

Jews in America
Thomas Thorowgood (1650)

Thomas Thorowgood, an Anglican minister in England, was an early, influential proponent of the idea that indigenous peoples of the Americas were descended from Israelites, or Jews, who had migrated from the Middle East to the Americas in biblical times. In support of this idea, Thorowgood cited similarities he saw between Israelite religion, as described in the Bible, and beliefs or practices of indigenous Americans, as reported by European observers. In this selection from his first book on the subject, Thorowgood interprets the brutal conquest of indigenous people by the Spanish as a fulfillment of biblical prophesies that warn the Israelites they will suffer God's wrath if they disobey God's law.

The Americans' calamities are suitable to those plagues threatened unto the Jews (Deut. 28). Such a comment upon that terrible scripture is not anywhere to be found as among the Indians; by this also it will appear probable that they be Jews. And here three things shall be touched upon. [...]

1. The Jews were grand offenders. Galatinus mentions some of their enormous transgressions, with their ensuing vengeance. [...] Their fatal and most grievous crime was the denial of the Holy One and the Just, with desire that a murderer should be given them (Acts 3:14). And this brought upon them, first, the tyranny of the Roman conquest and then all those hideous and horrid tribulations that press and oppress them to this day.

2. The natives of America have endured the extremities of most unspeakable miseries. They are a nation, saith Lerijs, cursed and forsaken of God; and the men of Spain, to their other cruelties, added that most abominable reproach: "these barbarians are dogs, unworthy of Christendom." 'Tis too true they were so used by them as if they had been such or worse; they did so wear them up with labor that they became weary of their lives, the poor creatures choosing rather to die any kind of death than to live under such bloody masters and monsters. They scared the Indians into woods, where the men and women hanged themselves together; and wanting instruments sometimes for such self-execution, they helped one another to knit their long locks about the branches of trees, and so cast themselves down headlong, their own hairs being their halters; and thus many thousands of them ended their days with most lamentable yellings and outcries. Their intestine violences and injuries among themselves were woeful by rapine, war, and sacrificings of one another; many thousands of them have been immolated in one day at Mexico. But their sufferings by the Spaniards exceed not only all relation but belief, and surely the savages could not have outstripped the Spaniards in barbarous savagenesses if those infidels had gotten the upper hand of these Christians [...]

3. The Indian sufferings have run so parallel with those threats (Deut. 28) as if they had been principally intended therein also. [...] Against the sinning Jews, it was said, "Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body..." (v. 18); "the pestilence shall cleave unto thee... The Lord shall smite thee with a consumption..." (vv. 21, 22, 35, 29). Strange diseases have destroyed the natives, as the histories of those countries do relate. Their cruel taskmasters, the Spaniards, did so much overburden them with load and labor that the cohabitation of man and wife did cease. Seven

thousand infants of Cuba did perish in three months' space; their mothers, worn out with toiling, had no milk to give them. [...]

God said of the Jews, they should be "oppressed and spoiled evermore" (v. 29); "thou shalt betroth a wife, and another shall lie with her" (v. 30); "you shall be left few in number, though ye were as stars for multitude..." (v. 62). And these Americans were made by the Spaniards everywhere and every way miserable, without any help or relief [...] Countries longer than all Europe and a great part of Asia, by horrid cruelties, were destroyed, and more than 20 millions of the natives perished; yea, in Hispaniola alone, scarce 150 of two millions were left alive. [...]

It was said against Israel, "Cursed shall thy basket be and thy store" (v. 17); "the fruit of thy land, the increase of thy cattle" (ver. 18); "all shall be devoured by enemies and other nations..." (v. 30 ff.). [...] And the Spanish Christians that brake into America showed themselves so covetous of their treasure that the natives, with wonder, said, "Surely gold is the Spaniards' God." They broiled noble Indians on gridirons to extort from them their hidden wealth, giving no respect at all to their caciques or kings. [...]

It were endless to mention all the parallels that the Spaniards have drawn upon the poor Indians, according to the threats of God upon the sinning Jews: "The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high, and thou shalt come down very low" (Deut. 28:43). "Thou shalt serve thine enemy in hunger, and thirst, and nakedness, and in want of all things; and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck till he have destroyed thee" (v. 48). "The Lord will make thy plagues wonderful... (v. 59). "And every plague which is not written in this law will the Lord bring upon thee, until thou be destroyed" (v. 61).

Their kings and caciques were no more regarded by them than the meanest; they enthralled all the natives in most woeful servitude and captivity. Their sufferings have been most wonderful, such as the book of the law hath not registered, nor any other record. They spared no age nor sex, not women with child; they laid wagers who could dig deepest into the bodies of men at one blow, or with most dexterity cut off their heads; they took infants from their mothers' breasts and dashed their innocent heads against the rocks; they cast others into the rivers with scorn, making themselves merry at the manner of their falling into the water; they set up several gallows and hung upon them thirteen Indians in honor, they said, of Christ and his twelve apostles [...]

And now if all these parallels will not amount to a probability, one thing more shall be added, which is the dispersion of the Jews. 'Tis said, "The Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from one end of the earth, even to the other..." (Deut. 28:64). "The whole remnant of thee I will scatter into all winds" (Ezek. 5:10, 12, 14). "I have spread you as the four winds of heaven" (Zech. 2:6).

Now, if it be considered how punctual and faithful God is in performing his promises and threats mentioned in the scripture of truth, we shall have cause to look for the Jews in America, [...for] if the Jews be not now, [or] never were, in America, how have they been dispersed into all parts of the earth? [...] Much more might be said of their sufferings from the Spaniards, whom the barbarous Indians thereupon counted so barbarous and inhumane that they [...] do execrate and curse the sea itself for sending such an intractable, fierce, and cruel generation into the earth. But

thus have wicked sins drawn woeful punishments, threatened to the Jews and suffered also by these Americans, wherein the more hath been spoken not only to deter all Christians from such inhumane barbarities, but to provoke the readers every way to compassionate such transcendent sufferers—the rather because as Canaan of old was Emmanuel’s land (Hos. 9:3), the holy land (Zech. 2:12), and the Jews were God’s peculiar people, so these surely are either a remnant of Israel after the flesh, or else God will, in his good time, incorporate them into that commonwealth, and then they also shall become the Israel of God.

Source: Thomas Thorowgood, *Ievves in America; Or, Probabilities That the Americans Are of That Race* [...] (London: Tho. Slater, 1650), 26-35 (part 1, chap. 8). From a digital transcript created for the Early English Books Online Text Creation Partnership, <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A94301.0001.001>. The University of Michigan Library provides access to this keyboarded and encoded edition of the work for educational and research purposes; the transcription is believed to be in the public domain in the United States.

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The word *natives*—inconsistently, though usually, capitalized in the source publication—has been converted here to lowercase, along with a number of other words capitalized in the source per antiquated convention (including *nation*, *barbarians*, *masters*, *monsters*, *kings*, *caciques*, and *millions*). A title of Christ, mostly lowercase in the source publication (*the Holy one and the just*), has been capitalized here for clarity. Other religious terms, capitalized in the source, have been converted here to lowercase for the sake of modernization and readability, including *scripture* and *apostles*. The use of lowercase for *the holy land* replicates the source.

These edited excerpts from Thorowgood’s book are intended for **teaching** purposes only. For **research** purposes, you should consult, quote, and cite the source publication listed above.



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