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Israelnews, December 2010

Born in Bethlehem of Judea

From grandeur to glory

Of the architectural masterpieces built by Herod the Great during his three decades as king of Israel, none is more awe-inspiring than the resort-fortress he constructed on the edge of the Judean wilderness and named after himself: Herodium. Herod's most famous project was the expansion of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. But Herodium held an honored place in his heart. Poised atop a man-made mountain nearly 2,500 feet high, Herodium afforded the king a panoramic view of his domain, including Jerusalem.

Only three miles from Herodium lay a small Jewish village named Beit Lechem ("House of Bread" in Hebrew). Bethlehem was a world removed from Herod's opulence. Populated by the lowest strata of Roman society—shepherds and other common folks—likely no more than 300 people lived in the community at the time.

Herod was entombed at Herodium in 4 B.C. Probably two years earlier, perhaps in the spring when shepherds remained in the field lambing their sheep, an uncommon child was born to devout Jewish parents in Bethlehem. They had taken refuge in a borrowed stable—like a cave beneath a home where the animals were kept—and placed their son in a feeding trough. Though he was truly of royal descent, his arrival was attended by livestock and shepherds. Rather than costly incense, the pungent smells of a stable filled the room.

The shepherds, who were told of Jesus' birth in nearby Bethlehem, would have seen Herodium towering in the distance. What a contrast! One, a monument to self-exaltation; the other, a testament to the self-condescension of a loving God Who, in accord with His word, sent His son to remedy the fractured human condition inherited from Adam.

Although Jesus was "the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of His nature" (Hebrews 1:3), He did not aggrandize Himself, but humbled Himself and took on the role of a servant (Philippians 2:8)—first to the Jewish people, "on behalf of God's truthfulness, to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs," but also to the gentiles, that they "might glorify God for His mercy" (Romans 15:8-9).

Herod called himself "the Great," and lorded it over people. Jesus declared, "I am gentle and humble in heart; learn of me and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:29). Herod's kingdom was built of might, and the monuments raised to himself. Jesus proclaimed kingship and spent His life "raising" disciples [—living testaments instead of stones.]

Bethlehem's child fully reflected the character of the God of Abraham—a God Who, though high and exalted, "hath respect for the lowly" (Psalm 138:6 KJV). **The spirit of the true and living God always seeks out the low places.** He is a "coming-down" God, passionate in pursuit of a people to partner with Him in His redemptive agenda for the earth.

So when this God sent His Anointed One with good news for the humble (Isaiah 61:1), it was not to Herodium but to Bethlehem that He came. The contrast could not be sharper. In the words of the biographer Matthew: "Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king" (Matthew 2:1).

(Excerpts from Dr. Dwight A. Pryor's article From grandeur to glory. Published in the Jerusalem Post Christian Edition, December 2010. The main heading added and edited for clarity. Dr. Pryor is the founder of the Center for Judaic-Christian Studies in Dayton, Ohio. Visit www.jcstudies.com.)

The Vatican reverses into a darker age

New replacement theology—Palestinianism

The following excerpts from the article by Melanie Phillips (FamilySecurityMatters.org) are republished as a current news item. They do not necessarily reflect religious, denominational or political views of the board or staff of Christian Friends of Israel—USA.

One of the most disturbing features of the visceral hostility to Israel displayed by the Anglican Church is its underlying revival of replacement theology, or supersessionism—the ancient Christian calumny that, because of the denial of the divinity of Christ, the Jews have forfeited God’s promises, which [the Church believes] have been transferred to Christians. This pernicious doctrine was the principal motor behind the medieval Christian pogroms against the Jews and persisted until the Holocaust, after which it went underground until it was revived in recent years and fused with Palestinianism. As a result, some Anglican theologians now claim that God’s promise to the Jews of the land of Israel is forfeit and has passed instead to the Palestinians.

Until now, the Catholic Church seemed to have wanted to bury this doctrine of replacement theology, with the Second Vatican Council showing an awareness of the role of Christianity in the persecution of the Jews and an apparent desire to put an end forever to the theology that had fueled it. But now Rome has reversed itself. At a Vatican press conference on October 23, following a communiqué demanding that Israel accept UN resolutions calling for an end to its “occupation” of Arab lands, bishops appeared to jump from the “occupation” to Israel itself and from politics to theology.

No longer a chosen people?

The Jerusalem Post Reports: “The Holy Scriptures cannot be used to justify the return of Jews to Israel and the displacement of the Palestinians, to justify the occupation by Israel of Palestinian lands,” Monsignor Cyril Salim Bustros, Greek Melkite Archbishop of Our Lady of the Annunciation in Boston, Massachusetts, and president of the ‘Commission for the Message,’ said at October 23’s Vatican press conference. “We Christians cannot speak of the ‘promised land’ as an exclusive right for a privileged Jewish people. This promise was nullified by Christ. There is no longer a chosen people—all men and women of all countries have become the chosen people. Even if the head of the Israeli state is Jewish, the future is based on democracy. The Palestinian refugees will eventually come back and this problem will have to be solved,” the Lebanese-born Bustros said.

