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THEME

*The Suffering of
the Jewish people*



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4. The Suffering of the Jewish People in Biblical Times
Dr. James E. Patrick
12. The Suffering of Jews in the Post-Biblical Era
Rev. Cornelis Kant
17. Shoah and Theology
Dr. Tobias Krämer
25. Jewish Suffering after the Shoah
Kees de Vreugd
30. 'With all My heart and with all My soul'
Rev. Jaap de Vreugd

Colophon

Israel and the Church is a journal for Biblical and theological reflections concerning Israel and the Church in God's plan for this world in the light of His coming Kingdom.

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The history of the Jewish People is a history of suffering. From Biblical times on, the Jews have been in the zenith of the nations of the world, whether they were in the Promised Land, or in exile outside the Land.

Of course, there is suffering in a general sense. Almost every human being in every time will experience suffering in his personal life. Nations suffer because of wars, natural disasters, dictators, injustice. But there is a uniqueness to Israel's suffering that is implied by Israel being God's elected people. For the world is not ready to accept God's presence.

In this volume, we explore the suffering of the Jewish People in the Bible and throughout history. We will discern different forms of Jewish suffering in the Bible and in the post-Biblical times. Antisemitism in its various forms has always accompanied Israel's existence. A separate article is therefore dedicated to the holocaust (or the Shoah). We will end in our own time.

Today, the Jewish People is again threatened in its existence. Many feel that the tides are turning. Yet, we believe that God will be faithful to His covenant. We continue to pray for the peace of Jerusalem and the liberation of all the hostages.



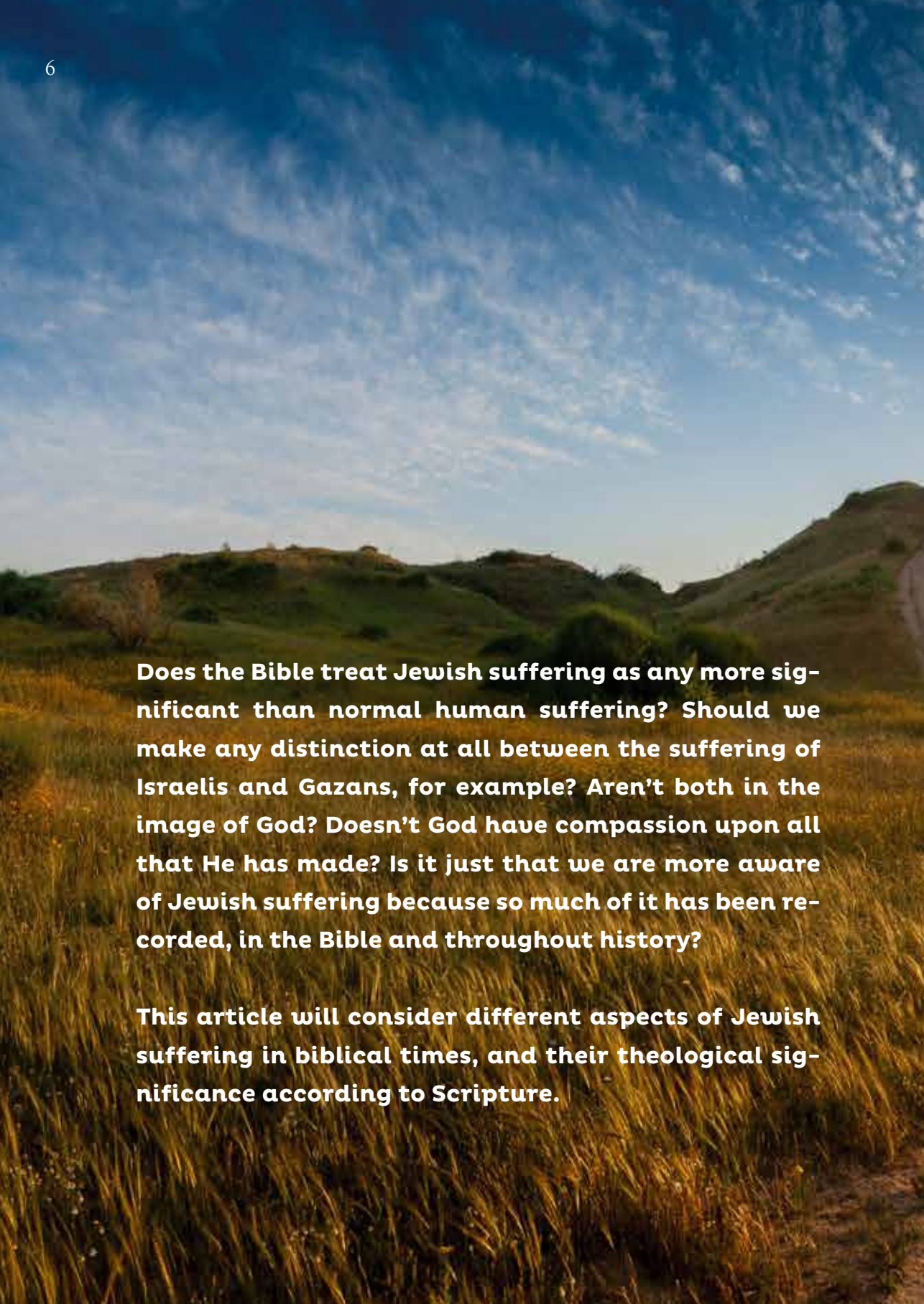
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A full-page background image showing a dirt path winding through rolling hills under a bright sunset sky. The sun is low on the horizon to the right, casting a warm glow over the landscape. The hills are covered in dry, golden-brown grass. The sky is a deep blue with scattered white clouds.

The Suffering of the Jewish People in Biblical Times

DR. JAMES E. PATRICK



Does the Bible treat Jewish suffering as any more significant than normal human suffering? Should we make any distinction at all between the suffering of Israelis and Gazans, for example? Aren't both in the image of God? Doesn't God have compassion upon all that He has made? Is it just that we are more aware of Jewish suffering because so much of it has been recorded, in the Bible and throughout history?

This article will consider different aspects of Jewish suffering in biblical times, and their theological significance according to Scripture.

On the one hand, the Bible is clear that the Jewish people are no better than any other nation (Deuteronomy 7:7; 9:4-6). Their Scriptures begin not with themselves, Israel, but with the shared ancestry of all humanity (Genesis 1-11). They teach that suffering for everyone goes back to the sin of our first parents against God's instructions (Genesis 3). That rebellion against God resulted in broken relationships with each other and with the world entrusted to us. Not only creatures (like snakes) but also the natural environment will rebel against us and make us suffer, until we die and return to the ground. We all inherit suffering from our ancestors, and by behaving in the same sinful ways we pass on suffering to our own children.

For this reason, Jewish suffering is not different or worse than suffering of anyone else. The Jewish people have many stories of broken relationships (Joseph and his brothers, Absalom and his family) and civil wars (Saul and David, Jeroboam and Rehoboam), as well as famines and plagues and military oppression by nearby countries. Children die young and women become widows, wealthy become poor and healthy become sick. The Bible does not see any of this as unusual or surprising. Its laws assume there will be much suffering in life, just as its psalms help people who are suffering to express their pain. In the New Testament, when James/Jacob (5:1-13) writes to Jewish believers, he recognises the common link of suffering with poverty. He strongly warns the wealthy not to oppress the poor, but to those suffering he simply advises prayer and endurance, trusting the Lord to be merciful and to bring justice when Jesus returns. In their suffering, therefore, the Jewish people can identify with the pain of all other human families and societies.

