

## Seven Wonders of Jewish History – JewishClarity.com

### Introduction

Imagine that a total stranger would come up to you and say: “I’ll tell you what is going to happen to you soon. The ground in front of you will open up, seven golden chariots will come out of the ground, circle your head three times, and then fly off into the sky.” You would most likely dismiss this whole episode as some crazy encounter, and forget about it. Now, suppose that some time later you hear a loud rumbling noise, and a large chasm opens up before your very eyes. Amazingly, you see what looks like a golden chariot appear from this ever-widening crater in the ground. Sure enough, a total of seven golden chariots emerge, circle your head three times, and then fly off into the sky. How many questions should you then have?

There are really two essential questions:

- a. What in the world just happened?
- b. How could that guy have possibly predicted such a crazy event?

It is obvious that even if no prediction had been made, the fact that these golden chariots had suddenly emerged out of the ground would certainly demand an explanation. The fact that this event had been accurately foretold, however, certainly adds a second independently significant dimension to this whole episode.

### The Analogy

This serves as an analogy for Jewish history. Even had the Torah said nothing about what would later occur to the Jewish people, wouldn’t we still feel strongly that there must be some explanation for all of these incredible and unique events? As true as this certainly is, the fact that all of the major events and patterns of Jewish history were, in fact, explicitly prophesied does add significantly to the remarkable story of the Jewish people.

We can certainly understand why the Torah encourages us to study history.

*Remember the days of old, understand the meaning of each generation.  
Ask your father and he shall instruct you, your elders and they shall tell you... Deuteronomy 32:7*

History teaches us how G-d relates to the world. And, all the more so, Jewish history shows us how G-d’s relationship with mankind is most openly revealed on an ongoing basis.

Jewish history shows two very clear phenomena:

- a. The Jews are G-d’s chosen people.
- b. The Author of the Torah had clear knowledge and control of all of history.

**It’s Common Knowledge –** Many non-Jews are also aware of this.

“If the statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one per cent of the human race. It suggests a nebulous dim puff of star dust lost in the blaze of the Milky Way. Properly the Jew ought hardly to be heard of; but he is heard of, has always been heard of. He is as prominent on the planet as any other people, and his commercial importance is extravagantly out of proportion to the smallness of his bulk. His contributions to the world’s list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine, and abstruse learning are also away out of proportion to the weakness

of his numbers. He has made a marvelous fight in this world, in all the ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself, and be excused for it. The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greek and the Roman followed, and made a vast noise, and they are gone; other peoples have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished. The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?" From the article "Concerning the Jews", Harpers (1899), see "The Complete Essays of Mark Twain", Doubleday (1963), p. 249

## Streams and Patterns in History

We won't merely be discussing seven isolated events, but rather seven streams and patterns which run all throughout Jewish and world history. These seven patterns are indeed remarkable, and clearly demonstrate that the Jewish people are not governed by the regular rules of history. Jewish history can be understood only as the history of G-d's chosen people. And, in addition, every one of these patterns was explicitly prophesized in the Torah itself, over 3,300 years ago!

### The Seven Wonders

#### I. Eternal Nation

*And I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and your descendants after you, throughout their generations, an eternal covenant; to be your G-d and the G-d of your descendants after you. Genesis 17:7*

*Yet even so, even while they are in their enemies' land, I will not reject or spurn them, lest, by wiping them out, I make void My covenant with them; for I am their G-d. I will remember them because of the covenant I made with their forefathers, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt under the very eyes of the nations, that I might be their G-d. Leviticus 26:44-45*

A nation existing eternally is not unique, although it is certainly unusual. How many nations in the entire world, besides the Jews, could really be called "eternal"? China, India, maybe the Arabs — very few. Therefore, while a nation existing forever is certainly not impossible, it is definitely a long shot. The author of the Torah must have had a lot of confidence in the Jewish people — that they would be one of the handful of nations to qualify as "eternal."

