

what similar questions could be asked about any people in any period of history, but in no case are these questions more puzzling, more insistent, more urgent, than when face to face with the Jews.

The writer only knows of one answer but it is an answer of faith : Jesus Christ, " a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of His people Israel ". For a crucified people need the message of Easter Day.

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## Is there a Future for the Jews ?

BY GEORGE STEVENS

FROM the purely secularist point of view the question of a possible future for the Jewish people is bound up with the prospects of the survival of the human race as a whole. The development of nuclear weapons has placed a gigantic question mark against the whole future of humanity and recently such secular " prophets " as Bertrand Russell and Philip Noel-Baker have given expression to views of extreme pessimism in the matter. Bertrand Russell has said he considers there is a fifty-fifty chance that any human life will remain upon this planet in a hundred years' time. Noel-Baker has been still more pessimistic stating that the most probable future of the planet is to be a lifeless, radio-active mass rotating in space.

Leaving these dismal and terrifying possibilities on one side the likelihood of the Jewish race surviving as a separate entity may be argued on the basis of probabilities arising from past history. The fact that the Jewish people have shown an astonishing genius for survival, the fact that, in Disraeli's oft-quoted words, the Jew has time and time again stood at the graveside of his persecutors, might well make it seem likely that they will successfully withstand any further ordeals the future may have in store for them. Moreover, there is now for the first time for nearly two thousand years a Jewish state in existence in part of the ancient fatherland. Although the position of the State of Israel, surrounded as it is by hostile and suspicious nations, may well be regarded as precarious in the extreme, yet, in the opinion of an increasing number of unbiased observers, it has come to stay. If this is so that State would almost certainly provide a refuge for many potential victims of a future " Hitler " and therefore the likelihood of the entire people being exterminated is proportionately reduced. Thus, if the human race as a whole survives, it may be said that having regard to its past history and its present prospects the Jewish race is likely to survive at least in the foreseeable future.

Can the continued existence of the Jewish people, however, be explained on purely secular, materialistic lines? There is certainly something unique about their history. This was recently well expressed

by David Ben-Gurion, Prime Minister of Israel. Addressing a large Zionist gathering he referred to the disappearance of the ancient culture of Egypt, Babylon, Syria, and Canaan and went on to say: "It is only in one corner of the Middle East, in Israel, that there lives a people speaking the language spoken by its fathers four thousand years ago, maintaining the literature created by its prophets and sages in those far-off days, and thus preserving an unbroken tradition almost four thousand years old, although it is heir to all the modern achievements of science and technology, and has absorbed all the heritage of modern culture. Why has nothing survived of all these nations but inscriptions, tells, ruins, and temple remains, while their language, literature, and religions have vanished from the face of the earth, while the Jewish people alone has preserved the power, after thousands of years, to ingather its scattered sons and help them to strike new roots in its ancient homeland while maintaining its bond with modern culture?"

Why indeed? Most Christians would agree that only in the pages of the Bible are we likely to find the answer. In fact, the very existence of the Jewish people may be regarded as one of the most effective replies that can be offered to the suggestion that blind chance and purely material, contingent causes determine the course of human history.

This is borne out by three very different, yet each in his way representative Christian writers of our time.

Thus Karl Barth, the great Continental Protestant theologian has described the continued existence of the Jews as "the only possible natural proof of the existence of God."

Nicholas Berdyaev, the Russian Orthodox thinker, has described how as a young man he determined to test the materialistic interpretation of history by applying it to the records of one nation after another. He found that it broke down completely in the case of the Jewish people and it was this more than anything else which began to shake his faith in the Marxist interpretation of history.

Similarly, Jacques Maritain, the French Roman Catholic writer, feels compelled to speak of the "Mystery of Israel", a mystery which he compares to the "Mystery of the Church", something that is totally inexplicable in purely human terms. These modern writers recall the medieval Court Chaplain who, on being asked by his royal master for a proof of the existence of God and the truth of the Scriptures in two words, is said to have replied: "The Jews, your Majesty, the Jews".

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Once we accept the biblical revelation of God's creation of the world and man upon it, the purpose of God for the Jewish race takes its place as part of the purpose of God for humanity. The survival or otherwise of mankind is no longer a matter of chance nor is it merely dependent on the degree of man's stupidity and wickedness; it rests ultimately upon the sovereign will of an All-Wise God. The Bible never suggests that human history will go on for ever and, as the Archbishop of Canterbury said a few years ago, it is conceivable that God might allow a misuse of atomic energy to ring down the curtain when the drama of human history is over. The one thing that is

certain is that it will not happen by chance. If, then, we have reason to believe that there is a future for humanity because God's purpose for the human race is not yet exhausted we may answer the question "Is there a future for the Jews?" in the affirmative, merely because they form a part of the human family.