The Creator made all things good in the beginning, and has promised to re-make all things good after Jesus' return, when 'there will no longer be any death ... mourning or crying or pain' (Revelation 21:4). But even during this era of suffering, we know that God does intervene in His creation to protect and heal (Psalm 34:18).

We also know the Jewish people have a unique relationship with Him, so this raises significant questions about why He would allow them to suffer. There are at least five ways in which their suffering does have special significance.

1. THEY SUFFER AS PEOPLE WHOM GOD HAS PROMISED TO RESCUE

First, the Jewish people were born into a family covenant with their fathers' God, even before they had encountered Him personally. In Exodus 2:23-25, the sons of Israel 'sigh', 'groan', and 'cry out for help', even though it does not say that they cried out to God directly. In fact, they had been led astray in idolatry to the gods of Egypt, gods who could not save them (Ezekiel 20:7-8). Even so, their cry 'rose up to God', He 'heard', 'remembered' His covenant with their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, 'saw' the sons of Israel, and 'knew' them. Although He had not yet made a covenant with the sons of Israel directly, the fact that they were descended from His friends the patriarchs meant that He was committed to look after these children too (Isaiah 41:8).

This is the same sort of commitment that David had to the children and grandchildren of his covenant-brother Jonathan. He maintained it even to the end of his life, long after Jonathan had died (1 Samuel 18:3; 20:15-17; 23:18; 2 Samuel 4:4; 9:1-13; 16:1-4; 19:24-30; 21:7). The covenant seems to have been upheld by David's descendants too, even during the messy division into the two kingdoms (1 Chronicles 9:39-44; 1 Kings 11:31-32; 12:20-21).

But beyond just a general covenant, God had made specific promises to the patriarchs about their descendants, first painful and then positive, and God always keeps His promises. In Genesis 15:13-14 (and 18), God told Abram that his descendants would be enslaved and oppressed in a foreign land, but that God would judge their oppressors and lead them out with many possessions. And as Psalm 105:8-11 reiterates, God remembers His covenant promises for ever, especially the promise to the patriarchs that the land of Canaan would be a permanent gift to their descendants.

For this reason, whenever the Jewish people suffer among the nations, the God of their ancestors is particularly attentive. However long the suffering may last, He will always remember His covenant promise to rescue them and bring them back to their fathers' land.

2. THEY SUFFER AS PEOPLE WHO ARE SPECIALLY LOVED BY GOD

But the sons of Israel also have their own covenant with God. At Mount Sinai, the God whom Abraham knew as 'El Shaddai' (Genesis 17:1-5) now gave Himself a new covenant name 'Adonai' (YHWH) – Exodus 3:13-15. This new name signified the new covenant He was making specifically with Abraham's descendants, the whole nation of Israel. By this identity He would now be known 'to all generations'.

This new name – He who is and who will be the same – is closely connected to His new relationship with Israel as "Adonai your God". This new relationship will be proved by new actions. He would rescue Israel from their suffering in Egypt, and He would bring them to the promised land and give it to them to inherit (Exodus 6:2-8). This is why the Ten Commandments and the rest of the Torah of Moses repeatedly remind Israel how Adonai rescued them from suffering (Exodus 20:2; Deuteronomy 4:20; 6:20-25; 26:5-9; etc.).

God rescues Israel out of their suffering, not just from a sense of duty to keep His promises, but because He loves them. He has chosen Israel to be 'My special treasure' (Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Psalm 135:4). In each of these uses of the word *segulah*, God says explicitly that Israel has a more special status 'out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth', and even 'high above all nations which He has made'.

This choice of Israel was not because of their own virtue or qualities, 'but because Adonai loved you'. He 'set His love on you' (Deuteronomy 7:7-8), even though He created all nations and gives inheritance to all of them without exception (Deuteronomy 32:8; Psalm 86:9; Acts 17:26). This is why, when they must pass through suffering depicted as waters or fire, He preserves them because 'you are precious in My sight, you are honoured and I love you'. He will even give other peoples in exchange for them (Isaiah 43:1-4).

But it is precisely because Israel is such a beloved son of God, that he must be disciplined with suffering. As Amos 3:2 says, 'You only have I chosen [known] among all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your



they are content to keep suffering. On the contrary, they cry out for their silent God to answer them and rescue them (Psalm 44:23-26; 69:3, 13-18). And this is exactly the same reaction as was made by the most well-known sufferer in human literature – Job. Job was not claiming to be a perfect human (Job 6:24; 7:21; 13:26), but he was confident that this severe suffering was not at all proportionate to any sin he may have committed (10:1-7). So he appeals to God as his witness in heaven, because God is a righteous judge (16:18-21; 23:3-7).

Although Job does not realise, we readers know that Satan, the Adversary in the heavenly court, challenged whether Job really cared more for the personal benefits of worshipping God. Since Job was God's most righteous servant on earth, this challenge also questioned whether God Himself truly deserved to be worshiped, or was just buying popularity. Both Job and God were vindicated in the end by Job's behaviour in suffering. Job insisted that his God would never inflict unfair suffering, and therefore demanded that God should publicly reward the righteous sufferer with honour on earth, even by raising him to life again after death if necessary (14:7-15; 19:23-27). God said that Job had spoken correctly about Him (42:7).

We should note also that Job was not Jewish, so when the people of Israel preserved the book of Job in their Scriptures, they showed awareness that righteousness before God is not only possible for those who know God's revealed Torah (Romans 2:14-16, 26-27). Non-Jews may also be righteous in God's eyes and yet suffer unjustly, as Jews do, for God's sake.

4. THEY SUFFER AS THOSE WITH GOD'S AUTHORITY TO BLESS OTHER NATIONS

It is not just because of their righteousness that Jewish people suffer, especially in attacks instigated by Satan. It is also because Israel carries legal authority from God to bless all other families and peoples on earth. In every generation from creation onwards, God's appointed authority was given to only one son to rule over the oth-

ers. God chose Seth not Cain, Shem not Japheth, Abram not Lot, Isaac not Ishmael, and Jacob not Esau. But all twelve of Jacob's sons received a blessing, showing that the inherited authority now belonged to the whole nation of Israel. 'Blessed is everyone who blesses you, and cursed is everyone who curses you' (Numbers 24:9).

It is inevitable, however, that when one son is chosen to bless the others, they may choose not to accept it, and instead rebel against God's choice of that son rather than one of them. Among Jacob's sons, he did give extra 'first-born' blessings to the sons of Leah (Judah) and Rachel (Joseph), and unsurprisingly Joseph's brothers would not agree to being ruled by their youngest brother. Instead, they sold him into slavery and suffering. But as he himself later explained to them, God only used that evil to bring about even greater good and blessing, both to his brothers and to 'all the earth' (Genesis 50:20; 41:57; 45:5; Psalm 105:16-19).

Throughout history, the Jewish people have suffered at the hands of other nations, who are usually jealous that God evidently gave this small nation a superior ability to bless all other nations. Rather than humbly blessing the chosen distributor of God's grace, they kill the favoured son in the hope of taking his place, and must therefore receive only the curse.

