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Israel: The Apple of His Eye

by David Dunlap

It was near two o' clock on the afternoon of August 16, 1949, when an airplane flown by an American pilot appeared over the Mediterranean coast of Israel. Immediately it was joined by four fighter planes from the Israeli Air Force. Earlier that day, this plane had left Vienna, Austria. It carried the remains of a Jew who had died forty-five years before and whose body had slept quietly all these years, wrapped in the blue and white flag of Zion. The grave in which it had been interred was an ordinary grave like many others there. Above, below, and on all sides of the stone and the railing, there was handwriting in Hebrew, Russian, and German. These writings were not desecrations. Rather, they were expressions of gratitude felt by the thousands of Jews who had visited the grave since 1904. The writings contained requests, hopes, prayers, proverbs, and blessings. Coming from all parts of the world, Jews had expressed in many different languages their longing for a national home in Israel and their appreciation to the man whose leadership had so inspired them.¹ Now the new state of Israel had been formed, the body of the man was being brought to Israel, where it would lie in the soil of Givat Herzl outside Jerusalem. At last, after forty-five years, Theodore Herzl, the Father of Zionism, could rest in the soil of his beloved land of Israel. For forty years, Herzl's great cry to the world was: *"There is a land without a people, and there is a people without a land. Give the land without a people to the people without a land..."*

The "Indestructible" Jew

How is it that mightier and more powerful nations have crumbled into the sands of time, but the small and scattered nation of Israel continues strong? She has grown stronger despite battling a host of enemies who were more numerous and more powerful than herself. She has survived each war and every enemy that has tried to rid the world of the Jews. She has survived dictators, persecution, anti-Semitism, "Kristallnacht," the pogroms in Russia, concentration camps in Nazi Germany, and the Islamic terrorism of today. Through it all, the Jewish people have proven to be virtually indestructible. The mystery of the "Indestructible Jew" has baffled observers and historians for centuries. Yet, the only satisfactory answer that can be offered is the unique protection of the Almighty God.

However, God's divine protection of the Jews in the world cannot be fully appreciated by simple observation. Providence is the work of God that can only be truly discerned by the eye of faith. This is nowhere more clearly seen than in the history of the Jewish nation in Russia shortly after World War II. In the Old Testament, God had preserved the Jews through the hands of Moses in Egypt, and later through the bravery of Mordecai and Esther. Yet one of the most remarkable acts of providence took place in the Soviet Union. On March 1, 1953, Josef Stalin

"God speaks of the elect nation as 'Israel my Glory'. He has chosen that nation above all the nations of the world for His glory. He loves them with an everlasting love. In His plan God has chosen Israel to a holy and everlasting nation."

Lewis S. Chafer
(1871-1952)

unveiled a proposal to liquidate the three million Jews then living in the Soviet Union. Stalin, a paranoid Jew-hater, had executed thousands of Jews in the 1930s, including many loyal Jews who had supported the Communist cause since the beginning of the Bolshevik revolution. Stalin's anger against the Jew was rekindled after World War II when Israel's first ambassador to Moscow, Golda Meir, was invited to a reception held by Soviet Jews. Soon afterwards, Stalin suddenly announced that a "plot" to kill him had been discovered. He explained to the Soviet press that the clever and sinister plot was arranged by Jewish medical doctors. Soon denunciations against all Jews from leading Communists were broadcast on government-controlled radio and television and circulated in the print media. On March 1, 1953, at noon, Stalin called a meeting of the Politburo in the Kremlin and read to the Soviet leaders his plan for the extermination of the Jews. However, Stalin's evil plan to annihilate the Jews never took place. On March 2, nearly twenty-four hours after outlining his plans and exactly one week before the devastation would begin, Josef Stalin died of a stroke. He lay in state for a week and was buried on March 9, which was the Jewish holiday Purim.

In the human mind, the calendar dates of the week, month, and year often are forgotten, but the mind of God remembers always. Purim is the Jewish holiday which remembers God's deliverance of Jews from extermination by the hand of Haman in the book of Esther. God is still in control.

The Beginnings of the State of Israel

In the 1880s the desire for a Jewish homeland began to burn in the hearts of Jews throughout the world. Influential political leaders in Europe and the United States began to support the idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. In 1897, the first Zionist Congress held in Basel, Switzerland, captured world attention. However, in the years that followed, interest in a Jewish state began to wane. Nonetheless, soon a number of events once again began to shift public opinion. The anti-Semitic violence in Russia, the Dreyfus affair in France, and the wreckage of World War I all served to influence political goodwill.

As the First World War entered its final year, British commanders changed the thrust of their eastern operations from Mesopotamia to Palestine. Christians throughout the world began to wonder if God was directing military affairs in Palestine to provide a homeland for His people. When the fall of the Ottoman Empire seemed imminent, many speculated that Bible prophecy was about to be fulfilled before the eyes of a watching world.

At the end of 1917, fast-moving events heightened world expectations even further. On November 2, Lord Arthur Balfour, the British foreign secretary, wrote to Lord James Rothschild, a leader of the international Zionist movement:

His Majesty's government views with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best efforts to facilitate the achievement of this object...²

Barely five weeks after the Balfour Declaration, the Turks surrendered Jerusalem to British forces under General Edmund Allenby. On December 9th, 1917, the first day of the Feast of Hanukkah (the 25th of Chislev) and the anniversary of the freeing of Jerusalem centuries before by Judas Maccabeus, Allenby took the city without firing a shot. General Allenby was a devout Christian. He abhorred the thought of shedding blood in the very city where the Lord Jesus Christ had once walked, and he had no desire, either, to damage the city's walls. He had brought up his troops, determined to free the city but wondering how it might be done peaceably. Meanwhile, the rumor of Allenby's

"The knowledge of prophecy provides joy in the midst of affliction, cleanses and encourages holy living, and gives proof to the reliability of Holy Scripture. It draws out our hearts in worship to the God who is in complete control and who will accomplish his will in history. To slight prophecy is to miss these benefits."

