

From Exile to Israel

In Hebrew teaching, a Jew living anywhere but in the Promised Land (the Land known today as Israel) is living in Exile or in Hebrew, Galut. One of the curses listed in Deuteronomy (28:14-68) for not obeying the One True G-d is removal from the Land of Israel:

“...and you shall be plucked from off the land...the L-rd will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other...and among those nations you shall find no rest...but there the L-rd will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, and anguish of soul. Your life shall hang in doubt before you; you shall fear day and night, and have no assurance of life...(Deut. 28 63c-66)

The Israelites experienced three specific times of exile (galut). First, the Northern Kingdom (known as Israel or Ephraim) was exiled by the conquering Assyrian Army. They were scattered throughout the world and are today known as the “Ten Lost Tribes”. The second exile was of the Southern Kingdom of Judah when King Nebuchadnezzar removed most of the people to Babylon. That exile lasted only 70 years. When they returned to the Land, they rebuilt the Temple of G-d, but they never fully returned to G-d Himself, Yahweh. They continued to worship other G-ds and to disobey G-d’s commands. That caused the third and final exile when the Roman Empire forced the Jews to leave Israel in 135 AD and renamed the Land, Palestine.

In spite of the curses and even the final exile almost 2000 years ago, G-d promised He would return the scattered people of Israel and restore their former prominence.

“Since you were precious in My sight, you have been honored, and I have loved you; therefore I will give men for you, and people for your life. Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your descendants from the east, and gather you from the west; I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’ and to the south, ‘Do not keep them back!’ Bring My sons from afar, And My daughters from the ends of the earth—(Isaiah 43:4-6)

The story of Jacob and Esau is a foreshadowing of the entire history of Israel from exile to re-gathering to restoration. It also records the hatred of Esau for Jacob that was passed down to

his descendants and will come to a head at the end of the age in G-d's dealings with Edom, Esau's descendants.

“So Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him, and Esau said in his heart, “The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then I will kill my brother Jacob.” (Genesis 27:41)

After Jacob's mother Rebecca learned of Esau's plan, she convinced his father Isaac to send Jacob away (into exile), to seek a wife from among the daughters of Laban, her brother in Haran. Rebecca thought that Esau's anger would subside in time and he would forget Jacob's offense.

But before leaving Canaan on his way to Haran, Jacob had an encounter with G-d during which He assured Jacob that He would bring him back to the Land He promised to Abraham (Genesis 17:8) and to Isaac (Genesis 26:3-4).

“...“I am the L-rd G-d of Abraham your father and the G-d of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants... Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.” (Genesis 28:13-15)

When G-d's timing was ripe for Jacob to return to the Land, Jacob's relationship with his Uncle Laban began to 'sour'. He became 'a stench in the nostrils' of Laban's sons as they began to complain about Jacob's success as a shepherd. So, in fulfillment of G-d's promise, after Jacob had spent many years in exile (galut) in Haran raising two families, the L-rd once again spoke to Jacob.

“Then the L-rd said to Jacob, ‘Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you.’” (Genesis 31:3)

As soon as Jacob made the decision to obey G-d and return to his country and his family, his Uncle Laban sought to dissuade him, first through friendly persuasion and then by pursuing him

Crossing the Jordan

Written by Victoria Radin

to prevent him from leaving. G-d, however, put fear in Laban and Jacob was free to leave. Jacob had been living in Exile for so long with his Uncle Laban in Haran (east of the Jordan), that he was presumed dead by his father's entire household. And although G-d had promised to be with him, Jacob feared facing his brother Esau because of Esau's threat on his life. Then Jacob prayed.

"... 'O G-d of my father Abraham and G-d of my father Isaac, the L-rd who said to me, "Return to your country and to your family, and I will deal well with you...Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother...For You said, "I will surely treat you well, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude..." (Genesis 32:9, 12)

G-d wanted Jacob to cross over into the Promised Land and fill the Land with his descendants. This would require Jacob to wrestle with all his fears of facing Esau and all that Esau represented before he could cross over. In preparation for his confrontation with Esau, Jacob separated from his family.

"And he arose that night and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven sons, and crossed over the ford of Jabbok. He took them, sent them over the brook, and sent over what he had. Then Jacob was left alone..." (Genesis 32:22-24a)

That night a Man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man touched the socket of Jacob's hip, it was dislocated. Even then, Jacob told the Man, *"I will not let you go unless you bless me."* The Man changed Jacob's name to *Israel and blessed him. Jacob called that place Peniel, saying,
"It is because I saw G-d face to face, and yet my life was spared." (Gen 32:30)

* The name, Jacob, means 'crooked'. The ancient root of the name, Israel would translate, *"straightened of G-d"*.

In the morning, Jacob (Israel) learned that G-d caused Esau to receive him graciously, with no threat to his life or to that of his family members. Jacob settled in the land of Canaan and filled the land with his offspring (Genesis 37–50).

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This was a literal episode in Jacob's life. But it, like many other stories in the Bible, has a broader implication for Jews today. G-d's promise to Jacob is a promise to all his descendants as well (all Jews living in Exile): When a Jew returns to Israel (and to G-d), G-d promises to be with him.

