

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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The Curse of Anti-Semitism

In 2005, historian Paul Johnson published an important article on anti-Semitism in the journal *Commentary*. He defined anti-Semitism as “an intellectual disease, a disease of the mind, extremely infectious and massively destructive. It is a disease to which both human individuals and entire human societies are prone.” After the destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 BC and the Southern Kingdom of Judah in 586 BC, the Jews were dispersed throughout the eastern Mediterranean. After Rome’s brutal destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, the final, great diaspora unfolded with Diaspora Judaism becoming the norm. Jews were now dispersed on every major continent and yet were able to maintain a distinct social and religious identity. Over the last 2,000 years, anti-Semitism has continually raised its ugly head virtually everywhere. As Johnson comments, there is a “fundamental irrationality” to anti-Semitism: “It is hard to point to a single occasion when a wave of anti-Semitism was provoked by a real Jewish threat (as opposed to an imaginary one) . . . In all its myriad manifestations, the language of anti-Semitism through the ages is a dictionary of non-sequiturs and antonyms, a thesaurus of illogic and inconsistency.”

Johnson offers several key historical examples of his thesis:

- Spain. Through a series of acts in the 1490s, centralized in the horrific Spanish Inquisition, virtually all Jews were expelled from Spain, thereby destroying the center of the rich diaspora Jewish culture and depriving Spain of the expertise and experience of Jewish bankers and finance specialists. The end result was the financial collapse and bankruptcy of Spain and its eventual decline as a major world power.
- In the late 19th century, anti-Semitism deepened in France, culminating in the famous Dreyfus affair, where a famous French Jewish military officer, Alfred Dreyfus, was convicted of spying for Germany and sent to Devil’s Island. Despite obvious evidence demonstrating his innocence, the French general staff refused to act. Anti-Semitic riots broke out, and a purge of all Dreyfus sympathizers ensued in the French army and government. Although Dreyfus was eventually pardoned in 1899, such anti-Semitism seriously weakened the French military and government for several decades.
- Under Czarist Russia, beginning with Catherine the Great in the 18th century and on into the 20th century, Russia adopted a decidedly anti-Semitic set of policies and then official pogroms that forced Jews out of Russia, many of them migrating to Britain and the United States. In the 1890s, the Czarist secret police, anxious to prove the Jewish threat

to Russia, fabricated *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a tale supposedly documenting an international Jewish conspiracy. In 1921, the London *Times* proved incontrovertibly the fabrication and forgery of the *Protocols*.

- The modern epitome of anti-Semitism is of course Hitler's Germany, which became obsessed with anti-Semitism and produced the Holocaust. It also led to the cataclysmic invasion of Russia in 1941, aimed at providing "lebensraum" for the Aryan race, after the area was to be cleansed of Jews and Slavs. Hitler's madness destroyed an entire generation of Germans and produced the most horrific war in human history.
- Johnson convincingly argues that anti-Semitism "has been the official ideology of the Arab world; its practical objective has been the destruction of Israel and the extermination of its inhabitants . . . [B]y allowing their diseased obsession to dominate all their aspirations, the Arabs have wasted trillions in oil royalties on weapons of war and propaganda . . . Yet still the Arabs feed off the ravages of the disease, imbibing and spreading its poison. Even as they keep alive the *Protocols* itself, now published in tens of millions of copies in major Arab capitals, they have embellished its lurid fantasies with their own homegrown mythologies of Jewish wickedness. Recently the *Protocols* was made into a 41-part TV series, filmed in Cairo and disseminated throughout the Muslim world." Bret Stephens of the *Wall Street Journal* comments on the results of this Arab obsession: "Today there is no great university in the Arab world, no serious indigenous scientific base, a stunted literary culture. In 2015 the US Patent Office reported 3,804 patents from Israel, as compared with 364 from Saudi Arabia, 56 from the United Arab Emirates, and 30 from Egypt."

In God's promise to Abram (Genesis 12:1-7), the father of the Jewish people, He declared that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars and the sand, that He would give him land and that He would bless the world through Abram. This three-fold promise is called the Abrahamic Covenant and it provides the key framework for explaining how God has dealt with Israel throughout its long history. Connecting Genesis 15:17-21 with 12:1-7 is critical, for these verses describe how God "cut a covenant" with Abram. In the ancient world, especially the ancient Akkadian world from which Abram came, animals were killed, cut in two, and their respective parts were then laid opposite one another. The parties making the covenant then walked between them together, signifying that if either party broke the covenant, that party would become as dead. However, in this narrative, God (in the symbolic form of the oven and the torch) walked between the severed animals alone. God, who is holy and perfect, was binding Himself to this covenant. He would fulfill His unconditional and eternal covenant promises, for His promises to Abram and his descendants are forever. In the narrative (15: 6), it says that "Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness."

In Genesis 12:3, God also made this profound promise to Abram: "I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse" [ESV]. Then God adds, "All the families of the earth shall be blessed" [ESV]. This promise of God is central to understanding God's dealings

with humanity. Those who bless and honor Abram (later called Abraham) and his descendants will experience God's blessing. Those who do not will experience God's curse. The disease of anti-Semitism bears this out. Those who have persecuted, killed and dishonored the Jews have experienced God's curse. Furthermore, the blessing that "the families of the earth" will experience is the blessing of salvation offered in and through Jesus Christ (see Galatians 3:8-9). Jesus Christ was a Jew and He declared to the Samaritan woman that "salvation comes through the Jews" (see John 4:22).

The horrible disease of anti-Semitism within the context of the Abrahamic Covenant goes a long way to explaining the demise of Spain, Czarist Russia and Hitler's Germany, as well as the tragedy encompassing the entire Arab world today. We who represent Christ must never embrace or excuse the sin of anti-Semitism.

See Paul Johnson, "The Anti-Semitic Disease" in *Commentary* (1 June 2005) and Bret Stephens in the *Wall Street Journal* (16 August 2016).