In addition, what is it that usually defines and sustains a nation? **Common** land, spoken language, culture, customs, an army, etc. For the past almost 2,000 years, we have had virtually none of these elements, and yet we are still here. What could explain this?

#### II. Exile / Scattering / Wandering

Along with the prophesy of "Eternal Nation", the author of the Torah makes a second prophesy that seems to make "Eternal Nation" an impossibility — the exile of the Jews from their own land. The difficulty of these two prophesies existing together is because, throughout the history of the world, no other nation ever survived an exile. What's more, the Torah prophesized *two* different exiles for the Jewish people to survive (Lev. 26:14-46, and Deut. 28:15-69)!

**History of Jewish Exile** – The Jewish people were exiled from Israel by the Babylonians in 586 BCE. They survived, returned to Israel after 70 years, and built the Second Temple. Then in 70 CE, the Romans destroyed the Second Temple, causing the Jews to go into exile once again.

## **Two Unique Aspects of Jewish Exile:**

### **a. The only nation exiled twice from their original land**

The Jewish people were not only exiled from their land, but they were exiled twice! No other nation ever suffered more than one exile.

### **b. The only nation ever to survive and return from a previous exile**

The obvious prerequisite to a double-exile is to survive the first exile, and then to return to one's land of origin. The Jewish people are the only nation which ever accomplished either feat.

## **Scattering**

In addition to this, the Torah spells out another uniqueness — this second exile of the Jewish people by the Romans would be a **complete scattering** to all four corners of the earth.

*...You will be torn from the land which you are about to occupy. And G-d shall scatter you among all the peoples, from one end of the earth to the other... Deut. 28:63-64*

Without even physical unity, this would definitely seem to be the “kiss of death” for the Jews.

## **Wandering**

And, on top of all of this, the Torah spells out one final uniqueness within this category — among the nations within which the Jews will be scattered, there will be a continual wandering. After stating, *And G-d shall scatter you among all the peoples, from one end of the earth to the other... (Deut. 28:64)*, the prophesy continues: *Among those nations you shall find no repose, not a foot of ground to stand upon, for there G-d will give you an anguished heart and wasted eyes and a dismayed spirit. (Deut. 28:65).*

This prophesy of the “Wandering Jew” has not only characterized our ancient history. It continues to describe us right up until and including the present day!

*As a result of the relentless persecutions and forced expulsions, most Jews are but recent newcomers to their respective lands of residence. 90% of the Jewish people have lived in their new homes for no more than 100 years. The majority of the large Jewish settlements date back no more than 50 or 60 years! 75% of Jewry has thus been displaced in three lands (Israel, America, and Russia) while the remaining 25% are dispersed throughout over 100 lands on all five continents. Leschzinsky, “The Jewish Dispersion”, pg. 9 (Heb.)*

The author of the Torah seemed to really like big challenges! Not only would the Jewish people be one of the handful of nations in all of world history to be truly eternal, they would do it despite what looked like impossible obstacles — no land, no unity, and no physical stability! What then could possibly reconcile these seemingly contradictory historical patterns? Perhaps if the Jews would have been beloved and respected by the world, they would have been able to survive? Interestingly, the exact opposite is not only what happened, it was what the author predicted would happen.

### **III. Anti-Semitism**

The very need for the term “anti-Semitism” itself is curious. Why not refer to the hatred and persecution of the Jews by more generic terms like religious bigotry, xenophobia, or racism? The existence of a distinctive term for hatred of the Jews tells us that the world recognizes that anti-Semitism isn't simply one more unfortunate example of hatred in the world. It is, rather, a phenomenon that is specific to the Jewish people.