5. THEY SUFFER AS GOD'S PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVES ON EARTH

Not only do the Jewish people have royal authority over other nations for their blessing and benefit; they also have a uniquely priestly role to represent God to the nations and vice versa (Exodus 19:6). Being the one nation on earth that God chose as His own inheritance (Deuteronomy 32:8-9; 1 Kings 8:51-53), Israel both as individuals and as a whole people are identified with the God of all the earth in a unique way.

It is not surprising, then, that the enemies of God will direct their attacks against Israel as a way of hurting God. They can't reach God Himself, so they strike those whom God chose to represent Him in human history (compare Mark 12:7). An

example of this would be the book of Esther. Although God is not mentioned in the book, He is clearly at work behind the scenes, putting His Jewish people into key positions of influence in advance to out-manoeuvre His enemies, even at the highest levels of the Persian empire. Mordecai the Jew refuses to bow to anyone but God, and thus he stands as proof that Haman's power is still limited. Because he epitomises his Jewish people, his death will be the first step to wiping out the entire people group. Individually and collectively, the Jews must be eradicated for rebellious man to achieve the pinnacle of earthly power.

Jesus perfectly fulfils the Jewish people's representation of God. He testified before Pontius Pilate that God had truly sent Him into the world as its king. For that reason, His suffering at Roman hands was a 'sin' against God (John 18:33-19:11). His case also makes it clear that hatred of the Jewish people really comes from God's enemy, Satan, who uses humans to attack God. The 'Accuser of the Brethren' had unsuccessfully tried to condemn Joshua the High Priest, an earlier leader of the Jewish nation (Zechariah 3:1-5; Revelation 12:7-13). But now with Jesus, Satan inflicted as much suffering as possible on 'the King of the Jews' through the Roman soldiers' antisemitic violence (Luke 18:32-33; Mark 15:15-20). Jesus identified Satan as his hidden rival for 'ruler of the world' (John 12:31; 14:30-31; 15:18-23).

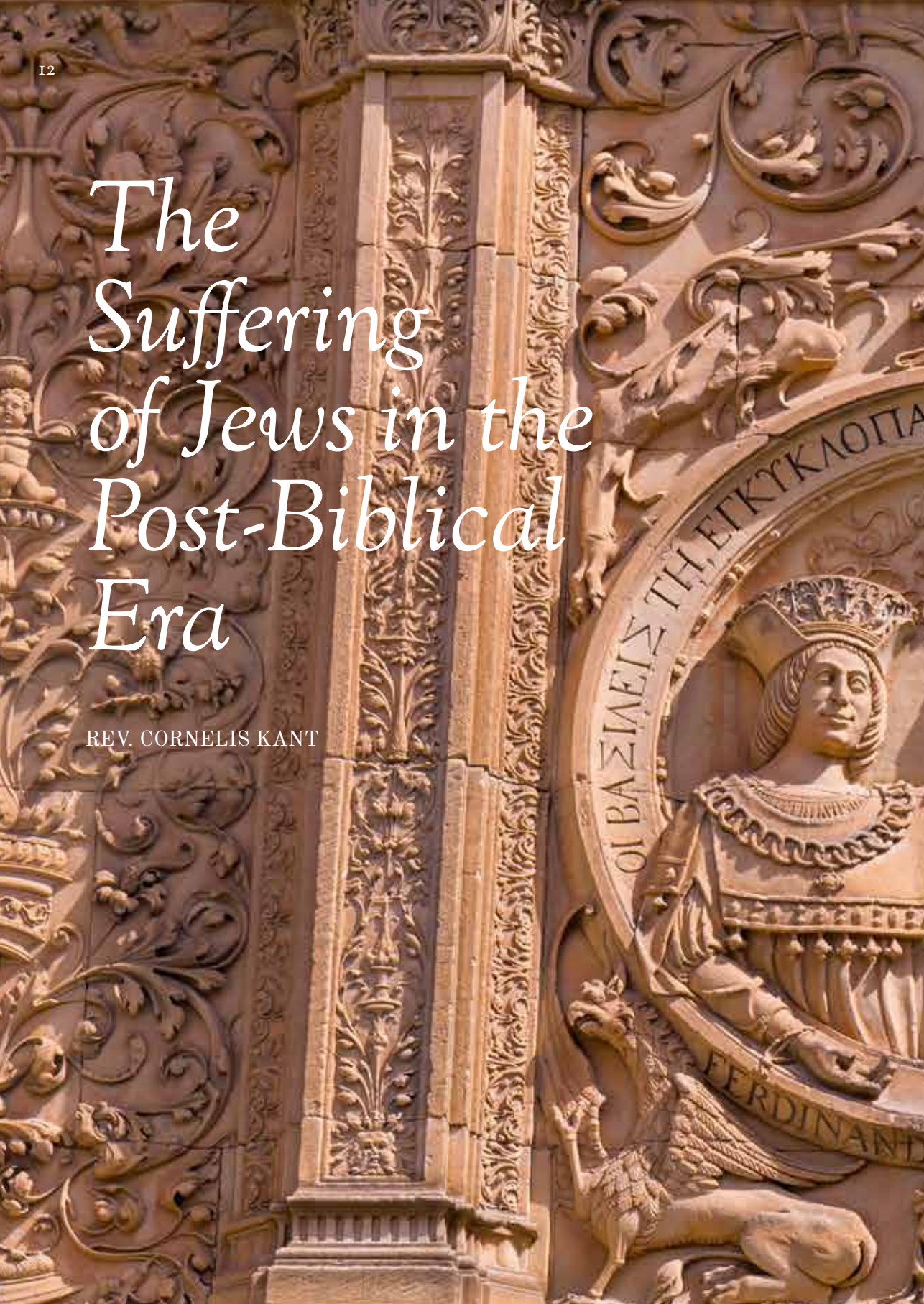
But since the Jewish people suffer as God's representatives, and 'in all their affliction He was afflicted' (Isaiah 63:9), He has decreed that those who share His suffering will share His glory also (Luke 22:28-30; Romans 8:16-19 + 9:4). This applied first to Jesus in His resurrection, and because of Him also His people Israel will be glorified after suffering (Luke 2:32; Acts 1:6-7). His followers among the nations have now become representatives of God too, sharing with Israel in the same promises through Messiah. So they can also expect to share in the suffering of Jesus and His Jewish people, and the glory that will follow (1 Peter 2:20-23; 4:1, 4:12-5:1; 5:8-11).

CONCLUSION

In each of these five points, we see how suffering is not just a painful reality for all humans, because of Adam's sin and our own. It is also a way God has chosen to accomplish His purposes, specifically through Israel. God is personally touched by the suffering of His people, whether they suffer for sin or for righteousness, so in either case He uses it to bring about good results. In Messiah, the suffering of God and His Jewish people was perfectly united and transformed into glory. Therefore, those from all nations who belong to Messiah and share in His sufferings can also trust that their suffering is significant to God and will have a good outcome.

The Suffering of Jews in the Post-Biblical Era

REV. CORNELIS KANT



During the lifetime of Jesus, Israel was occupied by the Romans, who ruled with brutal force. Many Jews were executed during this time, often through crucifixion. This spiritual and physical suffering culminated in the destruction of the Temple and the city of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD. Estimates of the number of Jewish victims range from half a million to over one million.

