

HISTORY OF JEWS SERIES – PROPHECY

“The Wandering Jew II” (Deut. 28:62-64; Psalm 137:5-6)

The Jews were strangers and pilgrims across the world for most of the next 2,000 years. In 1948 there has been a great re-gathering of Jews to Israel. But even today we find the dispersion is still profound. The two tables below show the scale of the migration of the Jewish Diaspora that can be traced to the Babylonian Captivity from 606-586 B.C.

WORLD JEWISH POPULATION

At the beginning of 2013, the world’s Jewish population was estimated at 13,854,800.¹ Before the full force of the Holocaust, this number was 16,728,000 in 1939 and by 1945 there were only around 11,000,000. Throughout the centuries the growth of Jews in the world has been very slow in population terms. For many decades since the Holocaust there has been zero population growth.

To put these figures in context we need to remind ourselves that at the end of first century, the Jews reportedly made up one in ten of the Roman Empire. The majority of those lived outside the land of Israel. Around an estimated 2.5 million Jews lived in the land of Israel, and 5 million Jews lived in the Diaspora communities before the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. So throughout the last two thousand years the growth of the worldwide Jewish population has been slight. Indeed, as a proportion of the world population it has greatly declined. This is a fulfillment of Scripture,

And ye shall be left few in number, whereas ye were as the stars of heaven for multitude; because thou wouldest not obey the voice of the LORD thy God. And it shall come to pass, that as the LORD rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the LORD will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it. And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone. (Deut. 28:62-64; cf. Lev. 26:33)

As the Jewish people spread throughout the four corners of the globe, they have undergone continual upheaval. Like Cain, they have become wanderers on the earth. Never once have they found a place of permanent rest. This lines up with Scripture also,

And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life. (Deut. 28:65-66)

1 “World Jewish Population, 2013” Report accessed online at <http://www.jewishdatabank.org/Studies/downloadFile.cfm?FileID=3113>

Rank	Country	Population	% of Total Jewry
1	Israel	6,103,200	42.9%
2	United States	5,700,000	40.1%
3	France	475,000	3.3%
4	Canada	385,300	2.7%
5	U.K.	290,000	2.0%
6	Russia	186,000	1.3%
7	Argentina	181,300	1.3%
8	Germany	118,000	0.8%
9	Australia	112,500	0.8%
10	Brazil	95,000	0.7%
11	Ukraine	63,000	0.4%
12	South Africa	70,000	0.5%
13	Hungary	47,900	0.3%
14	Mexico	40,000	0.3%
15	Belgium	30,000	0.2%
Year	Total Jewish Population		
1880	7,800,000		
1900	10,600,000		
1922	14,400,000		
1925	14,800,000		
1939	16,728,000		
1945	11,000,000		
1950	11,297,000		
1955	11,800,000		
1960	12,079,000		
1970	12,585,000		
1980	12,819,000		
1990	12,868,000		
2000	12,900,000		
2010	13,428,300		
2014	13,900,000		

CHURCH FATHERS & THE JEWS

The Lord warned through Moses in Deuteronomy the scattered Jews would suffer persecution and perpetual fear, *“And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life.”* (Deut. 28:65-66) This promise has been amply fulfilled down the centuries.

In Christendom (Western and Eastern Europe), the Jews have generally suffered the worst persecution throughout history. The early Church Father regarded the Jewish people as a conundrum. On one hand they acknowledged that the roots of their Christian faith was from Judaism with Jesus Christ and the 12 Apostles being Jewish. However, on the other hand the unbelieving Jews rejected Jesus Christ and were the bitterest opponents of Christianity. Despite

the best efforts to evangelise the Jews, there was still a remnant that stubbornly refused to embrace Jesus Christ as the Messiah.

Some early Christian fathers took a positive view of the Jewish people. Eusebius of Caesarea (c 263-340 A.D) in his *Ecclesiastical History* observed, “The race of the Hebrews is not new, but is honoured among all men for its antiquity and is itself well known to all.” However, there were two dominant schools of thought about the Jews during this time in the Christian world that were not so positive:

(1) One school of thought was to regard them as “God’s witnesses” (albeit unwilling witnesses) to the truth of the OT prophecies by their scattering in judgment. The Jews it was argued were the enemies of the Christian message yet their OT Scriptures provided great testimony to Jesus Christ. This strengthened the veracity of the witness to Christianity as a Christian could simply point to the OT Scriptures and declare, “See, even our enemies attest to the prophecies.”

A leading proponent of this view was St Augustine (354 –430), who used it to advocate that the Jews should not be persecuted. He pointed to the command from God to “*slay them not*” (Psalm 59:11) and said, “The Jews ... are thus by their own Scriptures a testimony to us that we have not forged the prophecies about Christ.” Augustine had a grudging admiration for the Jews, and respected the way his Jewish contemporaries remain true to the Law. He used the analogy of Cain to link their marked punishment across the earth. Augustine said, “no one can fail to see that in every land where the Jews are scattered they mourn for the loss of their kingdom, and are in terrified subjection to the immensely superior number of Christians.” He argued that the Jews would be forever doomed to this wandering punishment like Cain unless they embraced Christ.