#### **Four Aspects to Anti-Semitism**

There are four different aspects to anti-Semitism which characterize it as a hatred like no other:

**1. Universality 2. Intensity 3. Longevity 4. Irrationality.**

##### **1. Universality**

The universal scope of anti-Semitism can be seen in the fact that the Jews have been expelled from virtually every country in which they have resided. Jews were expelled from England in 1290, France in 1306 and 1394, Hungary in 1349 and 1360, Austria in 1421, from various places in Germany throughout the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries, from Lithuania in 1445 and 1495, Spain in 1492, Portugal in 1497, and from Bohemia and Moravia in 1744-45. Between the 15th and 18th centuries, Jews were not permitted to enter Russia, and when they were finally admitted, they were restricted to one area, the Pale of Settlement. Parallel to these atrocities in Europe were various levels of anti-Semitism at the hands of the Arabs. From Islam's inception in the 7th century, the Jews living in the Arab countries were constantly forced to live as second-class citizens. Violent outbreaks sporadically occurred throughout the following 1300 years and reached their peak between 1948 and 1967. During that period, almost all of the Jews living in Aden, Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Yemen, over 500,000 in all, were forced to flee, fearing for their lives, in the wake of pogroms, assaults and massacres.

##### **2. Intensity**

The clearest example is the Holocaust — recognized throughout the world as the ultimate manifestation of evil in history. It was the only time that an entire people (men, women and children) had a campaign of complete annihilation waged against them.

##### **3. Longevity**

Most of the world's great powers over the course of history, even those with only a small percentage of Jews among their populations, regarded the Jews as a central enemy. This began with the Greek persecutions of Jews during the Second Temple period. It continued with the Roman Empire, the Arabs, and the Christian world (most notably with the Crusades, the Pogroms, and the frequent occurrence of blood libels all throughout the Middle Ages) and more recently with the Germans and the Soviet Union, as well as the Arabs today.

##### **4. Irrationality**

The Jews are the only people ever accused of “deicide” (i.e., killing god) — and this was one of the major causes of anti-Semitism for almost 2000 years.

Despite the fact that consuming blood is a more serious prohibition than eating pork, Jews were persecuted throughout the Middle Ages with blood libels, the charge that they consumed the blood of non-Jewish children. They also suffered pogroms for well-poisoning, and once even for air-poisoning.

The Jews in Germany were accused of having brought Socialism and Communism to Germany,

of being responsible for Germany losing World War I, and of causing the economic problems of the 1920's. This triple paranoia existed in spite of the fact that the percentage of Jews in Germany at the time was only 0.8%.

Many nations have even hurt themselves as a result of their persecution of the Jews, most notably Spain (economically) and Germany (with science, culture, military, etc.). And finally, a forgery purporting to be the conspiratorial discussions of Jewish elders plotting to take over the world, "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," has been translated and reprinted in numerous languages, all around the world, for over a hundred years.

Whatever Jews happen to do, that is what is cited as the reason for the hatred against them. For example, at the same time that Jews in America were accused of being communists, Jews in Russia were being labeled as capitalists. The more one studies anti-Semitism, the more obvious it becomes that the numerous "explanations" offered throughout the various societies where Jews have resided are not reasons at all (whose absence would necessarily result in no more hatred or persecution), but rather excuses.

*Of all the extreme fanaticism that plays havoc in man's nature, there is none as irrational as anti-Semitism. The Jews cannot vindicate themselves in the eyes of these fanatics. If the Jews are rich, they are victims of theft and extortion. If they are poor, they are victims of ridicule. If they take sides in a war, it is because they wish to gain advantage from the spilling of non-Jewish blood. If they espouse peace, it is because they are scared and anxious by nature, or traitors to their country. If the Jew dwells in a foreign land, he is persecuted and expelled. If he wishes to return to his own land, he is prevented from doing so. Lloyd George (Prime Minister of England from 1916-1922), 1923*

*But as my research into Jewish history progressed, I was surprised, depressed, and to some extent overwhelmed, by the perpetual and irrational violence which pursued the Jews in every country and to almost every corner of the globe. If, therefore, persecution, expulsion, torture, humiliation, and mass murder haunt these pages, it is because they also haunt the Jewish story. Martin Gilbert, "Jewish History Atlas" Oxford 1985*

Remarkably, the very same author of the Torah who first prophesized that the Jewish people would be an "Eternal Nation", then prophesized that we would do it despite constant hatred and persecution.