In 135 AD, a group of Jews in Judea, led by Simon Bar Kochba, revolted against the Romans once again. This revolt was crushed by Emperor Hadrian's legions. Jerusalem was destroyed once more, and the city was renamed Aelia Capitolina. The land of Israel was renamed Palestine, referring to the Philistines who once lived there and went to war against Israel again and again. Over half a million Jews perished, and, as in 70 AD, many were sold into slavery. Most Jews were either expelled or fled abroad. This marked the beginning of the great Jewish diaspora, which would last for 19 centuries. The Jews were never again allowed to live in peace in their small homeland of Israel.

ANTI-JEWISH THEOLOGY

In the centuries following, Christianity grew, but so did a theology within the church that became increasingly hostile toward Jews. For many early Christians, it was inconceivable that Judaism and synagogues still existed after the coming of Christ. The Christian apologist Justin Martyr wrote in the second century that the Christian church had become 'the true Israel'. By the third century, Bishop Cyprian of Carthage referred to the Jews as 'a cursed people, and they have the devil as their father.' This theological development led to a deepening separation between Christians and Jews, which would contribute to widespread Jewish suffering during the Middle Ages. This suffering took countless forms.

EXPULSION

Jews were often seen as cursed or children of the devil, fueling the belief that they were dangerous to Christians. Some rulers decided to expel Jews from their countries. In 1290, King Edward I of England issued the Edict of Expulsion, banishing all Jews from England. This edict was not lifted until 1656. In 1394, King Charles VI of France or-

dered the expulsion of all Jews, and this ban lasted until the French Revolution. One of the most notorious expulsions occurred in 1492, with the

Alhambra Decree issued by King Ferdinand II of Aragon and Queen Isabella I of Castile. This decree forced Jews to either convert to Christianity or leave Spain. Those who refused were executed. This expulsion was one of the largest and most profound of the Middle Ages, causing unimaginable poverty and suffering for countless Jewish families.

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DESTRUCTION OF PROPERTY

The destruction of Jewish homes and synagogues was widespread. As early as 388 AD, Bishop Rabulas of Edessa ordered the burning of the synagogue in Callinicum. Emperor Theodosius ordered that the synagogue be rebuilt at the bishop's expense. Bishop Ambrose of Milan angrily addressed the emperor, calling the synagogue 'a place of unbelief and wickedness'. The destruction of synagogues was so common that, by 412 AD, an edict was issued forbidding such actions, and prohibiting the trampling or insulting of Jews. On Good Friday, it was common for churchgoers to loot and vandalise Jewish homes. In 1189, during the coronation of Richard the Lionheart in London, a major attack was launched on the Jewish community, resulting in the looting of homes and the destruction of synagogues. In 1492, following the expulsion of Jews from Spain, Jewish communities in several German cities, including Worms and Heidelberg, suffered violence, with synagogues destroyed and many Jews forced to renounce their faith or flee.

During the first Crusades Jewish communities along the Rhine were attacked, homes destroyed and Jews killed by individual Christians who could not afford a crusade. Martin Luther's writing in 1543 called for the destruction of Jewish homes and synagogues. In a time when

which also required Jews to wear yellow hats or patches to distinguish them. In 1516, the ghetto in Venice was established. Pope Paul IV imposed further restrictions on Jews in 1555, limiting their occupations to the lowest classes and equating them with prostitutes and lepers. These measures made Jews second-class citizens, without the same civil rights as others.

CONVERTED JEWS

Some Jews were forcibly baptized, and some converted in Spain and Portugal to avoid deportation. These converted Jews, known as 'Marranos', often continued to practice Judaism in secret. The Inquisition, led by Grand Inquisitor Thomas de Torquemada, hunted down these secret Jews and tested their adherence to Christian teachings. Those who failed were executed, often after torture. Some Marranos fled to Latin America, but even there, they were not safe from the Inquisition.

SUFFERING UNDER ISLAM

During periods of intense persecution in Europe, Jews sometimes found refuge in Islamic countries. However, they were treated as second-class citizens (*dhimmis*), required to pay special taxes (*jizya*) and subjected to occasional mistreatment. In the early 11th century, violence against Jews occurred during periods of political instability in the Caliphate of Cordoba, Spain. In the early 19th century, Jews in Persia under the Qajar dynasty suffered severe discrimination and persecution. In Morocco, during the late 18th century, Jews were attacked by local Muslims due to economic and social tensions. Jews in Tunisia were persecuted in the 19th century, with violent outbursts in 1857. Similarly, in Algiers under French rule, Jewish communities suffered attacks by local Muslims. The Cairo pogrom of 1882 was another example of anti-Jewish violence fueled by political unrest.

Due to the pogroms in Russia in the second part of the 19th century, Jews started to return to the Land of their forefathers

Due to the pogroms in Russia in the second part of the 19th century, Jews started to return to the Land of their forefathers, Israel, which was called 'Palestine' at the time. Sheik Tahir started to fight against these Jewish immigrants. His son, mufti, Amin al-Hoesseini, incited the Arab population against the Jews and initiated pogroms. In 1929 the Jewish population of Hebron was slaughtered by Muslim Arabs. Despite some periods of relative peace, Jews in Islamic countries, like in Christian Europe, often faced persecution, expulsions, and pogroms. The 19 centuries following the destruction of the Temple were marked by an indescribable suffering for the Jewish people, a form of Holocaust that lasted almost

two millennia, which is, unlike the six-year period of the 20th century Holocaust, almost unknown by many Christians.

FROM ANTI-JUDAISM TO ANTI-SEMITISM

In the 19th century, with the separation of church and state in most countries, Jews gained more freedoms as restrictions were lifted. However, a new racial ideology

emerged, viewing Jews as an inferior race. Even baptized Jews were considered to be of inferior descent. Anti-Semitic literature flourished, and Jews faced a new wave of mockery, exclusion, and hatred. Anti-Judaism evolved into virulent anti-Semitism, which laid the groundwork for the Holocaust in the 20th century. The psychological suffering endured by Jews in the 19th century is immeasurable.

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Why we need a theology after Auschwitz

DR. TOBIAS KRÄMER

PHOTO: HOLOCAUST MONUMENT, BERLIN, GERMANY

JULY 2025 ||||| ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

‘His blood be on us and on our children!’ This was the cry of Jews who wanted to see Jesus on the cross and demanded this from Pilate (Matthew 27:25).

Around 1,900 years later, millions of Jews were murdered during the Shoah (Holocaust). Time and again, there were voices that saw the Shoah as the cruel fulfilment of this ‘self-cursing’.

But is this valid? In the following, I would first like to show you what happened in the Shoah. We will then turn to Matthew 27:25 and ask about possible connections.

In the heart of the Christian West, namely in Germany, six million Jews were systematically murdered during the Second World War (1939-1945), including 1.5 million children, simply because they were Jews. These are facts whose brutality is unequalled by any other event in history.

