting of the Sodomites and had shown himself equal to a native in eating and drinking, which so vexed the envious and jealous Sodomites that they decided to punish with death the man who had invited him, or at least been the cause of his admission to the company and his presence there, and to punish him, Elias himself, with the bedstead as was their custom, for which reason divers persons asked him who had brought him to this banquet; to each and every such person individually he had answered that he, the man who asked the question, had invited and brought him there together with others; at which reply each had drawn away from him fearfully, like a mute. That night they wished to kill him anyway, even if he fitted into all their beds, the long as well as the short, as if they had been made to measure for him; but they were struck by God with blindness, as later in Lot's time, so that Elias came back to Abraham's cottage without any harm having been done him. They have many more tales of that sort about this Elias and say that he was placed in the service of Abraham as a faithful aide, prophet, and servant, and had therefore been endowed with a life so long that it would last down till the Day of Judgment. The entire time when Israel was in Egypt, they said, he had afforded them aid and comfort in visible as well as invisible form and in many shapes, and even though he had been taken off to heaven in a fiery chariot in Ahab's

time, he was nevertheless still present invisibly everyday at all Jewish circumcisions in the entire world, for which reason at each of these ceremonies a magnificent special chair was prepared for him which no other of the Jews, be he ever so holy, was permitted to occupy; moreover, they said, he protects and defends the Jewish people and turns away every misfortune which might befall them; but especially he looks with particular favor upon those who, when they celebrate the separation of the Sabbath, called *haudila*, honor him with wine and certain ceremonies, which is so pleasing to him that he takes such a house under his special protection and heaps rich blessings upon it; so, they say, he will in the future also bring to them Moschiah or the Messiah, and give him a hand in what he undertakes.

*In summa*, they venerate him more than the Catholics do the Virgin Mary, and to honor him will often feed and give the best treatment to a whole table full of poor folk, but at all times leave a seat empty for him, because they believe he is then sitting with them at the table and invisibly eating and drinking his share along with these poor guests.

About Moschiah and his office, Erasmus told me that the Jews believe that he will be sure to be a worldly king and in wondrous fashion, through great might and divine help, will bring them from all the parts of the world to which they have been scattered back together and to the Promised Land again; and thereby they commingled that which promised the chosen ones eternal life and Moschiach's or the Messiah's reign that promises that there will fall to them here in this world a life as if in an earthly Paradise. God, they firmly believe, will call their dead back to life, eradicate and extirpate all the enemies of the people of Israel, take away all plagues, hardships, and illnesses from them, His people, and build for them once more from precious jewels the holy temple of Jerusalem in the form and manner as the prophet Ezekiel saw it (Ezekiel 40); then the

people of Israel will rule and reign over the entire world, its property, treasure, and riches from one end of the world to the other; God will free them of innate lusts, inclinations, and temptations to sin and to all evil, indeed He himself will dwell with them so that they may see Him face to face; God will extend their life spans so that one of them will reach the age of Adam or of Methuselah, and any one of them who perished in the hundredth year of his life, of him they would say that he died prematurely in his childhood; the Promised Land, after it has first been purified by fire of the impurities with which the pagans, Christians, and Mohammedans have defiled it, will stretch much farther and will be a thousand times nobler and more fruitful than it now is, just as it was heretofore when the twelve tribes, which consisted of just as many hundreds of thousands of souls, were all therein and were nourished so richly there; their Moschiach will reign forever and upon beginning his realm will keep all the Jews as guests in Jerusalem, at which banquet they will drink the most delicious wine, which grew in Paradise and to this end has been kept in Adam's cellar till ready, and will slaughter the largest animals, birds, and fishes which God ever created, such as the ox Behemoth (Job 40), which grazes off a thousand mountains every day, and what he has grazed during the day grows back at night; and whose mate, so that she might not multiply and so that this race of gigantically large animals not ruin the entire world, God cooled and made unfruitful, and castrated the ox and thus kept it to feed the pious Jews in a future time; also the terrible, great bird Bar Juchne, which must needs supply naught but roasts, and is so large that a single of its eggs which fall out of its nest, crushes and fells three hundred cedar trees, and when it breaks inundates, drowns, and sweeps away sixty villages; no less the great whale Leviathan (of which Job also speaks), which God also castrated so that it might not multiply, and whose mate God slaughtered and salted for the God-fearing Jews who will come back to the Promised Land with their Moschiach.

