

Are God's Purpose Deterred by Political Affairs on Earth?

"And I will make of you a great name...And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:2,3)

The reality that God gave Israel, and only Israel, land has been a source of covetousness by rival peoples and nations down through time. Yet such jealousy has been based on a profound misunderstanding of the point of God's gift of land. The geographical entity of the territory of Israel was NOT for vacation purposes! Far from it. Accompanying that real estate-deed came both enormous responsibility and consternation. God's purpose for the Israelites for the world was that they would act as His mouth-piece for the surrounding nations and it was for that reason that He placed them at the crossroads between the three major continents: Africa, Asia, and Europe. God's reasoning for this location is quite apparent to anyone looking at a globe of planet Earth. The populace of civilizations are, in general, never content to stay put. Major trade routes between nations stretched all the way from Egypt to both Assyria in the northeast and Europe to the northwest. This ensured that Israel would never be either isolated or unnoticed. Its very location made it extremely valuable to the neighboring civilizations just named. Renowned New Testament scholar N.T. Wright described Israel's circumstances as follows:

"Every forty years out of the last four thousand on average, an army has rushed through [Israel], whether to conquer it, to rescue it from someone else, to use it as a neutral battleground on which to fight another army, or to take advantage of it as a neutral route for getting somewhere else to fight there instead."¹

It is really vital for you to understand that there were numerous crises in Israel's history. But in the Bible two catastrophes stand out as being the most fundamental of all. The first occurred around 587 BC when King Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian army destroyed the first Temple in Jerusalem and took Israel as captives to the city of Babylon for seventy years. The second happened in 70 AD when the Roman army under General Titus utterly destroyed the third temple, its foundation, and its surroundings which led to the complete end of the Jewish sacrificial system once and for all. The gold that melted in the destruction was officially collected by the army to fund the Roman Colosseum. Yet even though in both cases these events were predicted to end Israel's belief in God, they did not.

As for the first of the two events, they instead realized that God had promised the first Temple's demise if the Israelites did not repent of their disobedience. And in fact they turned from their former idolatry once and for all. Not only that, after their release from Babylon, Israelites move to many other places in the ancient world as a further means to bear witness to the true and living God. And as for the second of the two, the destruction of the third Temple (built by Herod the Great), it occurred only after the death and resurrection of Jesus. The point is, since Jesus dealt with the sins of the world once and for all at Golgotha (Romans 6:10), the Temple was no longer necessary to atone for our sins. Indeed, it is also the case that the train of persecutions which followed for several centuries under an oppressive Roman government led ultimately to its own destruction while the Christian Church grew and grew in numbers, clearly because of God's ongoing oversight.

I do not expect that these truths will remove our every anxiety about the present times in our nation. But I pray that you will be encouraged by the presence of God in the words of Psalms 2 and 46.

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¹ The New Testament and the People of God. (Fortress, 1992), p. 3.