Where to start to proclaim the truth?

1. The Bible was not used to justify the return of Jews to Israel. The justification agreed upon by the world was the unique *historic* claim to the land of Israel by the Jews, who were the only nation for whom it had ever been their ancestral homeland.
2. There was no ‘displacement of the Palestinians’ when modern Israel was formed. The Arabs tried to displace the Jews and failed. Many of the area’s Arabs fled the fighting, intending to return as victors. They lost.
3. It is not clear whether Bustros is claiming merely that Israel’s “occupation” of the disputed territories is unjustifiable, or whether the whole of Israel is “occupied” unjustifiably by the Jews. Taken as a whole, his remarks would seem to be implying the latter. He, thus, seems to be saying that Israel itself is an illegitimate [nation] and therefore should no longer exist as a Jewish state because the Jews have no right to their own country.
4. The reason Bustros says the Jews have no right to their own country is not political but theological, because he denies that the Jews are the “chosen people”; he claims that this designation has been nullified by Christ, thus making all people chosen. This makes very little sense: it does not explain why, since other people are allowed to have their own nation states, the Jews alone should be singled out to be denied their historic national homeland.

Is this merely a rogue outburst by a partisan bishop? If so, the Vatican must immediately distance itself from these remarks. If it does not, it would seem that the Vatican has taken a giant step backwards into a much darker age.



Pope Benedict XVI, the head of the Catholic Church and Sovereign of the Vatican City State, visited Israel in May 2009.

Israel – A Jewish nation

Crowley: More or less as a Jewish State

In a State Department briefing with reporters in Washington in October, spokesman P. J. Crowley acknowledged that the U.S. regarded Israel “more or less as a Jewish state.” Crowley’s statement came in response to a follow-up question about an offer from Israel’s Prime Minister to renew the freeze on Jewish construction in Judea and Samaria by sixty days—in exchange for *formal recognition by the Palestinian Authority of the State of Israel as a Jewish state*. Why should this be such an earth shattering declaration? Joshua Teitelbaum writes in the Jerusalem Viewpoint Series for October 11, 2010:

“According to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the real root of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians had been their ongoing refusal [by Palestinians] to recognize the right of the Jewish people to a state of their own in their historic homeland, and he has singled out this issue as a key ‘prerequisite for ending the conflict.’ Netanyahu’s proposal puts back on the global agenda a fundamental Jewish national right that was once axiomatic, but today is rarely mentioned.”

As much as this issue is a *global agenda*, the right of the Jewish people to their historic homeland should also be high on the Christian agenda. Sadly, it is not so in many sectors of the Church. The Christian West is so hostile toward the Jewish people, despite the fact that the printed Bible has been among us for several centuries!

His unbreakable covenant

It is futile to try to find Biblical proof that the Almighty rejected His people. At the same time, there is abundant evidence to the contrary. There is ample evidence that God assured the Children of Israel that they would be punished for their disobedience (“... I will appoint terror over you...and set my face against you...” Leviticus 26:14–17). “Yet for all that,” says the Lord (vs. 44–45) “I will not cast them away, nor shall I abhor them, to utterly destroy them and break My covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God. But for their sake I will remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am the Lord.”

Only a little effort will reveal the amazing, promised faithfulness of our God to His ancient covenant people. He promised never to abandon them for their sake, because He loves them with an everlasting love, and for the sake of His

Holy Name. This promised faithfulness by God toward Israel should be a constant cause for rejoicing among Christians, since in His faithfulness to the Jewish people is our eternal assurance that He will also remain faithful toward the Gentiles whom He grafted into the ancient tree (Romans 11:16–24).

Strategic praise and prayer points

- Please pray that God would strengthen and multiply the supporters of Israel among the nations.
- Please pray for God to strengthen Prime Minister Netanyahu’s political resolve as well as his own personal commitment to Eretz Israel.
- Please pray for a strong political support of Prime Minister Netanyahu within the Knesset to stand against international pressure and pressure from the Left.
(Excerpts from Frank & Karen Selch’s Watchman’s Prayer Letter, November 2010.)



Herzl’s portrait in the Independence Hall in Tel Aviv

A State for all the Jewish People

Prime Minister Netanyahu began his parliamentary speech (October 11, 2010) by stating that it was “not a change that the portrait of the State visionary, Benjamin Ze’ev [Theodor] Herzl, hangs here on the wall of the Israeli Knesset. In 1896, Herzl wrote in his book, *The Jewish State*, that the ‘Jews who are seeking a state will have a state. Finally, we will live as free people on our own land.’”

“In 1947, on the eve of the establishment of the State of Israel, David Ben Gurion wrote in his diary: ‘The state that will be established will be Jewish in its purpose, designation and objective; not a state of those Jews who reside in the country but a state for the Jews, for the Jewish people. The State of Israel is, therefore, both, the nation-state of the Jewish people and a democratic country for all its citizens; Jews and non-Jews alike, enjoying full equal rights,’” stated Netanyahu. *(Excerpts: October News Update by David Dolan.)*

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