

JAMNIA DURING THE PRESIDENCY OF GAMALIEL II,
c. A.D. 80-117.

By ARCHDEACON DOWLING.

THIS Rabbi (Rabban Gamaliel) was the son of Simon and grandson of Gamaliel I, leader of the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem, referred to in Acts v, 34. He is called Gamaliel II, or Gamaliel, Prince in Jamnia, from his position as Patriarch of the first Rabbinic School re-opened in that city. He ranks as one of the seven great Rabbins of the Talmudists.

Belonging to the new generation of Tannaim, A.D. 90-130, he lived long enough to feel the oppression which at last led to the great Jewish revolt.

Several quaint stories in connection with Rabban Gamaliel II are to be found scattered throughout Hershon's *Genesis: with a Talmudical Commentary* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1883). He was the chief speaker in the debate held by the Elders in Rome, A.D. 95, on the occasion of their journey to that city from Jamnia, in order to intercede for the Palestinian Jews. The Talmud abounds with references to the incidents of this journey.

An important point undertaken by Gamaliel II was to determine the time and order of the daily prayer. He ordered that every Israelite is bound to pray three times a day. He appointed R. Simon Hapekuli, one of the members of the Sanhedrin, to arrange the eighteen benedictions for the daily liturgy.

As scruples were entertained whether the ancient number of eighteen beatitudes, which formed part of the Temple and Synagogue Service prior to and at the Advent of Christ, should be increased, Gamaliel added a new prayer for the restoration of Jerusalem; and further, he fixed the Service for the Passover Eve in the place of the Paschal sacrifice, and himself compiled several portions contained in the ritual for that evening.

It was his constant desire to see the rival followers of Hillel and Shammai reconciled. In his legal decisions Gamaliel, as a Pharisee, followed the celebrated school of Hillel. The Great Sanhedrin at

Jamnia enjoyed the highest reputation towards the end of the first, and in the beginning of the second century after Christ. Rabban Gamaliel II and his court of justice watched over the current reckoning of the contents of the Kalendar, which became the authoritative standard. Even in regard to the number of the members of the Sanhedrin, we read of "the Seventy-two Elders."

Gamaliel's policy of aggrandising his own office of Patriarch has often been ascribed to motives of pride. In all probability his action in this matter was the outcome of his unifying tendency, and due to a belief that to secure unity in Judaism, one supreme authority was a necessity. In seeking to attain this end, he went the length of humiliating Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus of Lydda, and R. Joshua ben Chananiah, his superiors in learning. In consequence, he himself was deposed from office, although by the charity of Joshua he was later reinstated along with a colleague, Rabbi Eliezer ben Azariah. When we remember that in the hour of his defeat, he was content to sit as a humble member of the Academy which he had ruled so long, surely we must conclude that he was not vain-glorious nor self-seeking.

In the course of time, Gamaliel was reinstated as Patriarch. It must not be supposed that he was an intolerant bigot; the fact that he cultivated Greek literature, and that he had free intercourse with both heathen philosophers and Jewish Christians would of itself be a sufficient proof that he was liberal in his sentiments. He even went so far as to bathe at Ptolemaïs (Acre) in a bath which was adorned with a statue of the beautiful goddess Aphrodite, and when a philosopher (*i.e.*, a Jewish Christian) asked him how he could reconcile it with his religion, Gamaliel replied that the statue was not to be worshipped, but to adorn the building, as is evident from the little regard paid to it, that it had been made for the bath, and not the bath for it, and that it would be absurd to be prevented thereby from using the employment of nature.

It was an ancient custom among the Jews to bury their dead with great pomp. The heavy expenses which this entailed upon the poor sadly crippled their resources. Gamaliel forbade this extravagance, and ordered his family to bury him in simple white linen, and so did away with the extreme expensiveness of Jewish funerals. Ripe in years, full of honour, and beloved of all, Gamaliel II died in the first year of Hadrian, A.D. 117. According to an early Jewish tradition, he was buried at Jamnia. So great was

the regard in which he was held, that Onkelos, his disciple, and the celebrated Chaldee translator of the Pentateuch, showed his body royal honours, and burned at his funeral costly garments and furniture to the amount of seventy Tyrian minae, see Jer. xxxiv, 5. [The mina was an old Greek weight, and a sum of coined money equal to it. The intrinsic value of the Attic mina of silver was £3 6s. 8d.] It was such a funeral pile as was raised at the burial of a king. Onkelos declared that Gamaliel was worth more than a hundred kings, from whom the world had nothing.