G-d told Jeremiah, "... 'the days are coming' says the L-rd, 'that it shall no more be said, 'The L-rd lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt, but, 'The L-rd lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands where He had driven them.' For I will bring them back unto their land which I gave to their fathers.'" (Jeremiah 16:14, 15)

G-d even told Jeremiah how He would bring them back to the Land:

"Behold, I will send for many fishermen,' says the L-rd, 'and they shall fish them; and afterward I will send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain and every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks.'" (Jeremiah 16:16)

Many of the scattered Jews from ancient Israel ended up in Eastern and Western Europe. When the timing of G-d was ripe for the return of the Jews to former Israel, Israel's descendants became 'a stench in the nostrils' of Germany, Russia, and all the nations where G-d had scattered them. He sent messengers first to coax them back to the former Israel. And then He sent messengers to warn them, "Go home to Israel" before the hunters came to destroy them to prevent them from returning to the Land where the blessings of G-d awaited them as Laban attempted to do to Jacob.

In the late 19th century G-d raised up Theodor Herzl who was considered to be the father of Zionism, a movement for the reestablishment and the development and protection of a Jewish nation in what is now Israel. Zionism was established by Herzl to encourage Jews to emigrate to the former Land of Israel. Herzl never lived to see the fulfillment of his dream, but his dream was passed on to others who developed a fervent hope.

Before World War II, G-d raised up a man named, Ze'ev Jabotinsky. The thing that drove Jabotinsky was "the imminence of catastrophe in Europe" as he saw what was happening in Germany when Hitler rose to power. Jabotinsky embarked on a determined evacuation

campaign to get Jews out of Europe. He went throughout central Europe calling out to all who would hear, *"Get out, save yourselves before you are destroyed, let us together break open the gates of Palestine " "Either you liquidate the Diaspora or the Diaspora will liquidate you," he cried out. "...whoever of you will escape from the catastrophe, he or she will live to see the exalted moment of a great Jewish wedding: the rebirth and the rise of a Jewish state. I don't know if I will be privileged to see it; my son will. I believe in this as I am sure that tomorrow morning the sun will rise."*

To Jabotinsky's amazement, the Jews would not listen. His was a voice crying in the wilderness. Jabotinsky died in 1940 before the state of Israel was re-born. At his funeral Commander David Raziel said, "...he saw the Jewish state from afar, but did not set his foot therein." While some Jews left Europe, most did not and quickly faced the wrath of Hitler in the ensuing years. G-d sent the fishermen before the hunters came, but only a remnant returned to the Land at that time.

Today, G-d is once again embarking on a campaign to restore the Jews to the Land of Israel. The Jews of the world and the Nation of Israel have once again become 'a stench in the nostrils' of the nations to which they were scattered. G-d is sending out messengers like Jabotinsky to tell the Jews to go back home to the Land of their forefathers.

In Europe, today, the hunters (Arabs and other anti-Semites) are already again at work to destroy the Jews. Many have heeded the 'message' of the destroyers and have left Europe for either America or Israel. But G-d will not allow Jews to leave galut (exile) in Europe for galut (exile) in America. The Anti-Defamation League reports, Anti-Semitism, the oldest form of hatred, has now moved into a somewhat alarming new global phase crossing boundaries of every type -- geographical, national, political, religious and cultural. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran repeatedly demonizes the state of Israel and openly calls for its destruction at every opportunity. Most notoriously, he described Israel as a "fake regime" that "must be wiped off the map." Others in the Islamic world do likewise.

The 'handwriting is on the wall' as we see an increase in anti-Semitism in America as well as the rest of the world. Muslims worldwide have sought to extend their hatred of Jews wherever they have influence.

"We warn the U.S. and advise her to get rid of the Jews." -- Abdallah bin Matruk Al-Haddal, Saudi preacher from the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, on Al-Jazeera TV

"Have no mercy on the Jews....Wherever you meet them, kill them." -- Dr. Ahmad Abu Halabiya, sermon at Zayed bin Sultan Nahyan mosque, Gaza

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But G-d's love for the descendants of Abraham is stronger and deeper than all the hatred of the world. In a long letter of encouragement from G-d to the exiles in Babylon at a time the Jews were in disfavor with G-d, this great love was expressed through the prophet Jeremiah: (The full letter is recorded in Jeremiah 29:3-32)

"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the L-rd, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope." (Jeremiah 29:11).

These are the thoughts of G-d and the future He has planned for Israel and the Jewish people.

"I will sow them among the peoples, and they shall remember Me in far countries; They shall live, together with their children, and they shall return." (Zechariah 10:9)

"I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob, I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together like sheep of the fold, like a flock in the midst of their pasture; They shall make a loud noise because of so many people." (Micah 2:12)

"And the ransomed of the L-rd shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

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(Isaiah 35:10)

Just as Jacob had to ‘face his fear’ of Esau, Jews today must face their fears of moving to Israel. ‘Esau’ will not welcome Jacob’s descendants back to the Land, but one thing is certain — G-d will be with those who DO obey G-d and return. The Jews who return may find themselves ‘alone’ as Jacob did at the Jordan. But those who have conquered their fears of “crossing the Jordan” into Israel, allowing G-d to change them from being an “Exile” to being an “Israeli” will see G-d face to face and not be destroyed.

Am Yisrael Chai (The People of Israel Live)