

Israel: Facing the Giants in 2015

The story of the Jewish people is unlike any other history of a people group known on the earth. First, their very birth was a miracle, because Sarah was well past childbearing years when the promised son, Isaac, was conceived.

Their survival through 4,000 years of enslavement, wanderings, exiles and attempts at annihilation is also miraculous. None of the other small people groups from the Genesis story exist today because one exile alone is enough to wipe out a people group.

The Jewish people not only survived, but also have now returned to their ancient homeland after 2,000 years of exile. "Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall the earth be made to give birth in one day? Shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion was in labor, she brought forth her sons" (Is. 66:8).

Only God could have written this story. He promised all of this thousands of years ago and today He is fulfilling His promises to the smallest detail. The outcasts have returned to their homeland, the desert is blooming, and children are once again playing in the streets and speaking the ancient tongue of the prophets—Hebrew.

Miracles Don't Come Easy

Israel's return to her land, of course, has not been easy. It was literally out of the ashes of the Holocaust and the sand of the desert that the Jewish State was formed. She was then faced with an average of one war for every decade of statehood. Despite the drain this has put on the economy, Israel is now leading the world in innovation, technology, medicine, science and agriculture!

While we love hearing these stories, and being reminded of the miraculous, the truth of the matter is that Israelis are getting very tired of the ongoing saga of war and hatred that they and their children have to live in. The summer of 2014 was a particularly sobering one.

Sobering Summer

Israelis just want to be left alone and to live in peace. For this reason, many of them had become proponents of withdrawing from the West Bank and establishing a Palestinian state there.

But Operation Protective Edge, Israel's incursion into Gaza this past summer, has changed all of that. The Israeli left has realized that Israel must maintain security control over the West Bank for the foreseeable future. The previous withdrawal from Gaza did not result in peace but rather a state governed by a terrorist organization and ongoing threats of missile attacks.

They now admit that a withdrawal from the West Bank would not only be more of the same, but a situation that is far worse than containing the little Gaza Strip.

Shocking Levels of Anti-Semitism

This summer also brought about another sobering awakening. The Israeli people were shocked at just how strong anti-Semitism is in many places. During the Gaza war one of the most popular Twitter hashtags was #HitlerWasRight.

Anti-Israel demonstrations were marked by racist and genocidal rhetoric, some of it indistinguishable from Nazi slogans. Synagogues were attacked and individual Jews were threatened and physically assaulted.

Israelis felt fear, anger and despair. The only glimmer of hope came from the messages of support by Christians from around the world. For this reason, the ICEJ organized and

participated in rallies in a number of countries to be a voice of hope and encouragement to the Jewish people.

Strategy for Facing Giants

As Joshua and the Israelites prepared to take possession of the land of Canaan, God spoke to Joshua and told him to do two things. One was to meditate on the Law and to observe it, because then his way would be prosperous and he would have success.

Secondly, He reminded Joshua: "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (Josh. 1:9).

The God of Israel knew it would not be easy then, and He knows it is not easy now. He knew that Joshua needed encouragement then, just as the people of Israel need it now. This is why He has raised up Christians to be that voice of hope and encouragement they so desperately need.

The Giants in 2015

The people of Israel are facing numerous serious threats in 2015. An Israeli NGO recently released an independent report on poverty in Israel that shows that a growing number of Israeli households are under threat from food insecurity and other poverty-related issues. Approximately 31.6 percent of Israel's population, including almost one million children, is poor. Many of these children do not get sufficient food to eat and sometimes go without receiving proper medical treatment.

Another serious threat Israel is facing is the loss of its close cooperation with the United States. At one of her most critical moments in history, Israel cannot count on America to "have her back" and coordinate international pressure to stop the Iranian nuclear program. It is looking more and more like Israel will stand alone against a nuclear Iran.

Iran is also accelerating the arming of Hezbollah and Hamas with rockets and missiles in an attempt to circle Israel from the north, south and east. In addition, the Islamic State (ISIS) has gained a presence near the border with Israel on the Golan Heights and has declared that their flag will fly over Jerusalem, as well as Mecca and Medina.

Giving Hope and Strength to Israel

When we look at this situation we feel much like Joshua did as he undoubtedly thought about the giants in the land God had told him to enter. The people of Israel need their friends to stand up and be counted. Now is not the time to shrink back in fear but to realize that we, like Israel, need to be obedient, strong and courageous.

Israel's Christian friends can help confront the giants of poverty, anti-Semitism and Western apathy. It will require donations, activism and informing others. Most importantly, it will take persistent prayer that never gives up and gives Him no rest until His work is done and He has established Jerusalem as a praise in all the earth (Is. 62:6-7).

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