*Among those nations you shall find no repose, not a foot of ground to stand upon, for there G-d will give you an anguished heart, and wasted eyes, and a dismayed spirit. You will live in constant suspense, and stand in dread both day and night, never sure of your existence. In the morning you will say, "Would that it were evening!" and in the evening you will say, "Would that it were morning!" for the dread that your heart must feel and the sight that your eyes must see. Deuteronomy 28:65-67*

There is one last solution that could possibly answer all of these contradictions without the need for bringing G-d into the picture. Imagine the situation with China for a moment. Isn't it obvious that the Chinese people will always be around? Even if they suddenly lost their land and became the object of terrible hatred and persecutions, we could still never imagine them ever ceasing to exist. Why? Because of their enormous numbers. If the Jewish people similarly had huge numbers, then their survival, even in the face of such overwhelming obstacles, would certainly be much easier to understand. Incredibly, however, the author of the Torah once again prophesized the exact opposite!

#### IV. The Jewish people will be left few in number

*And you shall remain few in number, whereas you could have become as numerous as the stars of the heavens, because you would not obey the voice of G-d your L-rd. Deut. 28:62*

There are two different aspects contained within this prophecy:

1. "You shall remain" — i.e., a reference back to the prophecy of "Eternal Nation".
2. "Few in number" — despite being eternal, the numbers of the Jews will still be very small.

This seems to be an inherent contradiction. If the Torah tells us that the Jews will be around for thousands of years, their numbers should be very large. On the other hand, if the Torah says that their numbers will be frozen at a low level, what chance would they have of long-term survival?

2,000 years ago, among the 44 million in the Roman Empire, about 4 million were estimated to have been Jews (roughly 9%), besides the large numbers of Jews which were then living in Babylonia. Today there are probably over 2 billion descendants of those from the Roman Empire (i.e., the Western world), and therefore, we should expect about 200 million Jews today (not 14 million). With numbers like 200 million, it would certainly be much easier for the Jews to maintain their national continuity. Furthermore, if over 90% of the Jewish people can disappear (as we see **has** occurred) then it seems illogical to say that 100% of them **can't** disappear. What type of an author could say that only a tiny sliver of Jews would survive, that this tiny group would survive despite the numerous challenges spelled out in the Torah, and then has the control of over 3,000 years of subsequent world history to ensure that it actually occurs? Only an author with complete control over both Jewish and world history could guarantee that both halves of this seemingly contradictory prophecy would be fulfilled (as they both have)!

Given all of this, we might have expected the Torah to have envisioned the Jews merely surviving, and barely hanging onto their own values and national identity. In fact, we find just the opposite yet again — the Jews are prophesized to transform the values and direction of the entire world.

#### V. Light to the Nations

*I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great. You shall become a blessing. And I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. And through you shall all the communities of the earth be blessed. Genesis 12:2-3*

*I, the L-rd, have called you in righteousness, and will hold your hand and keep you. And I will establish you as a covenant of the people, for a light to the nations. Isaiah 42:6*

*Now, if you obey Me and keep my covenant, then you shall be My special treasure among all the nations, for all the world is Mine. And you will be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation to Me... Exodus 19:5-6*

**The Question** – How could a small group have such a profound impact on the entire world?

There are two approaches which seem to have some precedent:

1. Conquest (like with Greece and Rome), or
2. Proselytization (as with Christianity and Islam).

The difficulty, however, is that during the past almost 2,000 years, the Jewish people have rarely had an army, and have generally shied away from conversions.

**Profound Impact Indeed** – Despite this, the impact of the Jewish Nation on the world around them has been truly remarkable.

## 1. Monotheism

Monotheism is arguably the single most impactful idea in the history of the world. It forms the basis of the Western world and morality, and is accepted, in one form or another, by over 3.7 billion people (more than half of the world), all of whom got it from us.

