

Putting the Holocaust Into Its Proper Context

We live at a time when Jewish people are being accused of dwelling unnecessarily on the memory of the Holocaust. But at the same time, we are seeing swastikas being painted on doors, walls and even tombstones across the globe.

Mahmoud Abbas was unanimously reelected as leader of Fatah, and the West is supposed to get excited about the man they believe could make peace with Israel. Let us not forget he is a Holocaust denier who wrote his thesis in 1982 on that very topic under the title "The Connection between the Nazis and the Leaders of the Zionist Movement."

Populist parties are gaining tremendous ground in Europe as the desire to stop and control the migrant crisis becomes a priority. With them, they bring the deep rooted European racial antisemitism we thought was defunct.

Only a couple of years ago on the streets of Paris, I heard people marching and chanting, "Jews to the ovens." It seems a lot of people are either denying the Holocaust, wanting another one or worse, are clueless about the first one.

I don't think we speak too much of the Holocaust, but we don't think about it in its proper context.

Scholars, philosophers, theologians and historians have all grappled with the Holocaust, trying to come to terms with the immensity of its evil in strength and scope. Some within classical Jewish religious thought believe the Holocaust was God's retribution or payback for Israel's sins. In other words, it was God's desire to discipline Israel for her sins and, as such, was part of God's plan all along.

The common name for it is *Mi-penei hata ' einu* (Hebrew for

“because of our sins we were punished.”) It refers to divine punishment for the sins of Israel. It is true that the Tenach is replete with stories about the sins of Israel and their consequential discipline from God.

Holocaust survivor and Nobel Prize laureate, Elie Wiesel, wrote in 1962 of the religious Jewish reaction to the Holocaust in *Commentary Magazine*: “The feeling of guilt was, to begin with, essentially a religious feeling. If I am here, it is because God is punishing me; I have sinned, and I am expiating my sins. I have deserved this punishment that I am suffering.”

Wiesel, along with many others, feel that while the punishment inflicted by the Holocaust might not be proportionate to the sins committed by Israel, the two are related. Incidentally, if one believes that—as the Bible teaches—the price for our sins is death (Ezek. 18:4), then the Holocaust could be justified. But why would God wait almost 2,000 years to punish Israel, and why inflict pain and suffering on generations that are so far removed from the previous ones?

Others see Israel as the Suffering Servant of Is. 52:13-53:12. They will assign the suffering of the Holocaust to all Israel (all Jewish people.) Although it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the meaning of Isaiah 53, let’s state that this controversial passage definitely speaks of suffering, humiliation and death in no uncertain terms. But it can also refer to a person and not Israel as a whole. If indeed it refers to a person in particular, Yeshua of Nazareth is the only one who would fit that description, especially since toward the end of the passage, after humiliation, suffering and death comes resurrection.

Some speak of *Hester Panim* (“hiding of the face,”) also known as “the eclipse of God.” Ps. 44:23-24 speaks of God hiding His face: “Awake; why do You sleep, O Lord? Arise; do not reject us forever. Why do You hide Your face, and forget our

affliction and our oppression?"

Was God absent during the Holocaust? From the standpoint of protecting the victims from suffering and death, it would certainly appear to be true. Each and every one of the six million innocent victims—if they could speak—would most likely testify of God's absence or lack of involvement.

Yet, when we speak of the eclipse of God, we must recall what an eclipse is all about: a visual disappearance while the physical presence remains. In other words, God might have been eclipsed or might have been hiding His face during the Holocaust, but He was always there and always within reach. Not only was He there, but He felt the pain of the victims as Isaiah 63:9a tells us: "In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them; In His love and in His mercy He redeemed them."

Many religious people, Jewish and Gentile, wound up in the camps. If God was silent, some of His people weren't. The eclipse of God was not because He didn't care, but possibly because for a time, He removed Himself from the affairs of men, leaving the fate of many in the hands of a few. At the very least, He allowed for the Jewish people not to be under His protection, as He had done repeatedly in the long history of the children of Israel.

Isaiah tells us God cared as He suffered affliction for His people. Additionally, God took no pleasure in the death of the many. Even assuming Israel was being punished by the Holocaust for being wicked—a case that cannot be made with absolute certainty—the prophet Ezekiel speaks of God when he writes, "Say to them: As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezek. 33:11a).

The Holocaust prompted many Jews who survived the Holocaust to come to the conclusion that God is dead. Again Elie Wiesel,

this time in his seminal work *Night*, depicts the agonizing hanging of a young boy:

"Where is God? Where is He?" someone behind me asked ... For more than half an hour [the child in the noose] stayed there, struggling between life and death, dying in slow agony under our eyes. And we had to look him full in the face. He was still alive when I passed in front of him. His tongue was still red, his eyes were not yet glazed. Behind me, I heard the same man asking: "Where is God now?" And I heard a voice within me answer him: "Where is He? Here He is—He is hanging here on this gallows."

But if God died during the Holocaust, why did it come to a halt in 1945? The Nazi war machine was well-oiled and extremely efficient. The liberation of the camps and the capitulation of Germany would militate towards God not being dead and, on the contrary, being instrumental in the end of World War II. This is also in line with His promise never to completely destroy Israel as found in Jeremiah (Jer. 31:35-37.)

I could continue to look at the Holocaust and wrestle further with causes for it. Regardless of how many approaches with come up with, we will most certainly come back to evil being at the core of the catastrophe.

This leads us to the problem of evil. The existence of evil in the world is a topic that is highly debated. Very few believe evil doesn't exist. The Holocaust and how low humanity could bring itself proved evil exists.

Hitler wasn't insane. Insanity would exonerate him of all responsibility for the so-called "Final Solution to the Jewish problem." But Hitler was pure evil. But even when we recognize that, the source of all evil must still be identified.

I don't believe we can properly do such a thing without

building our case on a biblical foundation. Morality is based on the balance between good and evil, which is best brought forward by looking at what the Tenach says.

Good and evil cannot exist independently of one another, since one defines the other. Going back to the first book of the Tenach, Genesis, we find out that one of God's most special angels, Satan, rebelled against God and fell from grace. From that point on, he has been working very hard at hating what God loves and loving what God hates. That puts the Jewish people and Israel directly in his crosshairs.

Satan knows that through the Jewish people, more specifically through the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10), will come the Redeemer of mankind, the Messiah of Israel. His goal is to stop that from happening, because at some point in the future, Messiah will put an end to Satan's career, and he doesn't care for his retirement plan.

I am often asked if the birth of the modern state of Israel is a direct result of World War II and the Holocaust. I believe the answer is a resounding no. Rather, the Holocaust was an attempt by Satan to destroy the Jews right before they would start fulfilling one of God's most amazing prophecy about their return to their biblical land (Ezek. 36-38.)

There is no doubt in my mind that Satan was aware of the return of the Jews to Israel in the end times. He had to stop it, or at least try, thus the Holocaust. He used Pharaoh to try to stop Moses from being born, he used Herod to try to stop Yeshua from being born and he used Nazi Germany and Hitler to try to stop the Jews from moving back to Israel and fulfilling God's covenantal promises. Satan exploited the fact that the Jewish people weren't under God's protection and were more at the mercy of the nation to attempt their total eradication. He almost succeeded, but God is greater. Not only God is greater, but He is interested in every single soul that exists. God wants to draw them to Him, one soul at a time.

So again, it is not that we speak too much of the Holocaust, but maybe that we speak of it in the wrong context. {eoa}

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