

Auschwitz: Monument to Horror

***“Behold, I will
send for many
fishers, saith the
LORD, and they
shall fish them;
and after will I
send for many
hunters, and they
shall hunt them
from every
mountain, and
from every hill,
and out of the
holes of the
rocks.”***

—Jeremiah 16:16 days of Jesus’ earthly ministry, he proclaimed to the children of Israel that their nation would be destroyed because of their lack of obedience and appreciation of the wonderful workings of God which had been done on their behalf. “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!” (Matt. 23:37,38, *New American Standard Version*). Our Lord’s proclamation had a dramatic fulfillment when the power of

DURING THE CLOSING

ers her chicks under her

Rome destroyed their national identity and the Jewish people were ultimately scattered throughout the world as a subjugated people.

JEREMIAH'S PROPHECY

When writing the above scripture passage, the prophet Jeremiah, approximately six hundred years before Jesus was born, foretold a time in the far distant future when Israel's people would be regathered to their homeland once again. Students of the Bible recognize the events that have transpired concerning the Jews, particularly since the last quarter of the nineteenth century, as being evidences of the fulfilling of this ancient prophecy. In his prophecy, our attention is drawn to the use of the symbolic terms 'fishers' and 'hunters' as an indication of the methods God would use to regather his people following the long period of time since they were dispersed.

THE FISHERS

Those who study Bible prophecy are watching for evidences of this foretold time of regathering, and believe that this course of events began in the latter part of the nineteenth century. They relate the fishing process to the events that began in 1878, when the Treaty of Berlin was drafted to settle demands that were laid upon Turkey following the Russo-Turkish war, which concluded the struggle that took place in 1877 and 1878 between Russia and Turkey. Although Otto von Bismark of Germany dominated the treaty discussions, certain concessions were also demanded by Great Britain's Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, who was himself a Jew. God's providence

toward the Israelites was surely evident during this meeting, because Palestine had been under Turkish rule for approximately four hundred years previous to this time. This treaty, for the first time, introduced a clause that recognized Jewish interests in Palestine, as the long-established, and powerful, Ottoman Empire began to disintegrate.

Nearly two decades passed until Theodor Herzl, in 1897, called the First Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland to discuss Zionist interests. The Congress was basically a symbolic parliament for those who were in sympathy with the implementation of various Zionist goals. The main item on the agenda was the presentation of Herzl's plans for the establishment of a world Zionist organization. The matter of the new Turkish ban on immigration to Palestine was also discussed, as it seriously limited any immediate hopes for Jews to return to their ancient homeland. During World War I, and as a result of General Allenby's capture of Jerusalem in 1917, Turkish rule over Palestine came to an abrupt end.

Concluding these events was the Balfour Declaration which provided for British support for a Jewish national homeland in Palestine. The League of Nations, in 1922, officially placed Palestine under British political control and Turkey was forced to renounce all further claims over the district of Palestine. Following these political maneuvers, immigration to Palestine by the Jewish people during the 1920s and 1930s remained relatively small, and with little outside attention paid to it.

THE HUNTERS

The tragic events that transpired after the rise of Nazi Germany in the 1930s began to draw dramatic attention to the Jewish people, their suffering, plight, and renewed interest in Zionism, as well as for a future Jewish state. During this time, the newly established Nazi regime in Germany, under the leadership of Adolf Hitler, began to sponsor a systematic and thorough pogrom which was aimed directly at Jews throughout Europe. Countless numbers of these people were rounded up, and deported to concentration camps from one end of the continent to the other. Great numbers of them lost their lives during this time, by the hunters who rooted and drove them out of every mountain, and hill, and holes in the rocks all over Europe, as well as other places, even as Jeremiah had so dramatically foretold many centuries before. As a result of these terrible events, renewed interest in a Jewish homeland became greatly aroused throughout the world. In 1948, the state of Israel became a homeland for the Jewish people, and many thousands since that time have emigrated to their own land. The doors to this new nation remain open for all Jews everywhere to resettle in the land of their forefathers.

AUSCHWITZ- BIRKENAU

The Nazis built many concentration camps throughout Europe during the 1930s and 1940s to house political prisoners, and those that they considered to be a danger to National Socialism. There were several major camps built in Poland during this time, but Auschwitz-Birkenau has become the

most infamous of them all because of its construction and purpose as an extermination camp, as well as one of forced labor. There were other smaller extermination sites in various parts of Europe.

Auschwitz is the German name which was given to Oswiecim, Poland. It is a small city in the southern part of Poland with a present population of approximately 43,000 inhabitants.

Birkenau is about three kilometers west of Oswiecim and was built as a sub-camp in the small village of Brzenzinka which was renamed Birkenau by the Germans. It was officially known as Auschwitz II, but usually called Birkenau.

One of the architects of the Nazi extermination plan was Heinrich Himmler who ordered the construction at Auschwitz and its mechanism of mass murder. It was built to accommodate the tremendously increasing number of prisoners, mostly Jews, who were brought there to be slaughtered. By 1942, this vast camp complex was in full swing with the murdering and immediate burning of many thousands of people per day. The terror and inhumanity that was experienced at this site by these countless numbers of victims far surpasses all else in human history. It has become a symbol of man's inhumanity to man.