**2. Jewish Concepts** – The major concepts within Judaism have been widely accepted:

- a. We are all “children of one G-d”; therefore we have a fundamental social responsibility toward others. This leads directly to “love your neighbor” — a Jewish, not a Christian, idea.
- b. Society must be committed to truth, justice, and fair trials for everyone.
- c. All people have free will and unlimited potential for greatness. As the Declaration of Independence states: “All men are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” This may explain why Judaism has had universal education and widespread Tzedaka (charity for the poor) for thousands of years, while the rest of the world only adopted them within the last 150 years.
- d. We should seek peace, not war. This is expressed most poignantly in Isaiah’s Utopian vision of the world in the end of days (displayed on the “Isaiah Wall” at the U.N. building in New York): “They shall beat their swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not raise the sword against other nations, and they shall no longer learn war.” Judaism taught the world that the hero/role-model of society should be the scholar/teacher and the righteous person, not the one who could kill the most people (i.e., the warrior).

One might ask, “Aren’t these ideas intuitively obvious? Didn’t other societies also have them? If so, how can we take credit for them?”

First of all, the Jewish society was the only one until quite recently which even attempted to actually put most of these ideas into practice. And secondly, it was only once the Jews had already introduced them to the world that these ideas were then adopted by the non-Jewish world.

## Another Basic Question

While the verse (Exodus 19:5-6) states that the Jewish **people** will be “*a kingdom of priests*“, what has been shown until now is that the **Torah** has been a light unto the nations. Maybe there is nothing particularly distinctive about the Jews themselves. Perhaps, it is only because the Jews have been in possession of such an extraordinary book, the Torah, that their impact upon the world has been so profound! Where do we have any indication that the Jewish people themselves, independent of the Torah, have an intrinsic ability to impact the world?

The difficulty with attempting to answer this question is that the Jews have been so fundamentally connected with the Torah all throughout their history. Therefore, it would seem that the only way to evaluate this issue would be to do an experiment in which we separated Jews from Judaism. We would then be able to determine if the Jews continued to behave in an extraordinary manner (although not necessarily in accordance with Torah principles) or simply faded into the background and acted like all other people.

While we ourselves would never have willingly conducted such an experiment, unfortunately it has already been performed for us. Over the past 150 years, for the first time in all of Jewish

history, we have large numbers of Jews that are entirely disconnected from Judaism. What do we then find when we study the behavior of these secular Jews?

**1.** The three individuals that arguably had the greatest impact on the entire 20th century were Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and Albert Einstein. According to one that agrees with this view, how likely is it that all three would have been Jewish? Considering that the Jews have never (in recent times) exceeded 1/2 of 1% of the world population, that means that for every Jew that lived within the previous 150 years, there were over 200 non-Jews. Therefore, the odds against the first of these three occupying this position of ultimate influence on the world would be 200 to 1, the second joining him would be 40,000 to 1, and the third being there as well, would be 8,000,000 to 1!

**2.** Remarkably, Jews have received 23% of all Nobel prizes given for over 100 years. This is all the more striking when one considers that it was as recently as the middle of the 19th century that Jews were first given the ability to attend universities and enter many different fields, especially within the various sciences!

**3.** Jews continue to be exceptionally committed to education. In America, they are twice as likely to attend college as non-Jews. In Ivy-League schools, they are twelve times over-represented in proportion to their percentage in the general population.

**4.** Jews have also been prominently in the forefront pushing for social change:

**a.** Many of the top leaders of both the Russian and Hungarian revolutions were Jewish.

**b.** Approximately 60% of the members of the SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) — the major student activist organization of the 1960's, were Jews. The two most well-known student activists of the 1960's, Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, were both Jews. In fact, a survey by the American Council of Education in 1966-7 stated that "the best single predictor of campus protest (during the 1960's) was the presence of a substantial number of students from Jewish backgrounds."

**c.** In 1967, 40% of all Peace Corps volunteers were estimated to have been Jewish.

**5.** In terms of careers — Jews in the US are over-represented relative to the general population by 231% in medicine, 233% in mathematics, 265% in law, 300% in dentistry, and 479% in psychiatry.