The Shoah ('catastrophe'/'destruction') was planned in cold blood. It was strategically implemented, industrially executed, precisely organised and unscrupulously carried out. The victims were inconspicuous people who had lived among us Germans or Europeans for generations and were normal citizens. What was in the hearts of our ancestors that allowed such bestial things to happen? And are we really any different today than our fathers? These questions are of particular importance to me as a German.¹

THE GOAL: COMPLETE ANNIHILATION

Under Hitler, the National Socialists (Nazis) came to power in Germany, who wanted to elevate the Aryan race to the master race over mankind, conquer large territories and destroy Judaism. These were their declared goals. Hitler's plan was radical. He wanted to destroy everything Jewish: the Jews, the Jewish faith, the Jewish Scriptures and traditions, even all memories of Jewish existence. If this had succeeded, then not only would Judaism have disappeared from history, but also (the Jewish) God. A new era would have dawned in which nothing would have reminded us of God. The National Socialists put Nietzsche's famous words into practice: 'God is dead, we have all killed him' (Nietzsche).

The Aryans as the master race were now to be God: unrestricted and total. This was only possible if there were no more restrictions. Hitler made unrestraint his programme. The more consistently God was abolished, the more radically the National Socialists proceeded against man and humanity. Everything that was weak was to be eradicated. Only the 'superhumans' (*Übermensch*, Nietzsche) were to rule. In the case of the Jews, however, there was an additional

dimension: the Jews were God's chosen people. The Shoah therefore struck God to the core. Anyone who wants to attack God goes against the Jews, against the 'apple of God's eye' (Zechariah 2:12). Nowhere has the enmity against God been realised more radically than in the Shoah.

Jews were not only killed in the Shoah. They were tormented, tortured and used like animals for medical experiments. The torture was aimed at destroying their personalities. Only then did death follow. It was therefore not enough for the murderers to kill the body. The Jewish soul was to be destroyed first. The Jews were reduced entirely to their Jewishness - and this was to be eradicated. Torture was an expression of total domination. It was an expression of total power. For the Jews, this meant total powerlessness. They were completely at the mercy of their enemies and their despotism. This totality had fatal consequences for both sides. Because in the end, there were no more people, no more humanity and no more likeness of God. All that was left were the National Socialists as cruel brutes, and dead Jews.

The Shoah happened in the middle of the Christian, enlightened-humanist West. That is shocking. After all, one would think that it was precisely Christianity, enlightened reason (ratio) and the humanistic self-image that should have prevented the Shoah. But that was not the case. Could the Holocaust be repeated among us today? Hardly anyone thinks this is possible, but the circumstances back then were not completely different from those today. And what would the world do if the Shoah were to be repeated in the Middle East, as Islamism has already announced? Would Israel be able to count on our support or would we (despite our euphonious words) just stand by and watch again?

The Shoah is a modern event. It was not a spontaneous pogrom, but the result of state-controlled systematics and modern logistics. Behind it was a state apparatus that organised the extermination of the Jews on an industrial scale: the transport of Jews, concentration camps, forced labour, torture, shootings, gas chambers

and incinerators that ran day and night. This apparatus was carried out by thousands of people. But these people were not beasts. They were normal people like you and me who (as they said) did what they were told to do. The banality of people simply doing their job is one of the horrific aspects of the Shoah (Hanna Arendt). But this was a crucial prerequisite for the apparatus to function.

Modernity had begun to lead people to freedom and maturity. It moved God to one side in order to make room for the free development of man, to promote humanism and to make the world a better place (Enlightenment). In the twentieth century, modernity turned into the opposite of its goal. It became the epoch of the great atheistic ideologies (National Socialism, Communism), which claimed untold numbers of lives. It is estimated that 160-200 million people lost their lives in wars, civil wars and so-called 'purges' in the twentieth century. Never before had brutality been as great as in the twentieth century. But the Jews were hit hardest in the Shoah.

NAZI SPIRIT IN CHRISTIANITY

It is fatal that the Nazis' hostility towards Jews met with hardly any resistance in Christianity. How can this be explained? At this point, we have to look back at centuries of anti-Semitic church history. Replacement theology and hostility towards Jews have been widespread in Christianity since the second century. The belief that God had replaced Israel with the church of Jesus led to the Jews being categorised as enemies. Many saw the Jews as being under the judgement of God and believed that they were destined for destruction. The next misconception was that the spiritual heritage of the Jews had been passed on to the church of Jesus and that Judaism no longer had a right to exist. The Jews had to become Christians; Jewish customs and religious life had to disappear.

The fact that the Jews had refused to accept Jesus or the Christian faith was also held up. It was thought that this was proof that the Jews were stubborn and constantly resisted God. From this they concluded that the Jews were evil, abysmally evil. For the Jews were not only stubborn, but also a people of barbaric 'Christ-killers'. This judgement aroused disgust in Christian hearts – disgust and hatred. The conclusion: the Jews must go. According to this way of thinking, this was both a Christian duty and the will of God.

The cross of Jesus Christ has a terrible history at this point. It brought the Jews death instead of life. Christians discriminated against Jews, harassed, dispossessed, persecuted, raped, tortured, killed and in the end handed them over to Hitler.



new beginning. Has this new beginning happened? Germany and Europe have drawn the right conclusions from the Shoah by fundamentally renewing their state systems. Above all, this means a rejection of all forms of totalitarianism. Totalitarian systems are always directed against minorities who hold different opinions, usually also against the Jews. European societies today are constituted as democracies, i.e. deliberately anti-totalitarian. They are committed to human rights and civil liberties, are pluralistic, are committed to the rule of law and respect the separation of powers. In this way, they are equipped to protect minorities and take action against anti-Semitism. Even in democracies, not everything is for the best, certainly not, but the basis and the structures are right, and that means a lot.

The warning cry of the Shoah was also heard in Christianity

The warning cry of the Shoah was also heard in Christianity. In 'theology after Auschwitz', it was recognised that the theology that paved the way for the Shoah needed to be renewed. Great efforts are being made to cleanse theology of anti-Judaism and to re-establish Israel as the covenant people of God. But that is not all. Friends of Israel all over the world have been joining together for decades in global networks to support Israel and stand up for the Jews (e.g. Christians for Israel International). These are encouraging developments. On the negative side, however, these movements are only marginal phenomena. Broad Christianity continues on its path as if nothing had happened. This can only make you wonder: what else needs to happen for Christianity to finally wake up?

MATTHEW 27:25 REVISITED

It is time for Christianity to return. To return to its roots, to Judaism, to Israel. God has included us Christians in the noble olive tree - God's saving action with Israel. We are grafted in, we are partakers, we belong to it through Christ (Romans 11; Ephesians 2; John 10). This means that our theology must become free of supercession-

ist theological thinking, hostility towards Jews and anti-Judaism. Achieving this is a task for the century. The famous theologian Johann Baptist Metz rightly warns that we should be wary of people whose theology is the same before and after Auschwitz.

As an example, I return to the word 'blood' in Matthew 27:25: 'His blood be on us and on our children.' In the classic anti-Jewish mindset, the matter seems clear: The Jews, it is said, killed Jesus; they cursed themselves and thus brought the Shoah upon themselves. However,

if we look at the parallel in John 11:50 (and John 18:14), we can come to the exact opposite conclusion: the high priest Caiaphas is in favour of having Jesus executed. He does this with the argument that it is better for 'one man to die for the people than for the

whole nation to perish'. Basically, his argument is a numerical one: better one than all.