More than this, however, is generally intended when the question is asked. Other questions are invariably involved. Have the Jews a special assurance of survival as Jews? Are they still in any special sense the "chosen people" of God? Can the idea of a chosen people still be maintained today, and even if they were at one time "chosen" have they not long since forfeited all right to be regarded as the people of God? All these and a number of similar and closely related questions require to be examined in the light of the biblical revelation.

There can be no doubt that the idea of a "chosen people" is extremely repugnant to the modern mind. It savours of favouritism and thus to many minds seems to suggest an unworthy and sub-Christian conception of God. This is part at least of what is sometimes spoken of as "the scandal of particularity". Men may say: "How odd of God to choose the Jews", but they really think it would be extremely odd of Him to choose anyone at all!

Yet, whether we like it or not, there can be no doubt that the principle of choice, or "election", to use the more technical and still more unpopular word, runs throughout the whole of the Bible and is just as prominent in the New Testament as in the Old. In fact the entire drama of the Bible may be said to be based upon this principle.

In the book of Genesis we see the beginning of the Divine purpose. Man is created in the image of God: that is to say, endowed with reason and real, not imaginary, free-will. This involves the enormous risk of his abusing this gift which is what actually happened. Man fell, preferring his own way to the way of God and thus "Paradise" was "lost".

Immediately, however, after the account of man's fall in Genesis iii, we have the clear statement of God's intention to put matters right: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. iii. 15). Thus we see the familiar pattern developing. God endows man with free-will. Man abuses the gift. God does not prevent him since that would mean withdrawing the gift. Rather he intervenes to repair the result and, whether we like it or not, he does so through a chosen people. Israel is to be the instrument of God's redemptive work.

In Genesis we see the line narrowing through Noah, the pioneer of a new beginning after the deluge, through Shem to Abraham. The call of Abraham may be regarded as the beginning of the history of the chosen people of God, as in fact the Jews do regard it to this day. The important thing to notice is that Abraham was called and chosen. In the biblical account God takes the initiative. We are not told that in the city of Ur of the Chaldees there lived one particularly lofty and exalted soul who, by a long process of philosophical reasoning and mystical contemplation, eventually came to a far higher conception of the Divine reality than most of his contemporaries. That is, no

doubt, how a modern humanist might attempt to rewrite the twelfth chapter of Genesis. The Bible, however, states quite plainly : " The Lord had said unto Abram, ' Get thee out from thy country and from thy kindred and from thy father's house unto a land that I will shew thee '."

The words of the promise made to Abraham at the time of his call are still treasured by the Jewish people and many of them would no doubt regard them as a guarantee of their survival. The Christian, however, may well feel that the deepest significance of the words eludes the Jew until he comes to a knowledge of Christ. " I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee and make thy name great ; and thou shalt be a blessing, And I will bless them that bless thee and curse him that curseth thee and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed " (Gen. xii. 1-3).

The promise made to Abraham was repeated to Isaac his son and Jacob his grandson, and the principle of election was confirmed by the choice of Jacob rather than Esau to be the head of the new and chosen nation. Jacob, later called Israel, had twelve sons, the fathers of the twelve tribes. By the time of the death of Jacob they were already a separate people, through a curious but divinely-overruled twist of circumstances, living in Egypt where they became a nation of slaves. According to the biblical record, a deliberate and systematic attempt to exterminate them was made by the Egyptians who ordered all male infants of Hebrew birth to be drowned in the Nile. The attempt did not succeed, however, and in the providence of God the nation was rescued from slavery under the hand of Moses, the chosen deliverer and leader.

It is the great deliverance of his fathers from the land of Egypt under Moses that the Jew celebrates on Passover night, and the traditional language of the feast emphasizes its importance as a guarantee of the future survival of Israel. " At present we celebrate it here, but next year (we hope to celebrate it) in the Land of Israel. This year we are servants (aliens) but next year (we hope to be) sons of freedom ". " Hitherto Thy tender mercies have supported us and Thy kindness hath not forsaken us. O Lord, our God ! Thou wilt not forsake us in future " (Passover *Hagadah*). As John Newton sings in his old hymn : " His love in time past forbids me to think He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink ". It is not difficult to realize the strength and encouragement these words of the ancient *Hagadah* have brought to the Jewish people in times of bitter persecution, not least in our own times when the Passover was eaten in secret during the days of the Nazi attempt at extermination.