**6.** And with income — Jews in the USA have the highest income of any ethnic group, 72% above the average, and 40% higher than the second highest group, the Japanese.

How do we understand all of these remarkable statistics? The Gemara says that Jews are more driven for meaning than non-Jews. It is this extraordinary drive for meaning which seems to be the common denominator for all of these many differences in the accomplishments of even secular Jews. Whether meaning is understood in terms of science, education, desire for social change, idealism, a prestigious profession, or just money — Jews are clearly more determined and able to achieve a dramatic level of success than the general non-Jewish population around them. Even an honest atheist would have to admit that, if there ever was a chosen people, with the responsibility to transform the world, the Jews would certainly be the best candidate. One thing is abundantly clear — this phenomenon of uniqueness is just as much a function and a statement of the Jewish people themselves as it is about the Torah.



## VI. The Interdependency of the Jewish People and the Land of Israel

Not only do we find extraordinary aspects to both the Jewish people and the Torah, but even the land of Israel seems to defy the normal rules of nature.

The Torah describes the land of Israel as being very prosperous.

*G-d, your L-rd, is bringing you to a good land — a land with flowing streams and underground springs gushing out in valley and mountain. It is a land of wheat, barley, figs and pomegranates — a land of oil-olives and honey-dates. It is a land where you will not eat your bread in rations and you will lack nothing... Deuteronomy 8:7-10*

*I have come down to rescue them from Egypt's power. I will bring them out of that land, to a good, spacious land; to a land flowing with milk and honey... Exodus 3:8*

The prosperity of the land of Israel can be seen as early as Joshua's military campaign, in which he conquered the seven nations living in Canaan, over a period of seven years. If seven nations battled for the land of Israel for seven years, it is unlikely that the land in dispute was composed merely of deserts and swamps.

Even up until the time of Josephus (about 1300 years later), the land was still very prosperous and fertile - *For the whole area is excellent for crops or pasturage, and rich in trees of every kind; so that by its fertility it invites even those least inclined to work on the land. In fact, every inch of it has been cultivated by the inhabitants, and not a parcel goes to waste. It is thickly covered with towns, and thanks to the natural abundance of the soil, the many villages are so densely populated that the smallest of them has more than fifteen thousand inhabitants.* Josephus, *The Jewish Wars*; Book III 3:2 Penguin edition, p. 192

Considering the fact that the Jewish people not only found the land of Israel initially prosperous, but that it stayed that way for well over a thousand years, how can we possibly understand the following prophecy in the Torah?

*So devastated will I leave the land that your very enemies who come to dwell in it will stand aghast at the sight of it.* Leviticus 26:32

**Two Possibilities** – There are two possibilities which might explain this prophecy of devastation:

- a. The land of Israel being in a poor location
- b. The land of Israel being very difficult to cultivate

In both cases, we could understand why only the Jewish people, who have such a deep connection to the land of Israel, might be sufficiently motivated to make the land prosper. And if the Jews were then exiled, the land would likely fall into desolation.

The problem, however, is that neither possibility is true.

- a. As the center of three continents — Europe, Asia, and Africa — Israel has an ideal location. And it was always of enormous strategic significance — militarily, economically, culturally, theologically, etc. We, therefore, would never have expected it to have been so neglected and desolate.
- b. The land itself was always good. The Jews found it prosperous, and it remained that way for over 1300 years. And even while it was desolate, it always exhibited the potential to become fruitful once again.

Yet, despite the land's goodness, fertility, and ideal location, when the Jewish people were exiled from the land of Israel, this inexplicable prophecy of desolation was fulfilled.