It is interesting how the evangelist categorises this event, namely as a prophetic word. This becomes clear in John 11:51-52: 'He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, 52 and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one.' Along these lines, Matthew 27:25 can be interpreted as the opposite of a self-cursing: Jesus' blood should (and will) come upon the Jews for forgiveness. This idea leads over to Romans 11:26: 'All Israel will be saved.' Paul justifies this statement by saying that one day a Saviour (the Messiah) will come and free Israel from its sins (Romans 11:27) - a promise of salvation for Israel.

The context of the blood word also speaks against the above-mentioned misinterpretation. In Matthew 27:15-26 we find ourselves in Pilate's official residence. In addition to Pilate, there are two other groups: the chief priests or elders and the 'people'. The debate is about who should be

released: Jesus or the criminal Barabbas. Pilate has staged this confrontation in order to get Jesus released. This is because Pilate cannot find Jesus guilty, but does not want to prevail against the leading Jews either. However, the plan does not work out because the Jews present want Jesus to die. Pilate must not have expected this.

It is interesting that the ‘people’ have to be persuaded by their spiritual leaders to demand the crucifixion of Jesus. Apparently, the people are not convinced of Jesus’ guilt. This means that it is a small group of leading Jews who incite a somewhat larger group of the Jewish people to want Jesus’ execution. At most, there are a few hundred people involved. There is no room for more in Pilate’s official residence. So it is by no means the whole of Israel that is working towards Jesus’ execution.

Pilate gives in and has Jesus crucified. However, he combines this with the well-known gesture of washing his hands of his guilt: 'I am innocent of this man's blood; you watch' (Matthew 27:24). But that is only half the truth, because Pilate pronounced the death sentence – he alone. But Pilate does not want to take the blame. He wants to impose it on the Jews present and they gladly accept it: 'His blood be on us and on our children' (Matthew 27:25). In a figurative sense, this means: 'We take responsibility for this. If this is a wrong judgement, then we are prepared to take responsibility for it, if necessary with our lives.'

It is important to note that this ‘self-cursing’ does not refer to the entire Jewish people. Those present do not have the authority to speak for the whole people, and they don’t do that: they speak for themselves. Furthermore, they take their children into responsibility. They have this right. But there is also a limitation. For they speak only of their children, not of their children’s children and further generations. This ‘self-cursing’ (should this be an appropriate term) therefore only concerns a few



hundred people present and their children. Not the entire Jewish people for all time. In other words, there is no path leading from Pilate's official residence to the Shoah of the twentieth century. This path is an evil construction that seeks to blame the Jews for the Shoah - a perpetrator-victim reversal of gigantic proportions!²

REPENTANCE AND ITS FRUIT: THE RENEWAL OF THEOLOGY

We need a theology in which there is room for the Jews:

- A theology that is free from hostility towards Jews and contempt for everything Jewish, free from anti-Judaism.
- A doctrine that does not need to speak ill of the Jews in order to make the truth of the gospel shine.
- A way of thinking in which God is the God of Israel, Israel remains the people of God, the election of Israel continues to apply and God's covenant with his people endures (cf. Romans 11).

We need such a theology.

When we have such a theology, the Jews and Israel are integrated into our teaching. Only then will replacement theology be overcome. Christians then no longer see themselves as a substitute for Israel, but recognise that God is on a journey with both: with Jews and Christians. They recognise that God is present in both and encounters the world. And they understand why the world is taking action against both, because the anti-Semitic spirit is also the anti-Christian spirit. Christians and Jews are God's representatives on earth. Both belong together. Both belong – each in their own way – to God: we Christians through our faith in Jesus, the Jews through their covenant, which God has never cancelled (John Paul II).

Now, it would be wrong to undertake the renewal of theology only because the Shoah was favoured by it. In fact, it is the other way round: the Shoah is a loud warning signal that something is wrong with our theology. So, it must be corrected. If we do this, we will start to move. And this movement leads us towards the Jews. We will love Jews as God loves them (Romans 11:28b), we will respect them, value them and hold them in honour. We will pray for them, serve them, stand by them in solidarity and stand up for them. And in doing so, we will long for the Jews to one day find Jesus and 'all Israel will be saved' (Romans 11:26), as the Scriptures promise. Then Israel and the church of Jesus will be one: one flock under one shepherd, the Messiah (cf. John 10:16).

If we follow this path, we will no longer be the same in the end. We will change. We will be *Christians alongside Israel*.

NOTES

- ¹ I owe essential insights into the nature of the Shoah to: Gregor Taxacher, *Nicht endende Endzeit. Nach Auschwitz Gott in der Geschichte denken* (Gütersloh 1998).
- ² The situation is similar with other New Testament texts that initially appear hostile to Jews. The criticism there comes from Jews to Jews and is directed against the behaviour of certain groups. Nowhere is Israel as a whole discredited or even rejected. That is not even possible. Jesus had many followers among the Jewish people; many Jews believed in him. It was never the Jews who were against Jesus across the board.

