

YAD VASHEM AND THE HOLOCAUST

Tom's Perspectives

by Thomas Ice

"Whoever saves one life saves the entire world."

—Inscription on a ring given to Oscar Schindler

Last month I attended a 10-day Christian Leadership Seminar on the Holocaust and anti-Semitism at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, Israel, which is a museum and study center documenting the Nazi crime of the murder of over six million Jews. The Christian Friends of Yad Vashem hosted the conference for about 30 Christians from a number of countries, but mainly from the United States. Dr. Susanna Kokkonen, a native of Finland who is fluent in six languages, is Director of the Christian Friends of Yad Vashem, and was head of this conference. The purpose of the conference is for Christian leaders to become better informed concerning the *Shoah* (Hebrew term for the Holocaust).

THE MEMORIAL

The Hebrew term Yad Vashem is taken from the biblical text in Isaiah 56:5 that says, "To them I will give in My house and within My walls a memorial, and a name better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off." The NASB translates the Hebrew word *yad* with "memorial" and *vashem* with "name." Yad Vashem is a 45-acre campus made up of multiple memorials to the victims of the Holocaust and also houses many buildings containing research material and scholars who study, document, and teach concerning the Shoah. A little less than a million people from all over the world visit Yad Vashem annually and virtually every tour group to Israel comes there to learn about this tragic historical reality. One can access the website at the following: <http://www.yadvashem.org>. The main memorial takes one through the rise of the Nazis in the 1920s, through the wartime period, and then the conclusion and aftermath in the mid-1940s. There are also other museums like the one that deals with the one and a half children that died during this time.

The idea of building a memorial for Jews liquidated in the Holocaust is first thought to have been the idea of Mordechai Shenhavi (1900–1983) in May 1945. Shenhavi's idea for a memorial were approved by the General Zionist Council meeting in August 1945. Things did not begin to get underway until after Israel became a nation in 1948 when Ben Zion Dinur (1884–1973), an education minister in the new government was able to get legislation through the Israeli Parliament in 1953 which led to the establishment of Yad Vashem. The first building was opened on April 28, 1957 that was the first of many more to follow.

THE UNIQUENESS OF THE HOLOCAUST

While tens of millions were killed during World War II, the murder of over six million Jews was unique in relation to the deaths of others. Most of the deaths were war casualties or a persecuted class of people. However, the murder of the Jews were the only ones who were killed for simply existing as a member of a certain race—the Jewish race. Hitler wanted to wipe out every single Jewish person under his jurisdiction so all the territories under his control would be "Jew free." Hitler's viewpoint goes all the way back to the mid-1920s when he wrote his famous book *Mein Kampf* or in English: *My Struggle*. Whatever Hitler's motive for desiring the liquidation

of the Jews, it was evident early in his life and was a core value. I know from Scripture that Satan has a similar desire as exposed in Revelation 12, which is primarily speaking of a future time.

We learned at the conference that Hitler was not alone in his irrational desire to murder Jews it was embedded in the German, Austrian, and Eastern European nations. The original source for such anti-Semitism goes back to the common experience of all of Europe's medieval Roman Catholic Jew-hatred. Most of the people throughout Europe did not have to be taught by Hitler or the Nazis to hate the Jews, it was endemic in their culture for hundreds of years. When the Nazis crystalized their anti-Semitism into murdering the Jews as a virtue, they already had a willing mass of people ready to join their crusade. After all, Hitler quoted the founder of the Reformation three times in *Mein Kampf* and called Martin Luther one of the greatest Christians in all of history. It is not surprising (for the most part) the German clergy were great Hitler enthusiasts since almost all of them were liberal and held to replacement theology. It was shocking to learn that about one and a half million Jews were killed by groups and individuals from the countries that were occupied by the Third Reich. So many were willing to show the Nazis that they were on board with that aspect of Hitler's plan. So it was not just the Nazis that killed the Jews or even a small group like the SS, most of the people knew about the murders and were compliant to some degree with what happened.

It was also astounding to me to learn that the evidence supports the notion that murdering the Jews was clearly the highest priority of the Nazis, even at the expense of the war effort. The Third Reich often redirected valuable resources and manpower to develop technology and implement the murder of more Jews. To think that they used their creative minds to engineer faster and more efficient ways to kill the Jews and then to dispose of their bodies is beyond my imagination to fathom. But that is exactly what they did. They sometimes deprived their own troops of supplies and munitions in order to use their railroad system to transport Jews to their death. At the end of the war when the Nazis realized they were going to lose, they stepped up their effort to murder more Jews. They were clearly driven by their top priority, which was the murder of as many Jews as possible. Once again, such an irrational drive can only come ultimately from Satan himself and we see the world today being set-up for a similar agenda where the Jews, and I might add also true Christians, will be persecuted again.