### **A Good Land Lies Desolate**

*I am writing to you from Jerusalem, the Holy City...What shall I tell you about the Land? There are so many forsaken places, and the desolation is great. It comes down to this — the more sacred the place, the more it has suffered — Jerusalem is most desolate, Judea more so than the Gallil. Yet in all its desolation it is an exceedingly good land.*

Ramban, R. Moshe ben Nachman, "Epistle to his Son" (1260)

*We traversed some miles of desolate country whose soil is rich enough, but is given wholly to weeds — a silent, mournful expanse... A desolation is here that not even imagination can grace with the pomp of life and action. We reached Tabor safely... We never saw a human being on the whole route. We pressed on toward the goal of our crusade, renowned Jerusalem. The further we went, the hotter the sun got and the more rocky and bare, repulsive and dreary, the landscape became... There was hardly a tree or a shrub anywhere. Even the olive and the cactus, those fast friends of a worthless soil, had almost deserted the country. No landscape exists that is more tiresome to the eye than that which bounds the approaches to Jerusalem...*

*Jerusalem is mournful, dreary and lifeless. I would not desire to live here. It is a hopeless, dreary, heartbroken land...Palestine sits in sackcloth and ashes. Over it broods the spell of a curse that has withered its fields and fettered its energies... Palestine is desolate and unlovely.*

Mark Twain, "The Innocents Abroad or The New Pilgrim's Progress" (published in 1869)

*Outside the walls of Jerusalem, however, we saw no living being, heard no living voice. We encountered that desolation and that deadly silence which we would have expected to find at the ruined gates of Pompey... A total eternal dread spell envelopes the city, the highways and the villages... the burial grounds of an entire people.*

Alfons de Lamartine, "Recollections of the East" Vol. I London (1845) pg. 238 (Hebrew-French)

*Until today no people has succeeded in establishing national dominion in the land of Israel... No national unity or spirit of nationalism has acquired any hold there. The mixed multitude of itinerant tribes that managed to settle there did so on lease, as temporary residents. It seems that they await the return of the permanent residents of the land.*

Professor Sir John William Dossou in "Modern Science in Bible Lands" London (1888) 449-450

### **Could It Be?**

How does this make any sense? While the Jews lived in Israel, the land was fertile; when they were gone, it became barren. As with all of Jewish history, the question is two-fold:

- a. How could such a perplexing phenomenon have occurred?
- b. How could the author of the Torah have possibly predicted that it would happen?

Is there any logic that we could understand if G-d were, in fact, the Author of the Torah? While G-d certainly **could** cause this relationship between the Jewish people and the land of Israel to occur, why would He want to?

The Ramban offers a reason:

*Similarly, that which He stated here, "and your enemies that shall dwell therein shall be desolate in it," constitutes a good tiding, proclaiming that during all our exiles, our Land will not*

*accept our enemies. This also is a great proof and assurance to us, for in the whole inhabited part of the world one cannot find such a **good and large Land** which was always lived in and yet is as ruined as it is [today]; for since the time that we left it, it has not accepted any nation or people; they all try to settle it, but to no avail. Ramban on Leviticus 26:32*

If we compare this desolation in Israel to what occurred when the Europeans conquered America from the American Indians, we can certainly see a benefit for the Jewish people. Barring an open miracle, the continued prosperity in America has made it virtually impossible for the Indians to ever reestablish themselves throughout the North American continent. In Israel, however, since the land was mostly desolate for our almost 2000 year exile, Zionism was able, with no need for open miracles, to formulate the slogan: "A land with no people for a people with no land." We need to keep in mind, however, that this prophecy would almost certainly have failed unless the author of the Torah had complete control over both future history and nature!

## **VII. The Return of the Jewish People to the Land of Israel**

This may be the most remarkable of all of the prophesies in the Torah, as well as one of the most incredible events of the entire 20th century!

*...G-d your L-rd will turn your captivity, and have compassion upon you, and will return and gather you from all the nations among whom G-d your L-rd has scattered you. If your outcasts be at the utmost parts of heaven, from there G-d your L-rd will gather you, and from there He will fetch you. And G-d your L-rd will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you will possess it; and He will do you good, and multiply you more than your fathers. Deuteronomy 32:3-5*

Not only was the **physical return** of the Jewish people prophesied, the **re-blossoming** of the land of Israel was predicted as well.

