

26 Nisan, 5767 (April 14, 2007) *Keeping Perspective on the Holocaust* J. M. Terrett

Parasha Shemini Eighth
 Torah: Lev. 9:1-11:47
 Haftarah: 2 Sam. 6:1-7:17
 Brit Chadashah: Heb. 7:1-19

Tomorrow is Holocaust Memorial Day (Yom HaShoah) and there will be a commemoration at 1:00 PM on the grounds of the Legislature around the Holocaust Memorial Sculpture. It has now been 69 years since Kristalnacht (Nov. 9th, 1938), when Hitler's regime began its program of genocide of the Jewish people. I do not remember how old I was when I first became aware of the extent of the Nazi extermination campaigns against our people, which eventually became known as the Holocaust (a word derived from the scriptural term for burnt offerings under the Levitical system). It was at least after my family immigrated and my dad purchased our first set of World Book Encyclopaedias that my life long fascination with history began.

Documentaries and films about the holocaust began to appear in literature in the sixties, but it was not until Schindler's List that the Holocaust became a popular topic of public interest, if you will excuse the term popular. There have been other historical examples of planned genocide, but never one where the perpetrators both tried to justify the destruction of their victims and also tried to disguise the means they undertook to accomplish their task.

In the past, victorious hordes have descended on defeated peoples and slaughtered them in full public view and claimed their right to do so as the right of the conqueror to exterminate the conquered. The Catholic inquisition singled out heretical elements within its jurisdiction and legally murdered them before an approving population. Beginning with the Crusades, the various pogroms against the Jewish people, in Western and Eastern Europe were never done in secret and never encountered any significant popular criticism or resistance.

However, after Napoleon began to bring the ghetto walls down, popular anti-Semitism began to single Jews out, not because they lived in a certain area, or because they dressed in a certain way, but because they slowly overcame most of their historic economic disadvantages and became quite prosperous members of all the societies they lived in. The Nazis used birth records from Napoleon's time to identify these people of Jewish blood who had fully assimilated into European culture. These people were indistinguishable from their Gentile neighbours and many of them had become practicing Christians.

New forms of political anti-Semitic propaganda began to appear alongside traditional religious hate literature so the Nazis could provide a "civilized" rationale for the extermination of a segment of their population that had lived in their midst for centuries. Many populations joyfully joined in to plunder and murder their Jewish neighbours, but when the Nazis began rounding up all the Jews they could identify, they tried to keep the means of their extermination a secret. They were the first and most effective group of Holocaust deniers.

They mounted a relentless propaganda campaign against the Jews in their midst and it became dangerous for anyone to express concern or sympathy for the gradual disappearance of entire Jewish communities. As the war progressed, the Nazis blaming the Jews for the war meant that many people saw the eradication of local Jewish populations as a logical part of their war against worldwide Jewry.

I have three comments to make about how we, as Messianic Jews and Gentiles should relate to the Holocaust (and to our obligation to never forget those who were murdered) and I want to begin with the successful propaganda campaigns which made scapegoats of the Jewish people. Whenever you isolate any group of people and assign to them as a group negative mental, social or political attributes you have crossed the line into racial (religious) prejudice and are setting the

stage to justify the same kind of group sanctions and violence which were imposed on the Jews, the Blacks, the Native Americans, and may even be imposed on the Muslims in our midst.

Twice in the Biblical account, our people were the victims of a negative propaganda campaign which described them as degenerates who needed to be eradicated for the safety and progress of the societies they lived in – first in Egypt and then in Babylon. I would describe propaganda as a malicious form of societal gossip which tries to assassinate a group's reputation, in order to justify persecution which may lead to repression and genocide. The Torah gives explicit instructions for the investigation of allegations against individuals and against groups (Deut. 13:6-11 and 12-18) and action was only taken if the charges were proven correct.

I disagree with the theological claims of Islam and am horrified by the actions of certain radical elements within the Muslim world community, but I do not wish to turn them into innocent scapegoats. They have the right to the full force of the protection and surveillance of the laws of our land and the international laws of our globe. It is only the violation of either national or international law which should be punished (Rom. 13:1-7; I P. 2:13-17) and even then, due process of law is the only minimally acceptable response which the Bible allows believers to promote or to implement.