RIGHTEOUS GENTILES

Yad Vashem has a significant section of its facility to honor those Gentiles who risked their lives in order to save the lives of Jews during the Holocaust. Most of the efforts were motivated by those who saw it as their Christian duty to help the Jews although significant help was provided by some Gentiles who were not Christian. Many have already heard of Corrie ten Boom and her book and movie called *The Hiding Place* or Oscar Schindler and the Steven Spielberg movie called *Schindler's List* both about rescuing Jews during the Holocaust. Yad Vashem had identified and honored over 26,000 Gentiles as "The Righteous Among the Nations" for their rescue efforts during the Shoah.

One of the most well known, non-Christians is Sir Nicholas Winton of England who saved 669 children in 1938 before the Nazis begin to not allow any more to leave their territories. The amazing thing about Winton was that he kept his rescue effort a secret for 40 years. Not even his wife knew about his heroics until 1988 when the BBC found out and did a special television program reuniting Winton with many of the Jewish children he had saved.

One of the more interesting examples of Christian rescue was the episode of an entire French town that saved about five thousand Jews during the Holocaust. The Village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon in Southeastern France was made up primarily of the Protestant “descendants of the Huguenots who had known long periods of persecution and massacre at the hands of the King of France and his compatriots.”¹ Under the leadership of their pastor, Andre Trocme and his wife Magda, the community held together through many efforts by the Nazis and their French collaborators to obtain the Jews dwelling in their midst. Under their leadership, the Trocmes inspired the greater community surrounding Le Chambon to become engaged in saving Jews. In spite of many efforts by the Nazis, they were never able to breakdown the community and have them handover their Jewish people.

David Brog tells of a situation that occurred in a farmhouse near Le Chambon when a Jewish person arrived to buy some eggs from the farmer. The farmer’s wife ask the Jewish woman if she was Jewish. The woman was trembling thinking that the farmer’s wife was going to report her to the Nazis. Instead, the farmer’s wife called for her husband and children to come see the guest that had arrived at their house. She said, “Look, look, my family! We have in our house now a representative of the Chosen People!” The Jewish lady was welcomed as an honored guest in their home. Brog explains: “This Jewish refugee had stumbled upon a village of Plymouth Brethren, known in French as ‘Darbyites’ . . . a settlement of religious Protestants who rejected replacement theology and believed instead that the Jews were the chosen people of God. In the midst of a genocide, the theology of the Plymouth Brethren led this Christian family to quite literally embrace the Jewish people.”²

CONCLUSION

The Holocaust very well could be the greatest example of the cruelest event in all of modern history. There is no doubt in my mind that it is part of the ongoing struggle between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman prophesied in Genesis 3:15. Revelation 12 provides an update on that great drama as the passage tells us that the worst is yet to come for the nation of Israel during the tribulation. Zechariah 13:8–9, in the context of the future tribulation the following about the nation of Israel: “‘And it will come about in all the land,’ declares the LORD, ‘that two parts in it will be cut off and perish; but the third will be left in it. And I will bring the third part through the fire, refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, and I will answer them; I will say, “They are My people,” And they will say, “The LORD is my God.”’” Unlike the Holocaust, the tribulation period will lead to the conversion of the Jewish people to Jesus as their Messiah. It will be through the fire of testing that redemption for the Jewish people will occur.

We see in our own day that a similar kind of Jew-hatred and anti-Semitism that lead to the Holocaust arising throughout most parts of the world. Apparently, this will lead to the time of tribulation that will blanket the world after the rapture. However, as Bible-believing Christians we are called to bless the Jewish people (Gen. 12:3; Rom. 11:28) and proclaim God’s love to them through the gospel made possible by our Jewish Messiah. In fact, Matthew 25:31–46 speaks specifically of this time of tribulation and how Gentile believers should attempt to bless and protect Jewish believers during that time. The Lord wants Gentile Christians to be a blessing and to evangelize Jewish people in our own day since He is not finished with them as a nation. Maranatha!

ENDNOTES

¹ Martin Gilbert, *The Righteous: The Unsung Heroes of the Holocaust* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004), p. 271.

² David Brog, *Standing With Israel: Why Christian Support the Jewish State* (Lake Mary, FL: FrontLine, 2006), p. 41.