Charles C. Ryrie
(1925-present)

approach ran through the Turkish garrison. In the Turkish language, Allenby's name was rendered "Allah bye," which means "the Prophet of God." The Turks seized with superstitious dread were convinced that God was against them, fled the city leaving Jerusalem undefended.

Upon approaching the city, General Allenby dismounted his horse and walked bareheaded into the city. When asked afterward why he chose such a means of entry, he remarked modestly, "It seemed to me the obvious and natural thing to do. The only alternative to entering on foot by the Jaffa Gate was to enter on horseback through the enormous hole in the wall made especially to permit the German Kaiser to make what he regarded as a triumphant and spectacular entry into Jerusalem. That was a procedure I naturally shrank from repeating."

The Zionist Movement & W. E. Blackstone

No Christian leader earned more acclaim among Zionists than W. E. Blackstone, the author of *Jesus is Coming*, one of the most popular books of its time on biblical prophecy. William Eugene Blackstone (1841-1935) was born in Adams, New York, into a Methodist home and was converted at the age of eleven.

In the 1880s Blackstone became an associate of D. L. Moody and published the book *Jesus is Coming*. Through his prophetic studies and association with other Dispensationalists, he developed a growing interest in the Jewish people. In 1888, he visited the Holy Land with his daughter. Upon his return, in 1890, Blackstone organized the first conference between Christians and Jews in Chicago.

The following year, Blackstone's concern for the oppressed Jews in Europe led him to sponsor an amazing "memorial" on behalf of Russian Jews. On March 5, 1891, Blackstone sent his memorial to President Benjamin Harrison and Secretary of State James Blaine. The memorial began with the question: "What shall be done for the Russian Jews?" After briefly discussing the situation in Europe, Blackstone offered his own solution:

Why not give Palestine back to them again? According to God's distribution of nations, it is their home—an inalienable possession from which they were expelled by force...

Blackstone's interest in the Zionist movement increased even further in the years following. When Theodor Herzl showed a lack of commitment to Palestine as the site for the Jewish state, W. E. Blackstone sent him a marked copy of the Old Testament, highlighting those passages which indicated that the Jews must return to Palestine. Today, Blackstone's marked Old Testament is on public exhibition at the "History of Zionism" display at Herzl's grave in Israel.

Blackstone was a true friend of Israel, and Jewish Zionists sincerely appreciated Blackstone's efforts on their behalf. At a 1918 Zionist Conference in Philadelphia, Blackstone was acclaimed a "Father of Zionism." In that same year, he was invited to speak at a large Zionist conference in Los Angeles. Blackstone's told the assembled crowd:

I am and for over thirty years have been an ardent advocate of Zionism. This is because I believe that true Zionism is founded on the plan, purpose, and fiat of the everlasting and omnipotent God, as prophetically recorded in His Holy Word, the Bible...There are only three courses open to every Jew...first to become a true Christian, accepting the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, which brings not only forgiveness and regeneration, but ensures escape from the unequalled time of tribulation...³

*“ Do not think
that the study
of prophecy
consists merely
in the setting of
dates or
forecasting
future events...
The Lord has
commanded us
to watch, to
love his
appearing, and
has pronounced
a blessing upon
the study of
prophecy.”*

W. E. Blackstone
(1841-1935)

from *Jesus is Coming*, p.177



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Blackstone retained a cherished place in the history of the early Zionist movement. In 1956, upon the seventy-fifth anniversary of Blackstone's memorial, the citizens of the state of Israel dedicated a forest in his honor.

The land of Israel without a Jew was a land without a soul. With the rebirth of the state of Israel, the Promised land experienced a resurrection. The Jews have returned to their land from the far corners of the world. Where once barren fields lay uncultivated, today forests, fields, and farms flourish. They have transformed the country, fought off their enemies, and fortified their borders. They have created a small but strong and highly industrialized nation in the most strategic area in the world.

Conclusion

On March 14, 1948, at 4:00 P. M., the General Zionist Council at Tel Aviv proclaimed to the world the establishment of the state of Israel. David Ben Gurion became its first prime minister and chemist Chaim Weizman its first president. Israel was now a sovereign nation in the community of nations. This was a significant moment in the history of the Jewish people. Doubtless, God was sovereignly guiding each of these historic events. Nevertheless, much of God's plan for the nation of Israel is yet to be fulfilled. The prophetic clock is still ticking for Israel. The seven-year tribulation period, the Antichrist, and the millennial reign of Christ are all still future. The day is yet to come when the eyes of the Jews will be opened at last, they will "look on Him whom they pierced" (Zech. 12:10), and they will mourn. Then Jesus Christ will be owned at last as Israel's Messiah, Savior, and Lord. The Lord's throne will be set in sight of the dark valley through which He passed on His way to Gethsemane. Then at last, Jewish men, women, and children, joining with Gentiles, will gather around His throne, joyously shouting their praise: "Alleluia; salvation, and glory, and honor, and power, unto the Lord our God" (Rev. 19:1).

Endnotes

1. Walter Price, *Next Year in Jerusalem*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1975), p.11
2. Melvin Urofsky, *American Zionism from Herzl to Holocaust* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1976), p. 199
3. Timothy Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), p. 140-141