PROPHECY

THE DIVINE PRESERVATION OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

by Randall Price

In a conversation on religious questions, Fredric II, King of Prussia (1740–1786) asked Joachim von Zieten, General of the Husars, whom he esteemed highly as a Christian for his plain and uncompromised views, “Give me proof for the truth of the Bible in two words!” To which Zieten replied, “Your majesty, the Jews!” The General’s statement reflected his understanding of not only the miraculous preservation of the Jewish people, but his belief that their preservation was for the purpose of bringing God’s unfulfilled promises to pass. To Zieten, the present existence of the Jewish people was proof that God’s Word was true because Scripture had promised that they would remain until all that had been prophesied concerning them was fulfilled. Remarkably, this expression of faith was made in a day when the Land of Israel was desolate of a Jewish population and the majority of Jews were scattered among the nations.

A century before Zieten, Martin Luther also struggled with the significance of Jewish existence, but came to a very different conclusion based on his observation of the miserable condition of the Jews in his day (sadly, one largely imposed upon them by the Christian Church). Deciding that such Jews could not be those to whom the Bible referred in its promises of future restoration, he said:

If the Jews are Abraham’s descendants, then we would expect to see them back in their own land. We would expect them to have a state of their own. But what do we see? We see them living scattered and despised.1

As a result, he continued to accept the spiritual interpretation of his Augustinian order that the Church is the only heir of the promises to Abraham. I wonder what Luther would say if they lived in our day when almost six million Jews have returned to the biblical homeland to regain their independence in a developed Jewish state whose technology and military achievements are the envy of the world? How different might have been the religious and political history in Germany and Europe (and the world) had Luther rightly understood God’s purpose for preserving the Jews?

The modern return of the Jewish People to the Land of Israel has been called the “Miracle on the Mediterranean.” Such a return by a people group that had been scattered among the nations is unprecedented in history. Indeed, the Jewish People are the only exiled people to remain a distinct people despite being dispersed to more than 70 different countries for more than 20 centuries. The mighty empires of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome all ravaged their land, took their people captive, and scattered them throughout the earth. Even after this, they suffered persecution, pogrom, and Holocaust in the lands to which they were exiled. Yet, all of these ancient kingdoms have turned to dust and their former glories remain only as museum relics and many of the nations that opposed the Jews have suffered economic, political, or religious decline. But the Jewish people whom they enslaved and tried to eradicate live free and have again become a strong nation! In 1898 the American novelist Mark Twain made a similar observation in Harper’s Magazine:

The Egyptian, Babylonian, and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away. The Greek and Roman followed, made a vast noise and they are gone. Other peoples have sprung up, and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out and they sit in twilight now or have vanished. The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal, but the Jew. All

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other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?  

Because Mark Twain was an agnostic and skeptic, he could only recognize the miracle of Israel’s preservation, but could not understand the reason for it.

The fact of the Jewish people’s continuity is even more remarkable in light of the testimony of history to exile and return. In all of human history there have been less than ten deportations of a people group from their native land. These people groups disappeared in history because they assimilated into the nations to which they were exiled. However, the Jewish people did not simply experience a single exile, but multiple exiles. The first exile of the Jewish People was of the ten northern tribes of Israel to Assyria in 722 BC. This was followed 150 years later by a second deportation of much of the population of the southern kingdom of Judah to Babylon and Egypt. In 538 BC a small group of about 50,000 Jews returned to Judah to rebuild the Temple and walls of the city of Jerusalem, but a large portion of the Jewish People remained in the Diaspora (lands outside Israel). Under Persian rule these Jews almost faced extinction as an edict was issued by the Persian ruler to wipe them out as a race (Esther 3:8-14). With the Roman invasion of Israel in 63 BC and the later destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70) there was a third exile of Jews to Rome. Sixty years later a fourth dispersion of the Jews occurred under the emperor Hadrian (AD 135). Persecution during the Byzantine era (4th–6th centuries AD), followed by harsh conditions imposed on the Jews under Muslim invaders in the 7th century, forced many more of the Jewish people to relocate in other lands.