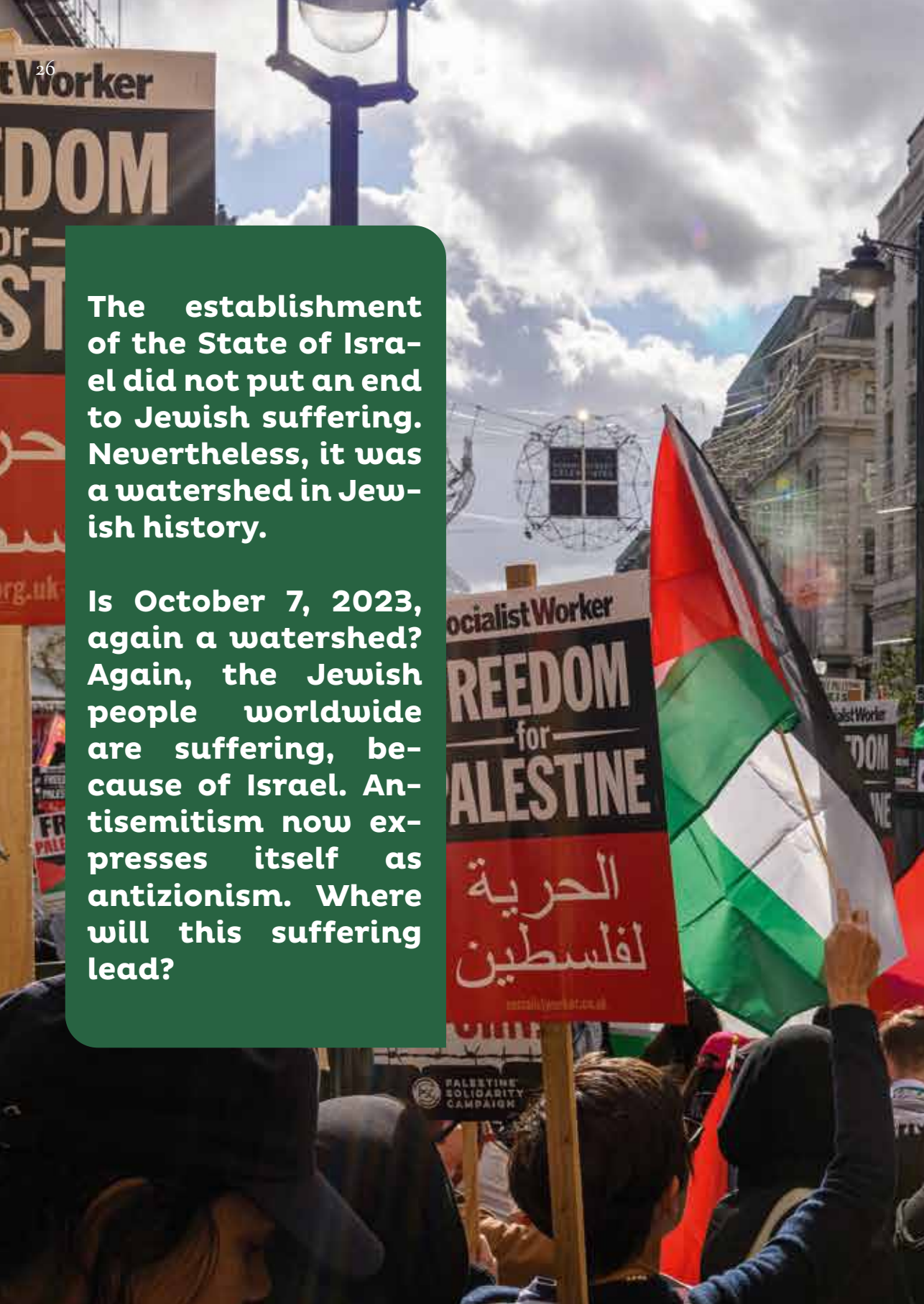
Jewish Suffering after the Shoah

KEES DE VREUGD



The establishment of the State of Israel did not put an end to Jewish suffering. Nevertheless, it was a watershed in Jewish history.

Is October 7, 2023, again a watershed? Again, the Jewish people worldwide are suffering, because of Israel. Antisemitism now expresses itself as antizionism. Where will this suffering lead?



On May 14, 1948, David Ben Gurion proclaimed the State of Israel. It was only three years after the darkest period in Jewish history, the Holocaust (Hebrew: Shoah – catastrophe). I prefer the Hebrew word over the term Holocaust. Holocaust is a Greek word indicating a sacrifice that is burnt totally, thus inadvertently attributing a religious meaning to the catastrophe that befell the Jews in Europe. Indeed, there is a religious dimension to the Shoah, as Tobias Krämer points out in his article in this volume. But that should not be conceived as a sacrifice that is brought (to whom?) to obtain a certain goal (which goal?). We can only observe that from this Shoah, this catastrophe, from the gas chambers and the mass graves, the Jewish people rose to new life, but at great cost. This is not to say, though, that the Shoah made the establishment of the State of Israel possible. On the contrary, an independent Jewish state was being prepared already decades before 1948. However, in spite of the Shoah, the British rulers blocked Jewish immigration to the Land of Israel also after the war, thus adding to the suffering of the Jews during the war. Only by rising up and confronting the world with their returning presence in the land of Israel, the Jews succeeded in obtaining the nations' support for the newborn state.

SURVIVOR SUFFERING

The subject of this article is the suffering of the Jewish people after the Shoah. First, we should consider then, I believe, the suffering because of the Shoah. Those who survived, have suffered on different plains. Of course, there were the immense traumas caused by the suffering in the camps. Just as the cruelties in the concentration camps defy all description, so it is with the traumas. These traumas are passed on to the next and even to the third generation. Even though many survivors never spoke about their experiences with their children, they of course noted the behaviour of their parents, the silence or the rage; they were aware of the absence of grandparents and other relatives. The unspoken history is always tangibly present, I have often noted when meeting Jews.

One notable aspect is that the persecution has caused many survivors to hide their Jewishness forever, to the extent that they did not tell their children about their Jewish identity. Somehow, outsiders always find out, and confront these children with their backgrounds. Other children of survivors found out themselves. In any case, it caused trauma of its own. But it also entails the process of searching for identity, and claiming or reclaiming identity. I feel not competent to go deeper into this matter. But it is important to be aware of this aspect of Jewish suffering today.

Often those who survived and succeeded in establishing a family, children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren even, show a tremendous pride: 'Hitler wanted to kill us, but this is our revenge. We are here and we will not let ourselves be killed again.' The traumas, the sufferings, have resulted in an unimaginable drive to rebuild the Jewish people, and to re-establish Jewish life.

COLD RECEPTION

Yet, the re-establishment of Jewish life both in the State of Israel and in the diaspora did not end Jewish suffering. Also after the Shoah, antisemitism is never far away. Even those who had survived the Shoah and tried to return to their homes, often received a cold welcome. Homes were taken over by others; deposited possessions never returned. Some were even confronted with bills for overdue taxes. It took years, sometimes decades, for them to be compensated by the authorities. The Netherlands at least have a bad record in this.

FEAR

We jump to 2025. After October 7th, 2023, antisemitism is back from never having been away. Jews around the world are threatened and feel fear. I quote just one message, posted on X a couple of weeks ago (around 25 May) by S.K. Tedeschi: ‘To the Jews. I didn’t think I’d see NHS doctors posting on social media that we should die. I didn’t think my kid’s son would be unable to wear his kippah anymore. Nor did I think I’d see regular-looking men who work at

music studios going round Golders Green knocking mezuzahs off doors. But here we are. We are living through exactly what our ancestors lived through generation after generation. And aside from a few very brave voices (thank you), we are alone in it as most people join in, or let it go by in silence.'

This is an expression of feelings shared by many Jews in Europe at this moment, and probably also in other parts of the world. It is noteworthy that already 15 years ago, Jews in Amsterdam, survivors of the Shoah, like the late Dr. Bloeme Evers-Emden (a psychologist and expert on the Shoah) felt that the atmosphere was changing. They noted a growing tendency of antisemitism that they compared to the 1930's.

Now, 15 years later, we are way beyond that. I hardly have to mention the antisemitic incidents flaming up everywhere in the world, like the murder of the young couple Yaron Lischinsky and Sarah Milgram in Washington. They were staff members of the Israeli embassy, but they were murdered just outside the Capital Jewish Museum, not in front of the embassy. In other words, they were murdered because they were Jewish, not because they were Israeli (if that would be an excuse).

ANTI-ZIONISM

Mrs. Evers used to call antizionism the 'see-through blouse' of antisemitism. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks famously spoke of antisemitism as a mutating virus, and antizionism as its latest mutation.

Antizionism is often defended as legitimate criticism of the State of Israel. Of course, critique of the State of Israel or better, its government, can

be legitimate. Criticising the government is what Israeli citizens do all the time, like in any other democracy. Whether we as Christians should publicly utter our criticism though, is a different question, certainly in this time. I believe Israel is in need of people who support the state regardless of this or that government.

What is at stake is Israel's right to exist. This is what is going on. Antizionism denies Israel's

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right to exist, more precisely, its right to exist as a Jewish state. It denies the Jewish right to self-determination. That is where antisemitism comes in. Antizionists have a problem with Israel as a Jewish state, whereas they don't have any problem with Iran, or Malaysia, or Arab countries being Muslim states, or Nepal as Hindu state. So it is applying double standards, judging Israel different than other nations. That is a form of antisemitism. And when double standards are applied to the Israeli government, you see antisemi-

tism through the antizionist blouse, to use Mrs. Evers' metaphor.