The Jew believes himself to belong to the covenant people, the people with whom God has entered into a solemn covenant ratified by blood as described in Exodus xxiv, verses 1 to 11. It may, however, be objected that Israel has broken her side of the Covenant, which is therefore invalidated. As her part of the Covenant Israel promised : " All that the Lord hath said will we do and be obedient " (Exod. xxiv. 7). Even before the time of Christ Israel had broken her side of the Covenant, as her own prophets were not slow to point out : " Which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith

the Lord" (Jer. xxxi. 32). Yet, even if Israel has been faithless, God is the Other Party to the Covenant, and He has remained faithful. Thus, it is argued, Israel still remains the people of the Covenant because of the faithfulness of God.

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So far we have suggested that the greatest guarantee of a future for the Jews lies in the fact that they are a chosen people who have been preserved by God despite many human attempts to destroy them, because His purposes for them are not yet complete. Here, however, some will certainly answer: "Granted that they were chosen by God in days gone by, have they not been cast off and rejected because of their failure to recognize Jesus Christ as the true Messiah and to believe in Him? Is there not a new Covenant which has superseded the old? Is not the Church the New Israel, and when we speak of the Jews as the 'ancient people' of God, do we not mean the 'former people'?"

Two things may be said at once in reply to this contention. First, it is strange that any believer in the New Testament should speak in this way in view of St. Paul's very definite words in Rom. xi. 1: "I say then, hath God cast away His people? God forbid. . . . God hath not cast away His people which He foreknew." At present, although the majority of the nation have "stumbled" and "fallen", there is still "a remnant according to the election of grace" (Rom. xi. 5). Moreover, even of the majority, this "stumbling" was not to be in order that they might finally fall.

St. Paul's explanation is as follows. Their "stumbling" has been permitted in order that the Gentiles may receive the message of salvation. This was true in St. Paul's own missionary experience. Having gone invariably "to the Jew first" if, in any particular place the Jews refused to listen to the Gospel, he then, and only then, went to the Gentiles. A good example is in Acts xiii. 46: "It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you (i.e., Jews), but seeing ye put it from you . . . lo, we turn to the Gentiles". This passage has sometimes been used to suggest that henceforth Paul gave up the Jews as hopeless. That this is not the case, however, can be clearly seen from Acts xiv. 1, where we find Paul and Barnabas again going first to the synagogue in Iconium where, incidentally, there were numbers of conversions among both Jews and Gentiles.

St. Paul, in his parable of the wild and natural branches of the olive tree (Rom. xi. 17-24), warns Gentile Christians not to boast presumptuously against the Jews—a warning that has, alas, often been ignored in Christian history. Furthermore, he looks forward to a final restoration of Israel which is going to bring blessings to the whole world far greater than those obtained by their fall: "Now if the fall of them (i.e., the Jews) be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness? . . . For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?" (Rom. xi. 12 and 15). Gentile Christians, it would seem, are to be humbly grateful that, as a result of the defection of the Jewish majority, they have been privileged to share in a spiritual sense, in the promises made to Abraham.

Further, they are to look forward to a time when the barrier between Jew and Gentiles will be finally broken down, the Jews as a people shall come to acknowledge Christ and Jews and Gentiles will be at one in Him : " Blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved " (Rom. xi. 25, 26). The last clause has sometimes been thought to promise the ultimate salvation of every individual Jew, an idea which has tended to blunt the keen edge of missionary endeavour among Jews. It would seem rather to mean that the entire Israel, the whole people of God, Jew and Gentile, natural and wild olive branches alike, will finally be one in Christ. Despite much popular modern talk (particularly in certain Anglican theological circles) the New Testament never speaks of a " new Israel ", a phrase often applied today to the Church. Always there is one Israel, one chosen people of God, though through His infinite mercy, Gentiles as well as Jews, spiritual as well as physical descendants of Abraham, have been brought into it. The keynote would seem to be St. Paul's words in Rom. xi. 29 : " The gifts and calling of God are without repentance ". God does not abandon His ancient people, no matter how faithless some of them may have been to Him. The survival of Israel is thus inextricably bound up with the faithfulness of God.

There is indeed a new Covenant, sealed by Our Lord with His own life-blood, of which He spoke in the upper room : " After the same manner also He took the cup, when He had supped, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood " (1 Cor. xi. 25). The parties to the New Covenant are God, the same unchanging God who made the old covenant with Moses, though now more fully revealed in Christ, and all, be they Jews or Gentiles, who by faith are children of Abraham. None of this, however, can contradict the firm declaration that God has not cast away His people.