(2) Another more sinister school of thought did not take such a benevolent view of the Jews. This group regarded the Jews as the killers of Jesus Christ who are guilty of deicide (lit. God killing) and despised them as cursed to eternal destruction. They took various NT passages to justify this such as:

When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children. (Matthew 27:24-25)

Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made the same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. (Acts 2:36; cf. 3:13-15)

To the deicide advocates the church had replaced Israel and that the Jews should not be permitted to public engage in what was to be regarded as blasphemous worship. They identified Judaism with heresy and declared the Jews to be *extra Deum* (lat. “outside of God”).

Men like St Jerome (347 – 420) were angered by the toleration of all Jewish forms of worship. He rebuked Augustine for his advocacy of restraint. Jerome argued that, “Judas is cursed, that in Judas the Jews may be accursed... their prayers turn into sins.” He warned that “the ceremonies of the Jews are harmful and deadly to Christians” and those who gave support to the Jews are doomed to “the abyss of the Devil.” John Chrysostom (c. 349 – 407 AD) went even further. He called synagogues “the Devil’s house” and argued that Jesus was speaking about Jews when he said, “*But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and*

slay them before me.” These theological views of the Jews were used to justify anti-Semitism and destroy synagogues and make illegal Jewish religious activities.

TREATMENT OF JEWS UNDER THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

The great waves of persecution began by the supposed conversion of the Emperor Constantine to Christianity in the fourth century. Edward Gibbon states that at the end of the 1st Century around 10% of the Empire identified themselves with Christianity and by the time Constantine came to power it was around 50%. It is reported that in Rome alone there were fifty thousand believers. Gibbon believes this is what motivated Constantine to legalize Christianity as he needed the support of the Christians to maintain the Empire.

After his victory in battle, Constantine made a public edict in favour of the Christians was issued in 313 AD and in 324 AD he issued an edict against Paganism. Constantine claimed to have had a vision of a flaming cross with the inscription, “By this conquer.” It is said he then adopted the sign of the cross as the imperial standard of his armies and declared himself a convert to Christianity, though he was never baptized until near the end of his life. As Constantine began to bestow special favours and privileges upon the church such as enjoying the special status of religious exemption from taxes, the church began to find herself bound in a new way.

Constantine’s soldiers were baptized en masse and Christians were given posts of honour. Bishops of the Church now sat on thrones with the nobles of the empire, wore costly attire, and gave sumptuous banquets. Bishops also replaced magistrates, as Ambrose did at Milan. Heathen temples were consecrated for Christian service. The Church adopted many pagan rites and ceremonies. The term “catholic” was now invariably applied in all official documents to the Church also. Aside from this, Constantine also openly took his place as head of the Church at Council of Nicaea in 325 AD, but at the same time retained the office of the Pontifex Maximus. Thus the Church and State became allied.

Constantine and his family sought to promote Christianity over the Empire. One of the places that they took an interest in doing so was in the land of Israel. They built the famous Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem in 327 A.D. They also came to Jerusalem and built a small church on Mount Moriah. Such action naturally infuriated the small Jewish community. The antagonism resulted in the diminishing of the Jewish population and influence in the land.

During the first three centuries the majority of the members of the Christian Church was thought to be Jewish. This balance changed when the Roman world took on the veneer of Christianity as a national religion. It now became an advantage for Gentiles to be Christian. The rise to public power of Christianity made it also attractive to many Jews. Many Jews took the opportunity to embrace Christianity. It is not clear if their motives were genuine or because of expediency. Some of these were given high office in the Church. They were responsible for campaigns to close down synagogues and outlaw Jewish practices like circumcision in many parts of the Empire. Jews were not allowed to own Christian slaves or marry Christians. Conversion of Christians to Judaism was outlawed. A poll tax was levied on them until the reign of Emperor Julian in 363 AD. The language of the church leadership in this period is indicative of the widespread anti-Jewish sentiments. At the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325 AD separated the calculation of the date of Easter from the Jewish Passover and ominously declared,

It was, in the first place, declared improper to follow the custom of the Jews in the celebration of this holy festival, because, their hands having been stained with crime, the minds of these wretched men are necessarily blinded. By rejecting their custom, we establish and hand down to succeeding ages one which is more reasonable, and which has been observed ever since the day of our Lord's sufferings. Let us, then, have nothing in common with the Jews, who are our adversaries. For we have received from our Saviour another way. A better and more lawful line of conduct is inculcated by our holy religion. Let us with one accord walk therein, my much-honoured brethren, studiously avoiding all contact with that evil way. They boast that without their instructions we should be unable to commemorate the festival properly. This is the highest pitch of absurdity. For how can they entertain right views on any point who, after having compassed the death of the Lord, being out of their minds, are guided not by sound reason, but by an unrestrained passion, wherever their innate madness carries them.

The Emperor Julian who ruled from 361 to 363 AD temporarily halted the sudden rise of the power of Christianity. He was the last non-Christian ruler of the Roman Empire. Julian rejected Christianity and attempted to return to paganism as the state religion. Hence the church named him "Julian the Apostate." One of the things he did was to show favouritism to the Jews, hoping they might rival the Christian faith and deprive it of many of its followers. Julian even promised to destroy the Church on the Temple Mount and rebuild the Temple there and set aside a sum of money to do so. His death in battle ended the hope of this Jewish dream. The Emperor Jovian who re-established Christianity's privileged position throughout the Empire succeeded him. It would not be challenged down the centuries. This will lead to a bloody history of Jewish pogroms and discrimination, which would culminate in the Holocaust in the twentieth century.