R. Eliezer ben Azariah, his co-president, and R. Joshua, his former antagonist, ordered general mourning, to which the whole nation readily responded. This incident, as also several others ascribed to Gamaliel I in Conybeare and Howson's *Life and Epistles of St. Paul* (American edition), Vol. I, p. 61, etc., edit. 1856, refer to Gamaliel II.

JEWISH COUNCIL OF JAMNIA.

c. A.D. 90.

The canonicity of the Old Testament was confirmed towards the close of the first century.

After the fall of Jerusalem, Jamnia became the centre of Palestinian Judaism, and headquarters of Jewish learning.

Possibly the destruction of Jerusalem, and the threatened annihilation of the Jewish race, coupled with the rivalry of the Alexandrian Version, determined the Jewish Rabbis at the so-called Council of Jamnia, to decree officially the limits of the Hebrew Canon of Scripture.¹ This Council could scarcely have had any formal recognition from the Roman authorities, but yet it occupied the position of the old Sanhedrin of Jerusalem as the final court of appeal for Judaism.

What is of great importance to the student of ecclesiastical history and Christian antiquities in the deposition of Rabban Gamaliel, is the fact that the Canon of the Hebrew Scriptures was settled under the new presidency.

Immediately after his elevation to the patriarchate, R. Eliezer, at the instigation of R. Joshua, undertook a revision of the decisions which had been carried by Rabban Gamaliel.

Up to this time the members of the Sanhedrin themselves, in whom was vested the power to fix the Canon, disputed the

¹ *The Cambridge Companion to the Bible*, p. 17, edit. 1905.

canonicity of certain portions of the Hebrew Scriptures. Thus the school of Shammai excluded Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs from the List of Holy Writ, declaring that they proceeded from Solomon's uninspired wisdom. It was the Sanhedrin at Jamnia, following the school of Hillel, which decided that those books are inspired, and form part of the Canon.¹

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES TO JAMNIA.

1. Joshua xv, 11. *Jabneel*.

The city is only mentioned here, and in chap. xix, 33, under this name. It is not found among the lists of the cities of Judah, Dan, or Simeon in the book of Joshua. There is no sign of its ever having been occupied by Judah.

2. 2 Chronicles xxvi, 6. *Jabneh*.

Under this name the city was captured from the Philistines by King Uzziah, and its wall was broken down. It is not mentioned in the canonical books after this catastrophe, unless, as Sir Charles Warren suggests, *Quarterly Statement of P.E.F.*, July, 1875, p. 181, that it is the same as Libnah, for the Jabneel of the Old Testament is given as Lebna in the LXX.

The modern village of Yebna, or more accurately Ibna, about eleven miles south of Jaffa, stands on the ruins of the city of Jamnia. It is situated about two miles from the sea, and rises above the general level of the rolling plain of Philistia. In modern days the encroaching sand has swallowed up the once productive sea-board. But the fertility of the surrounding field and grove helps us to understand its repute in days gone by, of populousness.

DEUTERO-CANONICAL BOOKS—REFERENCES TO JAMNIA.

1. Judith ii, 28.—*Jemnaan*.

The city is thus spoken of here as in fear and dread of Holofernes, the chief captain of the army of Nebuchadrezzar, the arch-enemy of the Jews.

2. 1 Maccabees iv, 15; v, 58; x, 69; xv, 40.—*Jamnia*.

In its Greek form the city is known as Jamnia. It is referred to as a strong garrison, and according to Josephus,

¹ *Dictionary of Christian Biography*: art. "Gamaliel II," Vol. II, p. 607.

Ant., XII, 8, 6, Georgias was its governor. During the wars of the Maccabees it played a conspicuous part in later Jewish history.

3. 2 Maccabees xii, 8, 9, 40.—*The Jamnites.*

The inhabitants having intended to drown the Jews, Judas Maccabaeus set fire to the haven and navy of Jamnia, so that the light of the fire was seen at Jerusalem, a distance of about twenty-five miles. At this time there was a harbour on the coast. This harbour is also mentioned by Pliny under the name of Maioumas.

The city itself did not come into the possession of the Jews under Simon. It was Alexander Jannaeus who made it a portion of the Jewish territory.—*Ant.*, XIII, 15, 4.

JOSEPHUS—REFERENCES TO JAMNIA.

Ant., V, 1, 22, and XII, 8, 6.—*Jamnia.*

Josephus describes the city as belonging to the tribe of Dan, and as being one of the most populous places in Palestine.

Strabo, the ancient Greek geographer, c. 55 B.C.—A.D. 25, records that this portion of Palestine was so densely populated that Jamnia and its neighbourhood were able to furnish 40,000 fighting men.

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