The contrast here with other historical exiles should not be overlooked. While other people groups were exiled to one country, the Jews were dispersed to many different countries, and in fact were scattered to every part of the earth. The Jewish people also hold the distinction of being the only people to have successfully revived their ancient tongue after more than 2,000 years. In the late 19th century when Jews began immigration to the Land, Jews only spoke the languages of the countries from which they had returned. One man, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, decided that the proper tongue for the Jewish people who were now back in the land of the prophets was the language of the prophets. He began teaching the children and today Hebrew is spoken daily by every man, woman, and child in Israel. By contrast, what country or people group today speak Egyptian, Assyrian, or Latin? Only the Jewish people have successfully regained the use of their original language in everyday life.

Moreover, the Jewish people are the only people to have returned en mass to their ancient homeland and to have restored their national independence by re-establishing their former state. When this event occurred on May 14, 1948, Israel’s first Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion declared that what Israel was doing was fulfilling the vision of the biblical prophets. In other words, modern Israel was back in the land to continue the destiny that had been written of them in the Bible.

This connection of the people of the Bible to the Land of the Bible may even be seen in the natural order. When I lived in Israel 30 years ago I was told that the very presence of the Jewish people in the land, draining the swamps in the Galilee, reforesting the hills, and irrigating the Negev was returning the environmental conditions to the way they were in biblical times. Even though the Jewish people did not have a homeland, a common language or a shared history (the factors that historians use to define a nation), they have remained a distinct people. This fact impressed the great secular historian Arnold Toynbee who remarked that there was no natural explanation for the survival of Jewish People through the ages.

Any one of these facts of Israel’s survival would be remarkable, but taken together they are miraculous. Their preservation is a historical testimony to the faithfulness of God. The prophet Jeremiah declared this even in the midst of Israel’s darkest hour of destruction and exile: “The LORD’s loving-kindnesses never cease, for His compassions never

fail. They are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:22).

This faithfulness was seen even in spite of the national sin of the Jewish people in breaking their covenant with God, for the Lord promised that when he punished them they would not be annihilated as a people as would be their enemies: “For I am with you, declares the Lord, to save you; For I will destroy completely all the nations where I have scattered you, only I will not destroy you completely” (Jeremiah 30:11).

A similar statement is made in the New Testament to demonstrate that despite the national sin of rejecting their Messiah, God would not revoke His promise to restore Israel in the future: “From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God’s choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and callings of God are irrevocable” (Romans 11:28-29).

This promise of God’s preservation of the Jewish people as a nation was also made to Jeremiah: “Thus says the Lord, who gives the sun for light by day, and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; the Lord of hosts is His name: ‘If this order departs from before Me,’ declares the Lord, ‘then the offspring of Israel also shall cease from being a Nation before Me forever.’ Thus says the Lord, ‘If the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out below, then I will cast off Israel for all that they have done,’ declares the Lord” (Jeremiah 31:35-37).

It should be noted that in this verse in the original text (Hebrew), the promise is made to preserve them not merely as a “people” (ha-’am), but as a “nation” (ha-goy). While it would be a phenomenon of history that any Jews might survive, it is an incredible miracle that they survived intact as a nation. This is because the Lord has a future purpose for the nation to bless the rest of mankind (Genesis 12:3).

While to some the incredible witness of Jewish preservation might seem to attest to the resiliency of the Jewish people, as though they had some unique strength in themselves, the reason for the Jews survival is, and always has been, the work of God. Author Sandra Teplinsky has well said:

Four thousand years ago God chose Abraham ...Four thousand years later the world is changed but the Word is not. God has catapulted Israel back to global center stage and made it an international battle zone. Why? Because its all about Him. The Creator King picked an otherwise sorry little strain of humanity called Israel for the sake of His own glory—not just for Bible times, but for all of history, down to this hour and beyond. Israel in the twenty-first century is all about Him.

For this reason, the present-day threats to wipe Israel off the map will fail just as have all such threats against the Jewish people in the past. The Psalmist David explained this was because the great Creator was for His people and would preserve them against every enemy in Psalm 124: “Had it not been the L ORD who was on our side,” Let Israel now say, “Had it not been the LORD who was on our side, When men rose up against us; Then they would have swallowed us alive, When their anger was kindled against us; Then the waters would have engulfed us, The stream would have swept over our soul; Then the raging waters would have swept over our soul.”

Blessed be the LORD, Who has not given us to be torn by their teeth. Our soul has escaped as a bird out of the snare of the trapper; The snare is broken and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the LORD, Who made heaven and earth.”

Let us therefore give God the glory for His preservation of the Jewish people and for His great future purpose in establishing the nation of Israel as the means of preserving God’s blessings for all of mankind (Genesis 12:3). ■

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