60TH ANNIVERSARY:

LIBERATION OF DEATH CAMPS

The *CNN International News* report (January 24, 2005) said, "The death factory where the Nazis murdered 1.5 million people went idle 60 years ago on January 27; but Auschwitz, ground zero of human

savagery, still has the power to stun its visitors into silence. ‘For me, this is a grave, not a museum,’ said Shalom Gross, a 57-year-old Israeli who lost more than 80 relatives to the Holocaust on his mother’s side alone.”

The news report, in giving details of the camp, said that “more than 90 percent of the victims from 1940, until the Soviet Army liberated the camp on January 27, 1945, were Jews, and the rest were Gypsies, Polish political opponents, Soviet POW’s, Catholics, and a few others. They died in gas chambers, from starvation, medical experiments, disease, or forced labor.”

The camps occupy a huge area in the vicinity of Oswiecim, and the fact is that “Auschwitz is not one camp, but two: Auschwitz I, built in an abandoned Polish military base, and Auschwitz II, or Birkenau, a much bigger complex that went up later about 2 miles (3 kilometers) away to expedite the Nazi’s Final Solution. It is Birkenau that shocks more profoundly; a flat, vast space still ringed by the silver birch trees (*birken* in German) that gave the place its name. Crematoria lie in rubble as a reminder of the Nazis’ effort to hide their crimes as their defeat loomed. Still intact are the rail tracks on which prisoners in cramped cattle cars were hauled into camp and selected for slave labor, experiments, or death.”

ISRAEL REMEMBERS HOLOCAUST

Fox News channel from Jerusalem (January 27, 2005) said, “Israel began its annual day of remembrance, for the 6 million Jews who died at the hands of the Nazis, with a torch-lighting ceremony

at Jerusalem's Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial and museum. Places of entertainment shut down for the evening, radio stations played mournful music and TV channels broadcast Holocaust related documentaries and dramas. Flags on public buildings were lowered to half-staff. Though nearly six decades have passed since the end of World War II, the effect of the killing of a large portion of the Jewish people plays heavily on the psyche of Israel, and observance of the annual day of remembrance is almost total among Israel's Jews. The theme of this year's commemoration is the continuing effort to document each individual victim of the Nazi extermination of Jews, under the slogan, "To the last Jew, to the last name."

POLAND HONORS AUSCHWITZ VICTIMS

A *CNN News* item from Warsaw, Poland (January 24, 2005) reports, "Poland's parliament has passed a resolution honoring the victims of Auschwitz-Birkenau, and recognizing the Soviet troops who freed the Nazi death camp, before the 60th anniversary next week of the event. This most horrifying cemetery in the history of modern Europe is a dramatic symbol of all the death camps created by the Third Reich on occupied Polish territory," the resolution said. "It reminds us of the consequences of the implementation of the insane ideology of national socialism."

SCHROEDER REMEMBERS NAZI CRIMES

A news report from *CNN* Berlin, Germany (January 25, 2005) said Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder paid tribute Tuesday to the victims of the Auschwitz death camp, expressing his shame as he

acknowledged that the Nazis had wide support, and promising Germany will keep alive the memory of their crimes. “I stand before you as a representative of a democratic Germany,” a somber Schroeder said during an event at a Berlin theater that included survivors of the camp, liberated 60 years ago. “I express my shame in the face of those who were murdered—and above all, you who survived the hell of the concentration camps. There can be no compensation for the scale of the horror, the torture, and the suffering that took place in the concentration camps,” Schroeder said at the event, organized by the International Auschwitz Committee. The memory of the Nazi genocide “is part of our national identity,” Schroeder said. “Remembering the era of National Socialism and its crimes is a moral obligation—we owe that not only to the victims, the survivors, and the relatives, but to ourselves.”

U.N. COMMEMORATES NAZI DEATH CAMP LIBERATION

Nick Wadhams, an Associated Press writer for the United Nations (January 24, 2005) reported, “The United Nations General Assembly commemorated the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi death camps with a special session Monday, and survivor Elie Wiesel and world leaders confronted a question that has long haunted the United Nations: whether the world body has the will to stop future genocide.

“Speakers at the General Assembly remembered the 6 million Jews who died in the Holocaust and how the United Nations itself was

founded in response to the tragedy to prevent such acts from happening again. 'The Jewish witness that I am speaks of my people's suffering as a warning,' Wiesel said. 'He sounds the alarm to prevent these tragedies from being done to others. And yes, I am convinced if the world had listened to those of us who tried to speak we may have prevented Darfur, Cambodia, Bosnia, and naturally Rwanda.' The event was one of several United Nations commemorations Monday beginning a week of events worldwide marking the anniversary of the liberation of the camps."