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There remain two further questions to be considered. Has the present return of many Jews to a part of the ancient land anything to do with God's special purpose for Israel, and, if it is admitted that the Jewish people are being preserved for a special purpose, have we any clue as to what that purpose may be ?

The questions are far from easy, for they involve the interpretation of prophecy and this is a notoriously difficult subject. There are, of course, those who accept as a guiding principle that prophecy must always refer to its own time or at most to the very near future. It is difficult to see, however, how this position is reconcilable with any view of the Scriptures which regards them as authoritative and inspired. If the Gospels give us anything like a trustworthy picture of our Lord, there can be no doubt that He regarded Himself as in some sense fulfilling the prophecies of the Old Testament. Even of Moses, according to the Fourth Evangelist, He said : " He wrote of me " (John v. 46) ; and to the disciples on the road to Emmaus we are told that the Risen Christ, " beginning at Moses and all the prophets, expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself " (Luke xxiv. 27). There would seem to be therefore no good reason for

abandoning the traditional position that the prophet was enabled, by the inspiration of God, to look beyond the confines of his own time and situation and speak of events far distant to him, and probably therefore beyond his own comprehension, but already, of course, within the purpose and knowledge of Almighty God. There is, therefore, nothing intrinsically absurd in supposing that there are passages of Scripture which will find their ultimate fulfilment in events which are contemporary to us or still future. This is worth saying because an opposite conclusion is often arrived at without much discrimination as being the only position that can be considered intellectually respectable.

At the same time, specific "futuristic" interpretations of prophecy must be accepted with extreme caution in view of their diverse and often contradictory character. British Israelites, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christadelphians, and Seventh-Day Adventists all claim to base their doctrines upon a particular interpretation of prophetic Scripture, quite apart from many who would wish to be regarded as orthodox Christians but who hold views that are not accepted by the majority of their fellow-Christians.

Having said all this, however, it must be admitted that there is a very general consensus of opinion among all who accept a futurist element in biblical prophecy at all that the Holy Scriptures do foretell a return of the Jewish people to their own land before the Second Advent of Christ. Nor is this view confined to Christians. It is held by many devout Jews also (without, of course, reference to Jesus Christ). It is considerations of this sort that led so sound a scholar as Dr. M. A. C. Warren to speak recently of "the profound mystical significance of Palestine for the religious Jews".

On what, then, is this conviction of an eventual return as part of the revealed purpose of God based?

First, on the belief that the Promised Land is part of the pledge given by God to Abraham. In Gen. xiii. 14, 15 we read: "And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it and to thy seed for ever". In Gen. xv. 17-21, in the course of a description given of the solemn covenant into which God entered with Abraham, the boundaries are defined as "from the river of Egypt unto the great river the river Euphrates", though so much territory has never yet been occupied by the children of Israel. It is further maintained that the language makes it clear that the promise is "for ever" and thus unconditional, though there are certain conditions for continuous habitation of the land which have not been fulfilled. As a result the people may be scattered and the land left desolate or occupied by the heathen for long periods, but ultimately God will remember His covenant and gather His people again (Lev. xxvi. 30-44).

Further, there are many passages in the Old Testament which speak of the ingathering of the scattered people of Israel, and it is claimed that these were by no means completely fulfilled by the return from Babylon. Finally, much is made of the prophecies of Zechariah which,

it is claimed, are at all events too late to refer to the partial return. Zechariah also speaks of Jerusalem as a spiritual centre for all nations and of the Jews as fulfilling their ancient role as interpreters of God to the nations of the world. This hope is expressed in a remarkable passage (Zech. viii. 22, 23) which it is claimed has not yet been fulfilled: "Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of Hosts in Jerusalem and to pray before the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you". What are we to make of this and other similar passages, e.g., Mic. iv. 1, 2: "In the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills: and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord and to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways and we will walk in His paths, for the law shall go forth of Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem"? Are these just the pious aspirations of Jewish patriots not destined ever to be fulfilled, or are they to be regarded as having been fulfilled in a spiritual manner by Pentecost and the subsequent spread of the Gospel? On these matters each man must decide for himself, but for those who accept an authoritative view of Holy Scripture it is difficult to see how a "futurist" interpretation of these words can be ruled out altogether.