So, I have stated that we should not fall into the trap of political or religious propaganda which would seek to justify either the suppression or suspension of the legal rights of any citizen of group of citizens without due process of law.

My second point is more theological and wants to examine the question which many believers struggle with when various catastrophes occur – why did G-d let this happen? First let me state categorically that there is no easy answer to this question. G-d is not a force, or an influence, He is a person who is in possession of all the facts, from the beginning of time to the end and how He intervenes or chooses not to intervene is based on an extensive jurisprudence which we will never have full access to in this life.

He intervenes and has intervened at critical points in human history and has always focused His intervention on His redemptive purposes, which He brought to a head in the death and resurrection of our Messiah. I see three categories of intervention based on this redemptiveness. He intervenes first to bring people to faith and to repentance. He intervenes next to bring people and peoples to a place where they are receptive to His redemptive agenda and while the principle of sowing and reaping applies (to three or four versus to a thousand generations), there are some crimes and some acts of greatness which will only be dealt with on Judgment Day (1 Cor. 3:9-15 and 4:5 and Eccl. 12:13, 14 and Rom. 2:13-16). So sometimes He intervenes to keep society going until the end, when He will judge both the good and the evil, according to His word.

It is both hard and necessary for me to admit that good guys do not always win in this life and that it is not always possible for justice to be served in our lifetime. I have two thoughts to share about this and then I will move on to my last point. Leaving some unresolved issues till Judgment Day is not a cop-out, it is both an expression of hopeful faith and a means to prevent generational vendettas. Also, as believers we are bound to uphold the law and never use unlawful means to accomplish lawful ends – the law in question being understood to mean to the law of G-d.

For me, those who perpetrated the Holocaust and those who deny it are guilty of one of the most heinous crimes in history, not just because it was perpetrated against our Jewish people by supposed Christian peoples, but because of the way the genocide was carried out. People with any generational connection to Judaism were singled out, rounded up, tormented, tortured and dehumanized in the most methodical, meticulous manner – and they were selectively slaughtered, beginning with the weakest and ending up with those for whom the Nazis had no longer any use. They tried to kill the survivors before the allies could liberate them and they tried to cover up all evidence of their actions and thus not only escape punishment, but also kill their

victims twice – once by inhumane means and twice by trying to erase their memory and say they never existed (or died of natural means).

How do we deal with the Holocaust as we move further and further away from it in time? Judaism could be styled as a theological elephant who never forgets – that is who never forgets significant national and spiritual events. Since the destruction of the Second Temple, there has never been such an extensive wholesale slaughter of our people. We should never forget three things, I will close with this.

We should never forget the innocent people who were slaughtered – up to 85% of European Judaism, which was then slightly over half the world total. We should never forget the events which lead up to the slaughter and never allow the same kinds of hate propaganda to be used against us or against anyone – we should say both :Never Again and Over my dead body.

Lastly we should remember that the goodness of the L-rd is not exhausted, but is renewed every morning and Am Israel Chai, l'olam va'ed. G-d will reward both the righteous and the unrighteous according to their deeds and the Jewish people will continue to be a beacon of His faithfulness to Abraham and a beacon of His light to the nations, no matter what they do to us. We are called to be light and salt and to live in spiritual intimacy with our King, over and above the circumstances of our lives, trusting both in His never failing provision and in His eternal purposes.

When we become hypnotized and embittered by the horrors of life, we cease to be able to participate in any significant tikkun olam (healing of the world) or in any significant proclamation of the righteousness and mercy of our soon coming King.

Yes, we weep and Lament. Yes, we promote the lawful prosecution of the perpetrators. Yes, we strive to preserve the memory of those who were slaughtered and yes, we will do out utmost to prevent such a calamity from reoccurring as we fulfill our spiritual mandate to proclaim the power of G-d to salvation in the Gospel, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

I hope to see as many of you as possible tomorrow afternoon at the Legislature. Shabbat shalom. Let's pray.

Parasha Shemini	Eighth
Torah:	Lev. 9:1-11:47
9:23, 24	fiery presence
11:45, 47	practical holiness
Haftarah:	2 Sam. 6:1-7:17
7:12-16	eternal purposes
Brit Chadashah:	Heb. 7:1-19
7:3	eternal fulfilment