That is where we are now. After October 7, 2023, you would have expected sympathy with the Jewish state. But instead, most of the media now freely expose their antizionist bias. Anti-Israel activists (this is an understatement) have taken the university campuses and the streets of the big cities all over the world. They may represent a minority view, but force their opinions into the public space in the most intimidating ways. Does it remind you of a certain period in history? To many Jews, it does.

JEWS AMONG THE NATIONS

Why is antizionism just another mutation of antisemitism? In the past, Jews were hated because

of their religion. Later, from the 19th century on, they were hated because of their race. Today, they are hated because of the State of Israel. Someone called the State of Israel the 'Jew among the nations', hated, detested in every sense Jews have been hated throughout history. In the worldview of the antisemite / antizionist, Israel is the great threat to the existing order, just as the Jews in general in past and present. And so, every Jew, wherever he or she finds him/herself, is seen as representative of that phenomenon, that is expressed in the State of Israel. It does not matter whether you are politically engaged with Israel or not, whether you endorse the present Israeli government or not, whether you feel spiritually connected to the State of Israel or not. All Jews are collectively seen as guilty.

SPIRITUAL LEVEL

Ah, but there might be a nuance. Antizionists defend themselves by pointing to certain orthodox Jewish groups that reject the State of Israel on religious grounds: 'We are not antisemites, for they are Jews and they are opposed to the State of Israel as well.'

Well, they may be so and they may even align with Israel's enemies. But they are definitely a small minority among the Jews, even within orthodox Judaism. Leading (ultra)orthodox rabbis have condemned this alignment as putting the People of Israel in danger.

But the real matter in question is of a deeper, spiritual nature. Ultraorthodox antizionists are not concerned with political self-determination. Their concern is the spiritual character of the Jewish people in particular and the world at present as a whole. It might be summarized in the question: does the spiritual level of the Jewish people allow for a Jewish state? And they argue: only the Messiah will restore Jewish independence.

They have a point. On the other hand, many orthodox religious leaders argue that history has made clear that a fully Jewish life is only possible in the land of Israel and that the time has come to seek an independent existence there, and that the return to the land in itself is an act of

sanctifying Jewish life. In the end, while the approach might be different, the concern of both orthodox 'camps' is the same. It is the concern for the spiritual elevation of the Jewish people in a hostile world. Both parties in their own way suffer the spiritual plight of the Jewish people. And they know: return to the land will not be an escape of suffering. A Jewish tradition says: the land of Israel is obtained only by suffering. But this suffering is a forebode of the coming of the Messiah.

PERSPECTIVE

The apostle Paul speaks of a hardening in part that has come over Israel (Romans 11:25). I am afraid that today, we have to speak of a hardening in general over the gentile nations, or at least, over many among the spiritual and political leaders, the hardening of the Pharaoh. There is a tremendous spiritual battle going on around Israel. The forces of godlessness are trying to resist the fulfilment of God's promises and the coming of His kingdom. If they cannot touch God Himself, they hurt those who are closest to God on this earth, the Jewish people, and the Church. So when Jews suffer, the church from the nations should suffer with them: 'If one part suffers, every part suffers with it' (1 Corinthians 12:26). I know, the persecuted Church knows better what suffering is than the Church in the West. The apostle Paul continues: 'if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.'

I believe this is the calling of the Church now, suffering with Israel in persistent expectation of God sanctifying Himself before the eyes of the nations (Ezekiel 38). Then God will take away Israel's suffering and wipe of her tears. So Israel will be honoured, and the whole church will rejoice with her (cf. Romans 15:10).

‘With all My heart and with all My soul’

(Jeremiah 32:41)

REV. JAAP DE VREUGD

This is a very remarkable word: God says He will faithfully plant Israel in the land ‘with all My heart and with all My soul’. It is the final verse in a pericope with a mighty promise of salvation: restoration and return from exile and the prospect of a permanent place in the promised land. God will rejoice over His people and plant them *bechol libbi uvechol nafshi* in this land.

think this is the only text in all the Bible that speaks of God’s heart and soul. God’s heart is spoken of more often, but in the combination ‘heart and soul’ only in this place.

In Hebrew, as in other languages, this means to indicate an intense connection; it is even more so when you say that you do something ‘with heart and soul’ than that you do something ‘gladly’. In fact, you are committed to it to the core of your being. And although in the context it has directly to do with the return to the land, I think we may without objection relate the expression more broadly to the people; God declares, that He has committed Himself with heart and soul to the people of His choice, Israel. This is nothing less than a declaration of love. To the core of His being, God has committed Himself to Israel.

Perhaps you may even say it has to do with the identity of the Eternal; after all, He also calls Himself the God of Israel. God does not want to be God without His choice with heart and soul for Israel. The Scriptures bear witness in many places that God loves Israel and therefore chooses her. In this context, the well-known metaphor from Zechariah also rings true: ‘For whoever touches you touches the apple of His eye.’

CHURCH DECLINE

Today we are experiencing a huge decline of church and Christianity in Europe, and certainly also in the Netherlands. Every week, several churches are being closed and many tens of thousands have left the churches in recent years. Modern idolatry and revived paganism are replacing it. Internally, there is spiritual superficiality and confusion in the churches, of going along with the zeitgeist.

Books and reports are published. Remedies are being offered. Someone spoke of a judgment on the lukewarmness of Christians in Europe. There is much in that.

But there is an aspect that I find painfully missing in discussions about church abandonment. What if it also has to do with God's pain over what was done to His people? Many people today would rather forget it, but we are far from over the fact that it could come to the murder of the Jews, the Shoah, in Christian Europe. Could

the judgment be that the Eternal is silent and hides His countenance because of the suffering inflicted on the apple of His eye? There is a connection between the empty homes of the Jews and the empty churches in Europe. Secularisation, spiritual confusion have struck Europe since Israel was almost entirely murdered amidst the European Christian nations and churches. This must have touched the Eternal in his heart and soul. Whoever scolds Israel kicks God on the heart. There will be a renewal of the church only if the church repents to the God of Israel and the Israel of God.

How do Christians, churches stand in this situation? Perhaps it is only a remnant of Christianity in Europe that has something to do with Israel, that has come to understand that

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Christian faith without the relationship with Israel is uprooted and thus has no opportunities for growth. A remnant, because many in the churches do not know what to do with Israel. I am afraid that that the night of the Holocaust and the miracle of Israel's revival no longer mean anything to many people, that consequently they do not have the willingness to critically approach their own being and tradition in relation to Israel, that consequently they do not have an eye for Israel's prophetic restoration either, and thus ultimately lose sight of hope for the world.

Frenetic programmes to revive church and Christianity then do not help to overcome the brutal force of secularisation, modern paganism and the threat of Islamisation. European Christianity died in Auschwitz.

Is it all hopeless then? No! The God of Israel is alive and we have the prophetic Word, which is completely reliable. That Word calls the churches and everyone to repentance

to the God of Israel, and also to repentance to Israel. To true communion, solidarity with the people of God's covenant. Unconditional, truly unfailing and heartfelt communion with Israel: people, land and state. Opening the Word, raising the voice, providing knowledge and information, allowing history to speak - that is the vocation of Christians who want to be in solidarity with Israel, because they simply cannot do otherwise because of the God of Israel they have come to know in Jesus the Jew. That is the calling of Christians for Israel. Convinced that the Eternal One is - still - committed to His people with all His heart and with all His soul.

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