

NEXT YEAR IN A FULLY REBUILT JERUSALEM

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The main part of the parsha is concerned with the description of the woes that will befall the Jewish people in their long years of exile and persecution. The Torah sees this as being a form of redemptive punishment for the Chosen People who chose to imitate the idolatrous and immoral ways of the general society.

However, as the exile of Israel stretched into centuries and then into millennia, the Jews began to feel that somehow the punishment was rather excessive relative to the crime. Therefore other explanations for the length and bitterness of the exile of Israel were advanced.

The Talmud itself, hundreds of years after the destruction of the Second Temple, offered that the scattering of the Jewish people throughout the world was to allow non-Jews who wished to convert to Judaism be afforded the opportunity to do so. Others suggested that the dispersal of the Jewish Diaspora was to allow Judaic values and attitudes to penetrate the non-Jewish world as well.

It was through the bitter exile itself that the Jewish people would fulfill its mission of being a light unto the nations of the world. The survival of the Jewish people under the oppressive conditions of its exile also raised questions and problems for the Christian world. The concept of the "Witness People" gained currency in the Christian world - that somehow Jews had to survive to "witness" the eventual reappearance of the Christian savior and finally convert to Christianity.

Thus the Church established the institution of the "Pope's Jews" who were protected from harm since they had to survive to be the "Witness People." Be all of this as it may, what is clear is that every word of the Torah regarding the fate of the Jews in exile has come true - true literally and not allegorically. As the Ramban phrased it, it is astounding that a book written thousands of years before the events occurred should record those events so truthfully and faithfully.

It is of comfort that since the tragedies recited in the parsha that would befall Israel have all come true literally that we can be certain that the blessings and redemption similarly told to us in the parsha shall also undoubtedly be fulfilled literally. Some of them have already been realized in our time with the ingathering of the exiles of Israel to the nascent Jewish state. Others are still developing and coming.

The Torah never placed any time limits either on Jewish exile or redemption. The Lord has His own reckoning that no human can be privy to. The rabbis, therefore, strongly discouraged prognostications of dates for the arrival of the redemption and the messianic era.

Over the many centuries of Jewish exile, many dates were forecast to be the ones of redemption, but all of them have come and gone and the redemption is yet unfulfilled in actuality or completeness. Yet our hope and belief in our eventual redemption has never waned. "Next year in Jerusalem" has been fulfilled. Next year in a fully rebuilt and peaceful Jerusalem is in the wings of the drama that unfolds now before our very eyes.

Shabat shalom,

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Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com