One of the speakers who was in New York for the occasion was Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom who is concerned about the rising tendency toward anti-Semitism that is occurring in many parts of the world. He also emphasized the strength of the movements at the present time that are denying that the Holocaust ever happened, and asked whether anything could be worse than the destruction of an entire race of people. "But there is something worse: to do all this and then deny, to do all this and then take from the victims and their children and grandchildren the legitimacy of their grief."

Sir Brian Urquhart, the retired United Nations undersecretary general who was among those soldiers who freed the death camps, said, "The world must not forget the Holocaust because it revealed what horrors humans can inflict and what they may do again. This commemoration serves to recall what human beings driven by hatred or fear or some perverse ideology are, against all rational belief, still capable of doing to each other."

A BLEAK, HOPELESS LANDSCAPE

This is the title of an article written by CNN's reporter Steve Goldberg (January 25, 2005) concerning Auschwitz, in his visit there. "It looked just as it does in all the photos and films I've seen about Auschwitz. And the winds that blew across the fields, and the dusting of snow that fell the night before made the camp seem even starker than I'd imagined."

The scene of horror was overpowering to Goldberg. "Yet nothing could prepare me emotionally as I walked through the main building of Birkenau—train tracks still passing under the main watchtower and through the 'gate of death'—and entered what has been described as the largest Jewish cemetery in the world, and one of the largest cemeteries of any kind, anywhere. It is here, at Auschwitz II-Birkenau—the biggest of the camps that comprise Auschwitz—that the Nazis built their death factory in eerie order, and massacred in a matter-of-fact way an estimated 1.1 million to 1.5 million people, most of them Jews of eastern Europe.

"The first thing that struck me as I entered the gate and got my bearings is the vastness of the camp—it's the size of some 400 football fields. Row upon row of barracks once stood here, about 300 buildings in all, holding as many as 100,000 prisoners at a time. But then there's the rail line, with its notorious siding, where cattle cars filled with deportees arrived constantly. Its occupants—those who survived the days-long trip amid the squalor of feces, urine, and corpses—were forced off the train and into two large lines: the strong and healthy on one side; pregnant women, children,

the elderly and invalid on the other. Some 70 percent of the prisoners on each transport were sentenced to immediate death, although they were only told they were being led to showers. The others were selected for forced labor. It was here that 438,000 Hungarian Jews were sent to their deaths in a period of 56 days in 1944.”

THE RECONSTRUCTION ERA

During the years immediately following the end of World War II and the Holocaust, British commercial interests in the Middle East, which included control over the supply of oil, began to favor Arab demands over the land of Palestine. The neighboring nations, which are predominantly Arab, became increasingly hostile to the intention of great numbers of Jewish immigrants who were turning their attention to the land of their forefathers, and their desire to resettle there. To appease Arab demands, one of the measures Great Britain sought to introduce during this time was to greatly limit Jewish immigration to Palestine. This put tremendous burdens upon the Jewish people who had suffered immense displacement during the recent conflict in Europe, and it greatly added to the misery that so many of their people had endured during the war years, and especially at the hands of Nazi Germany.

A NEW STATE OF ISRAEL

Recent memories of the Holocaust had not yet faded, and there was widespread international support for Europe’s Jewish refugees that led to the 1947 United Nations partition plan, which was to divide the land of Palestine into two separate

states, one for Arabs, and the other for the Jews. Under this plan, Jerusalem was to be an international city under the administration of the newly formed body of the United Nations. On May 14, 1948, the state of Israel was thus proclaimed as the official homeland of the Jewish people. Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the regathering of these ancient peoples had come true. A new era in the history of mankind was about to unfold.

A LAND OF CONFLICT

The tiny, newly established nation of Israel was immediately attacked and invaded by armies from several Arab States, which had rejected the United Nations plan. After bitter fighting, and the loss of many lives, this conflict, which became known as Israel's War of Independence, was concluded by armistice agreements between the newly proclaimed state of Israel and some of its Arab neighbors who had so viciously attacked them. The situation has remained largely unresolved and highly volatile ever since. Other wars have been waged against Israel, unsuccessfully, to dislodge the Jews from their land.

A BURDENSOME STONE

The prophet Zechariah has provided us with a sketch of God's intentions for his people at this end of the Gospel Age. "I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem. And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be

gathered together against it.” (Zech.12:2,3) How true are the prophet’s words concerning the continuing upheaval in the land of these ancient people of the Middle East. The efforts of the international body of statesmen, and other world leaders, to bring peace to this region have been met by failure.

God promises that he will not forsake the children of Israel though the times grow more troublesome, and desperate. “I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle.”—Zech. 14:2,3

GOD’S PROMISES ARE TRUE

As the world remembers the liberation of the Jewish people from the terrible death camps at Auschwitz sixty years ago, may we all be comforted by the scriptural promises from God’s Word. He has not forsaken them in all of their struggles and suffering. God’s ultimate plan of reconciliation for the human family and its recovery from the ravages of sin and death will be instituted with the long-promised Kingdom of Christ. The blessings will be made available at that time for the Jewish people, as well as for all mankind, when they will be assisted to walk on that highway of holiness and have opportunity to learn the ways of Truth and righteousness, and shall obtain eternal life.—Isa. 35:8 ■