

## 5 THE STATE OF ISRAEL – THE RETURN OF THE JEWS and THE HAND OF GOD

*“I will even gather you from the people, and assemble you out of all the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel” Ez. 11:17 I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, “Give them up!” and to the south, “Do not hold them back. Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth” Isaiah 43:5-6*

Two features particularly stand out in the return of the Jews to the State of Israel and indicate a divine providence and prophetic fulfilment. First, they are back to their land in large numbers and from all nations. Second, their physical absorption was nothing short of miraculous.

**1. The large scale return of the Jews from all nations** to the state of Israel after 1948 is the single biggest factor arguing the case that the 20thC witnessed God at work in history through a genuine fulfilment of biblical prophecy. Such prophecy (see texts above) made two essential claims: the Jews would be restored to their own land, and they would be gathered from all the nations where they had been exiled. Facts and figures are critical to demonstrate fulfilment, and they are readily available. The table below shows the astonishing phenomenon of the 20thC return, and is so compelling that those who doubt a prophetic fulfilment bear the onus of providing an alternative explanation. This table of the first 16 yrs of the State of Israel shows us just how many countries in the Middle East and Europe were involved in immigration, and it also shows how significant were the numbers. From 1948-62 the population of Israel rose from 650,000 to **2,050,000**.

### Return of the Jews to Israel 1948-64 (the period of foundation and consolidation)

Iran	39,000	Iraq	123,000	Germany	9,000	Tunisia	30,000	Afghanistan	4,000
Turkey	37,000	Yugoslavia	8,000	Morocco	120,000	Bulgaria	37,000	Rumania	119,000
Aden	6,500	Libya	35,000	France	4,000	Poland	104,000	Egypt	75,000
Syria	6,000	Hungary	14,000	Yemen	40,000	Czechs	40,000		

7 other European countries show lower numbers

If we were to make a similar analysis but over a longer period, namely from 1948-2003 we would find the facts still more compelling. After 1964 the return to Israel of Jews from Europe and the Middle East continued unabated. For example the number of Jews from Morocco increased to 270,000 in total, from Poland to 172,000, from Rumania to 275,000, from UK from 2,000 to 33,000, from France from 4,000 to 42,000. The major increase by far was from the former USSR as 1,100,000 Jews returned. Moreover, if we look beyond the Middle East and Europe and at the global scene there were an additional 295,000 Jews who returned to Israel from other parts of the world. The main bulk came from USA (86,000), Argentina (59,000) and S. Africa (72,000). But Jews also returned to Israel in very significant numbers from virtually every country to which they had been exiled, that is from over 80 different countries. Of particular note is the fact that this restoration brought about the rejoining of the two major Jewish groupings, the Ashkenazi (Western Jewry) and the Sephardim (Eastern Jewry) after centuries of separation. This in itself was a very distinct and unique mark of something quite extraordinary. So also was the complete evacuation of Iraqi Jews which finally brought about the end of the 2½ millennia long Babylonian exile.

In total from 1948-2003 the Jewish population of Israel grew to **over 5,000,00**, which means that **over one third of world Jewry had returned**, and the State of Israel became the predominant focus of Jewry in the modern world.

There is, therefore, a very remarkable precision between the prophetic words and the historical facts of Jewish 20thC. History. **Three essential features emerge:**

**First, the return is universal.** Jews have come literally from all the four corners of the earth. Jews have, of course, been constantly on the move throughout the last 2½ millennia of their dispersion but there has never been anything remotely like a movement which has involved Jews from all parts of the dispersion and directed them to the Holy Land.

**Second, the return is one of very significant numbers.** The 4 million Jews who have come to Israel in the last 50 yrs or so overtakes even the huge migration of Jews to the USA, when in the 50 years up to 1914 some 2 ¼ million Jews went from Russia and Eastern Europe. The return to Israel is in fact the most significant movement in terms of numbers that the world of Jewry has seen in its entire history. Not only have significant numbers come from most countries of the dispersion, but from some of the Middle Eastern countries virtually the whole of the Jewish population has come.

**Third, since 1948 the return has been marked by a breath-taking suddenness.** There was a fairly lengthy preparatory stage from the latter part of the 19thC until 1948 during which it took some 70 years for the Jews in Palestine to reach 650,00 in number, Eastern European and Russians predominating. But in the fourteen years from 1948 and to 1962 the population virtually tripled to over 2,000,000 from all across the globe. Anyone looking back from the year 1962 and recalling the situation in 1948 could be forgiven for thinking they had indeed watched a miracle rather than a normal historical process.

### Some Extraordinary Moments in the Return.

The overall picture of such historical trends is bound to cause any person versed in the prophetic promises to pause and weigh carefully the extraordinary fact of fulfilment. At the same time, however, the details also have something of a divine mark on them. The Jews of Yemen are an example. They trace their origin back nearly two millennia, during which their piety tenaciously held on to the promise of a return to Zion despite bitter persecution. In the years 1949-51 under violent persecution some 48,000 were airlifted by the Jewish Agency to Israel. This “Operation Magic Carpet” meant the Yemenites were a Jewish community virtually totally transported to Zion.

In 1948 some 30,000 dark skinned African Jews lived in Ethiopia, (the Falashas), the descendants of Africans who had been converted to Judaism in the Middle Ages and of whom there had once been some 250,000. From 1981-83 some 9,000 were taken

out by the Jewish Agency, over 5,000 of them by airlift (“Operation Moses”). A further 14,000 Falashas were airlifted from Addis Ababa in 1984 from under the noses of a besieging rebels (“Operation Solomon”).