Now, since I was very astonished that the Jews, who are otherwise a learned, sly, shrewd, and cunning folk, were so silly that they believed such follies and foolish dreams, Erasmus told me that they doubted that it would come about this way with their future Messiah as little as a genuine Christian doubts that the true Messiah has already (Leviticus 26:1) come. The so-called Aff or golden age (which the words of Leviticus at the end of Chapter 26 treat as follows: "Even so have I not rejected them when they dwell in the enemies' lands, nor even scorned them that they should be destroyed completely, and my pact with them should not exist any more, for I am the Lord their God, and shall think of my pact, etc.") gives them a particular and yet false hope in this, because that same utterance or promise has already been observed and fulfilled by God in the Babylonian captivity, and the poor blind people do not see they now are living under the curse described in Deuteronomy 28, where not the slightest word is said about any hope of some second salvation. Also, they take particular solace in what Isaiah announces at the end of Chapter 60, where they place in the age of their future Messiah what the prophet asserts about eternal life, namely when he says (Isaiah 60, 18-21, King James version, modified): "Sinning shall no more be heard in the land, wasting nor destruction in the borders; but thy walls will inherit salvation and thy gates be filled with praise. The sun shall no more shine by day, nor shall the moon give light, for the Lord shall be thy everlasting light and thy God thy glory; Thy sun shall no more go down and the moon wane, for the Lord shall be thy everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended, thy people shall be all righteous and shall inherit the land forever, the branches of my planting and a work of my hands that I may be glorified. The smallest one shall become thousands, and the youngest one a mighty people. I the Lord will hasten it in His time." So they understand that in their Messiah's time the smallest of the Jews will become many folk,

and meanwhile these blinded people refuse to see that this prophecy has been fulfilled, in a short time and in greatest haste as it were, in the disciples and apostles of our Lord Christ, namely when each of them in very little time became through his teaching and preaching a great Christian congregation, an incalculable number of many hundreds of thousands of people, whereby the Apostle Peter alone saved nigh on to three thousand souls at Pentecost. They, however, understand these last words (which in Hebrew read: “Oeni Adonai Bocitto Ochysche,” that is, “That, speaks the Lord, I shall do in a hastening time”) to mean that God will send them their Messiah unexpectedly and in great haste, post-haste as it were, and will put them in the Promised Land as in an earthly Paradise, and these few words they esteem far higher than their golden age, because they imagine that this promise and prophecy has not yet been fulfilled and therefore must needs still be fulfilled, and to be sure when their Messiah arrives. All those “lie-gends” and foolish fables I grasped in my little head as well as if my soul’s salvation had been at stake, and I believe, had I been obliged to still learn the catechism, I should not have comprehended it as quickly and as zealously as these foolish fables. To be sure, Erasmus told me probably ten times more than I am telling here, because I am omitting much, not only in order not to be burdensome to the reader, but also because these omissions are not particularly germane to my story; the little which I have told, I think, the reader must needs know so that he may understand right explicitly my story and how I made use of the one and the other thing; also why I did one thing and forbore to do another.

In concluding this chapter, let me mention this one more thing, which of all the foolish matters seemed to me to be the most foolish of all: namely that the Jews believe that when their Messiah comes, the great archangel Michael will blow a large horn three times. At the first blast of the horn the Messiah, David’s son, together with the

prophet Elias, will appear and reveal himself to all the children of Israel, all the Jews in the entire world will hear the sound of the horn and recognize that God has sought out his chosen people and that complete salvation is at hand; upon the Christians and other people will then fall terror, misery, tribulation, and illness; meanwhile the Jews will gird their loins joyfully, take to their legs, and march with great joy with Elias and the Messiah to Jerusalem.

At the second blast, which will be a very long tone, all the graves in Jerusalem will open, God will bring all the dead back to life, and the Messiah, son of David, and Elias the prophet will rouse from the dead again the poor and pious Messiah Ben Joshep (who stayed in Rome under the gate with the sick and the leprous and perished in a battle of the Israelites), then the kings of the people will take on their shoulders and pull in wagons the Jews who are still dwelling amongst them, and will bring them all the way to Jerusalem.

And when the prophet Michael has blown the third time, God will lead forth the Israelites who live over the Gasan brook, Lachlach, and Chobaar, and who dwell in the cities of Judah, who without number will go with the other children of Moses into Paradise; and when the ten tribes of the Israelites draw out, the cloud column of the honors and majesty of God will surround them, yea, God Himself will go before them; before, behind, and beside them will be naught but fire and flame, and they will leave behind for the Christians and the other people on earth naught which might sustain them so that they will be able to live.

I thought to myself: if so many thousand Jews believe this tomfoolery about their future Messiah, and in earlier times for his sake so many of them in Crete, or Candia, wrapped their heads in their cloaks and sprang from a cliff into the sea, then you will surely be able to persuade a simple one of them to let me sleep with his daughter for the sake of the health of their future Messiah.