

Orthodox Jew: Turning History Upside Down in Ukraine

You may be aware of the phrase “history repeating itself,” but I want to share a story of how history is being turned upside down as millions of Ukrainians try to flee the Russian siege of their country.

It’s especially appropriate to do so from a Jewish perspective; and especially this month as we celebrate Purim, commemorating the salvation of the Jewish people in ancient Persia at a time when all Jews were threatened with murder by the evil Haman, a plot that was also turned around.

As recounted in the book of Esther, rather than the Jewish people being killed, Haman, his relatives and all who threatened the Jewish people saw their demise. Haman himself was hung on the gallows that he built to hang Mordecai. At this season, we recount the story and heroic role of Esther and Mordecai who were central in turning upside down the Jewish people’s fate that the king had sealed. Interestingly, God is not mentioned in the book of Esther directly. The victory and actions that led to this took place through people’s actions.

Today history is being turned upside down in Poland where 75 years ago three million Jews were slaughtered by the Nazis, more than 90% of the total Jewish population of Poland. Some were able to escape; some were saved by Righteous Gentiles, but for the most part, the Jews of Poland were sentenced to an unprecedented fate of genocide.

In recent years, there has been a revival of Jewish life in Poland, with Jews reclaiming their heritage and traditions. People are still discovering that they or their parents or grandparents were hidden and are, in fact, Jewish. Many

Christians are creating warm bonds with the Jewish community and Israel as a sign of healing. This is partly to atone for what their Polish relatives did 75 years ago, and to correct a theological aberration of "the church" persecuting the Jewish people.

The turning around of history today is embodied in Jews proactively taking the initiative to help refugees from Ukraine, both Jews and Gentiles. Think about it for a minute: The once decimated Jewish community of Poland is coming to the rescue of Jewish and non-Jewish refugees from Ukraine, to which many of their relatives tried to escape.

One person on the ground shared that stores in Poland are being emptied of all kinds of products, with Poles donating and shipping these across the border. They are doing so in a humanitarian way, but they are also aware if Russia is not stopped, Poland could be next. Jews in Poland are providing substantial resources and supplies and refuge to fellow Jews who have escaped their war-torn country, with no money and only the clothes on their backs. This is exacerbated by families being separated by Ukrainian border guards, not allowing men to leave because they are being kept in Ukraine as extra hands to fight the Russians.

That means women and young children are crossing the border on their own, seeking any help they can. Rabbi Avi Baumol is the rabbi in Krakow who has been offering firsthand assistance. He is finding shelter, food and funds for those lucky enough to make it across the border, or wanting to get to Israel, and is on the border doing what he can to embrace those who make it to safety.

Jews are not being targeted directly by Russia. Not yet, but scapegoating Jews is not new there. Among the hundreds of thousands of people fleeing Ukraine, the Jews are aware of the fact that when war comes to their region, it is typically not something that has a positive outcome for the Jewish people.

Another important trend that is turning the tide of history is the reality of Jews in Poland helping Righteous Gentiles and their relatives in Ukraine. There are 17 alive out of 2,673 who had been honored as Righteous Gentiles: those who fed, sheltered and protected Jews in Ukraine during the Holocaust, putting their own lives at risk. Many of the Jewish community in Ukraine today have these Righteous Gentiles to thank for the fact that they are even alive. Johnny Daniels is spending considerable time and effort to provide hard-to-come-by basic staples to sustain these people in their 90s, whose children are in their 60s and 70s. As he said, it's a way for Jews to show gratitude for everything they did to risk their lives saving Jews decades ago.

Through people on the ground in Ukraine, risking their lives to check in on and provide the most basic desperately needed supplies to elderly Righteous Gentiles and Jewish Holocaust survivors who are too frail to flee, we are making a difference on the ground. It's not without many challenges to do all this in a war zone. One example of this is that a bank that was being used to transfer money was shelled and destroyed by the Russians.

I did not wake up today intending to make a fund-raising appeal. Until this week, despite many people asking how they could help, I rejected that. My plans changed when I saw appeals from others making claims to be providing all sorts of humanitarian assistance, but who really don't have the means or platform to do so.

Neither do I. But I know the people who do, people and organizations with integrity. So, through the Genesis 123 Foundation, we decided to give people a place to donate, which they can trust and know the money will go where it is needed. We will provide funds to bring Jews home to Israel and to absorb them in Israel.

For Jews left behind, with Passover only weeks away, we will

provide resources to help make their holiday joyous, at a time when the challenges they face are almost as bad as the beginning of WWII. And we will take care of Righteous Gentiles and their families, because that is our responsibility and privilege.

Please consider donating here, where you can rely on the fact that the funds will get to where they are most needed and will make the biggest impact, as we are part of turning history around. And when you do so, you can also send prayers and words of encouragement that will be delivered to people fleeing and those with no immediate way out of harm's way.
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Jonathan Feldstein was born and educated in the U.S. and immigrated to Israel in 2004. He is married and the father of six. Throughout his life and career, he has been blessed by the calling to fellowship with Christian supporters of Israel and shares experiences of living as an Orthodox Jew in Israel. He is president of the Genesis 123 Foundation, which builds bridges between Jews and Christians, and writes regularly for a variety of prominent Christian and conservative websites. Inspiration from Zion is the popular webinar series and podcast that he hosts. He can be reached at InspirationfromZion@.

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