“Operation Ali Baba” from Iran was a further airlift of Jews who were totally blocked in by an Arab blockade from any other form of travel.

In all these cases the commitment and tenacity of the Israeli authorities along with the brilliance and competence of their actions, not to mention the cost, points to a most extraordinary and unusual dynamic behind the restoration process of “Aliyah”.

## **2. The Miracle of Integration**

If we might legitimately describe the extent of the Jewish return as miraculous, we might also describe as miraculous the successful absorption and integration of such a vast influx by a very small state with minimal resources and under grave economic and military threat.

Mass immigration was crucial both for the defence and the populating of the new Israel, and one of the first acts of the new State of Israel was the granting of the right of return to any Jew from whatever country. Such a declaration, however, involved huge social, economic, financial and logistical problems and entailed vast risks. Israel in 1948 was only just finding its feet with its independence and its new national institutions. No one knew how big the response might be; it could be overwhelming.

A serious complicating factor was that the hundreds of thousands of Jews who began to make their way to Israel were derelict and poverty stricken, being initially survivors of the European war and later refugees forced out of Middle Eastern Arab countries. As one historian remarked, “*Even more than the hostility of the neighbouring Arab states, it was the influx of these rudderless derelicts that threatened to overwhelm the Jewish Republic from the very moment of its birth*”. They had little or no resources of their own, and the very process of getting them to Israel was enormously costly. Not only did much of the transport have to be provided, but in a great many cases they had to be “bought”. The Falasha immigration involving just 30,000 Jews cost millions of dollars in airlifts and also millions of dollars paid to government figures in Ethiopia to persuade them to let Jews go freely. Similarly, there was no free emigration from the European Communist states; the Hungarians wanted \$80 a Jew, the Rumanians \$100 and Bulgarians \$300. In the end, mainly through USA Jewry, \$5 million was paid to Rumania and Bulgaria for 160,000 to emigrate.

Once in Israel the task was to house them, find them productive work in a small country with sparse resources, provide medical care and education, build essential infrastructure and integrate many very different nationalities and languages. The first 100,000 were Displaced Persons from refugee camps in war-torn Europe, presenting a huge rehabilitation task, many being chronically sick, broken, traumatised and beyond long term self support.

The idea of finding the resources for doubling or tripling the population in 10 years in a constructive manner would have seemed utterly beyond reason in 1948. Israel lacked vital raw materials for industrial development, especially oil and iron. Industry required expensive imports, technical expertise was lacking, the development of the Dead Sea area minerals and the infrastructure of roads, ports and shipping was rudimentary. Agriculture faced massive problems: the land had still largely to be reclaimed from disuse, the challenge of the desert in the Negev was huge, and the major problem of water for irrigation, had still to be solved. All this required huge investment.

However, all this had to be achieved at a time when Israel faced the very heavy demands for national defence against a real and immediate possibility of a second Holocaust at the hands of the surrounding Arab nations. Arab intent to destroy Israel did not end with the armistice of the 1948 War of Independence; it only hardened. Israel would not be really safe until the mid 60s. This meant there was not only a huge drain on Israeli resources to purchase arms, but the Arab world and its supporters were fully intent of effecting an economic blockade against the new state in an attempt to strangle its agriculture and new industries by removing their markets. Controlling oil supplies the Arab nations could even put economic pressure on Western states to join them. The Arabs sealed all borders with Israel at a time when Israel was utterly dependent on exports to pay for life-giving imports.

The resettlement process, inevitably, was never without its flaws; many spent many months in what was virtually refugee accommodation, cheap temporary huts, with long waits for work and permanent housing. As a consequence considerable numbers moved back out of Israel altogether. With so many previous different nationalities among the Jews there was inevitably jealousies and friction, especially between East and West Jewry. There was friction between secular and religious factions. None the less the ultimate result was eventually a largely cared for, productive and united nation with great desire to succeed. Roads were built, large tracts of land were reclaimed and hundreds of miles of new pipeline distributed the waters of the upper Jordan area to the population and to the new agricultural areas. New towns went up and the ports of Askalon and Eilat were built. Massive advances were made in scientific and technological expertise. On any criterion the first ten years of resettlement constituted an astounding achievement against extreme odds, and for many it pointed all too clearly to the hand of divine providence.

How did this happen? Where did the massive financial provision come from? Personal Christian testimony is never short of instances of divine provision at difficult times, and discovering national provision is essentially no different. Certainly evidence abounds in the story of the settlement of Israel’s immigrants of extraordinary provision. A large flow of monetary gifts came especially from USA, some \$35 million annually. Created by the 19thC persecution in Eastern Europe and Russia, Jewry in the USA became an essential buttress of the State of Israel in the latter part of the “20thC. It also enabled the Jews to float bonds and raise funds for investment. USA Jewry was a major item in divine planning. A very unusual provision came from West Germany, whose Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, offered to make reparations to the Jews in Israel, a sovereign and unexpected gesture which brought in massive sums of \$120 million per annum in a very critical decade.

Two other features are worth noting which seem very much to have a divine stamp. First, though the influx was massive it was in a sense controlled, for the huge inflow of one million Jews from the USSR was held back until the 1970s by Russian policy decisions. Had it come in the first two decades of Israel’s history it undoubtedly would have swamped the country. Second, though the 1920s and 30s had been very difficult times for the Jews in Palestine, they were the times when the embryo national institutions had been providentially born to form the skeleton of the new state. Flimsy though it was, it was just sufficient to take the weight of a rapidly growing independent state.

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