*As for you, O mountains of Israel, you shall shoot forth your branches and bear your fruit, for My people Israel, for their return is close at hand. For behold, I am with you and I shall turn to you; then you shall be tilled and sown. And I will multiply men upon you, the entire family of Israel... Then I will multiply men and animals upon you, and they shall increase and be fruitful. I shall cause you to be inhabited as in your former times, and I will make you even more bountiful than you were in your beginnings. Then you shall know that I am G-d. Ezekiel 36:8-11*

*R. Abba also said – There can be no more manifest sign of redemption than this, as it is written, "As for you, O mountains of Israel, you shall shoot forth your branches and bear your fruit, for My people Israel, when their return is close at hand." Gemara Sanhedrin 98a*

*When the Land of Israel will yield its produce in great abundance, this will signal the approach of the end of the exile. There is no clearer "end" than this. Rashi (1040-1105)*

*As long as Israel does not dwell on its Land, the Land does not give of her produce, as she is accustomed. When she will begin to reflower, however, and give of her fruits in abundance, this is a clear sign that the end — the time of Redemption — is approaching, when all of Israel will return to their Land. Maharsha, R. Shmuel Eliezer Aidel's (1555-1631)*

After the initial 1300 years of prosperity in Israel, we would naturally have expected this fertility to continue. However, after the almost 2000 years of desolation, we would then have expected the land to remain barren, since presumably, this good land would have been ruined by then. And if the land was somehow still good, wouldn't we have imagined that someone else would have been able to cultivate it before almost 2,000 years had gone by?!

From a religious perspective, this is an overwhelming lesson — a powerful meta-physical connection clearly exists between the Nation of Israel and the Land of Israel! This certainly makes a lot of sense given our status as the preeminent embodiment of eternity and survival all throughout world history. This final prophecy of our unique relationship to the land of Israel, therefore, brings us full circle back to the continuing miracle of Jewish survival.

### **Coming Full Circle**

Eternal national survival, as we discussed initially, is quite rare. Even so, the Torah confidently asserts that we will be among this select group of “Eternal Nations.” However, we will do it with virtually none of the elements of nationhood which would seem to be absolute prerequisites (common land, language, culture, army, etc.) thereof. Although even a single exile from one’s own land, rare as it is, would destroy any other nation, we are assured of survival despite an unprecedented two separate exiles from the land of Israel, a complete scattering throughout the world, and a continued wandering from place to place which continues until the present day. Not only is no positive relationship prophesied to exist between the Jews and the non-Jewish world, which could serve to mitigate this enormous challenge of exile for our continued survival, but the greatest hatred the world has ever known — more universal, intense, long-lasting, and irrational than any other — is what existed instead. And, if all of this weren’t enough of a direct contradiction to our eternity, it is foretold that our numbers throughout this long exile would be kept extremely small.

Given this bizarre scenario, where mere survival itself should have been viewed as a miraculous achievement, the Torah instead tells us that we will also have a transformational impact on the entire world. Additionally, not only will our own history be remarkable in the extreme, our land will very conveniently be reserved for us all of the time that we are in exile. It will be as if a giant sign will be placed on the land of Israel, saying – “Do not disturb. Reserved for the Jewish people!” And finally, perhaps most striking of all, we are predicted to return to the Land of Israel after almost 2,000 years of exile, and the long-dormant land will once again return to its former prosperity, exclusively for the Jewish people.

The events themselves which highlight Jewish history are remarkable, both in their uniqueness as well as in their ability to navigate a myriad of obvious contradictions. Even without any prophecies at all, it would be very difficult to relate to it without positing some sort of a meta-physical explanation. Once we add in the fact that it was all prophesied in advance, over 3,300 years ago, this conclusion becomes inescapable. Therefore, the only way to properly understand Jewish history, as well as the prophecies in the Torah, seems to be to spell the word “Author” with a capital “A”, meaning that the “Hand” that wrote the Torah must be the very same Hand that has guided and continues to guide all of Jewish history up until and including the present day.