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Certainly the events of the past half-century are quite remarkable. One recent writer has referred to it as "a modern miracle", and justifies his use of the expression in these words: "The modern miracle to which we refer is the existence of the State of Israel. Young people will not understand such a claim, because they cannot realize how impossible it seemed in years gone by. Even older generations are not fully aware of the extraordinary ramifications behind the story of this achievement. The State of Israel today is the result of a movement which has defied the ordinary laws of history, geography, economic and international relations, which has gone against all the probabilities and possibilities that could humanly have been foreseen". This writer goes on to claim that it was, however, divinely foreseen, basing his claim on a literal acceptance of the prophecies already mentioned: "The prophets of the Old Testament were quite clear that at a time described as 'the last days' the exiles who had been scattered would be regathered to the mountains of Israel. . . . It was divinely intended and has been brought about through divine influence in the affairs of nations". He then proceeds to summarize some of these events. When Theodor Herzl published his pamphlet *The Jewish State* more than sixty years ago, he was expressing a traditional hope that had remained deep down in many Jewish hearts but had become "so submerged under 1,800 years of persecution and wandering that it was likely to stay there, as a tradition rather than a hope". In fact, the building of a Jewish national home in Palestine, then largely a



desolate, barren area, seemed so unlikely that Herzl at one time thought of accepting alternative suggestions such as land in British East Africa. "Then came two world wars which completely changed the situation." In the first place, they set in train a series of political events which removed some further barriers, and, in the second place, led to further waves of anti-Semitism which accentuated the urgent need of a national home. At a critical moment in the Great War of 1914-18 Dr. Weissmann, a Jewish scientist, rendered outstanding services to the British Government for which he desired no reward for himself but something for his people. As a result in 1917 the famous Balfour Declaration, viewing with favour the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine, was issued. "Shortly after, by some coincidence (!), General Allenby marched into Jerusalem to clear out the Turks."

After the war, however, it was by no means easy for the British government, as the mandatory power, to carry out the terms of the declaration issued at such a moment of crisis. Arab opposition led to a severe restriction and eventually a complete prohibition of Jewish immigration. "So it needed Hitler, in all the fury of his fire, sword, and concentration camps to bring pressure to bear on the Jews. Those who had looked upon Zionism as a wildcat dream now tried to get to Palestine as their last hope—and they flocked in, defying the blockades which caused a number to drown in sight of the Holy Land. Then came the United Nations, partition schemes, and vain efforts to get Arab agreement to the Jewish State. Finally came the great day of independence. Immediately the newborn state was attacked by the Arab nations from all sides. How it survived has been explained on military and strategic lines, but Bible students like ourselves will always think of it as a miracle." This writer concludes by saying: "Whether we believe that God is working with them, or whether we believe they have blindly followed a tradition handed down to them from their fathers, the fact remains that they are God's witnesses, witnesses to a super-normal force which has operated in them for four thousand years and still has a great part for them to play in the next chapter of the human story" (S.G.C. in *Glad Tidings*, Sept., 1960).

"Ye are my witnesses." These words would seem to explain the unique role of the people Israel in history, and it is in accordance with these words that we shall best be able to answer our further question as to what their future mission may be.

To this day they remain a reminder in the world of the reality of the God of the Bible, His faithfulness, and the demands of His law upon men and women. We may think that the pious Jew seeking to observe daily the 613 precepts into which the law has been broken down has carried legalism to excess. Nor do we forget the conflict between law and gospel fought out in the days of St. Paul. At the same time, in an age of increasing lawlessness when many are arguing that all moral judgments are relative and that there is no final standard, the Jew's emphasis on the Torah as the revealed will of a Holy God is salutary indeed.

Moreover, the Jew, like the Christian, is pledged to a doctrine of hope. Yet if he is true to his faith this hope is based, not on human wisdom or endeavour, but on the supernatural act of God, symbolized by the

coming of the Messiah. In the creed of Moses Maimonides the pious Jew still declares : " I believe that Messiah shall come, and though he tarry I will wait for him ". This corresponds to the eschatological clause in the Christian creed : " I believe that He shall come again to judge both the quick and the dead ". Some are still looking for the coming of a personal Messiah, some rather for the coming of a Messianic age. But the hope is there and the Jew, if he is true to the tradition of his people, can never accept a doctrine of despair. Even the Communist dream of the coming " classless society " originated in the perverted Messianism of a renegade Jew, Karl Marx. The tragedy is that the Jew does not know the Name of Messiah, the Name " given above every name, that at the Name of Jesus every knee shall bow " (Phil. ii. 10). If these words are to be fulfilled, the ignorance of the Jews cannot last for ever. Sooner or later they must " look on him whom they pierced ", and Jew and Gentile at last shall be one in the true Messiah, and so " all Israel shall be saved ". Faced with such a consummation, we can only echo the words of St. Paul : " O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God ! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out ! " (Rom. xi. 33, 34).