

THE MINUTE HAND OF HISTORY

MY FRIENDS, when that great leader Mr. David ben Gurion blew the dust of ages from the ancient flag of Israel and caused its eloquent symbolism to flutter once again in the international breezes of this world's contemporary history, he set up an ensign that became the cynosure of all those whose eyes of understanding had been enlightened by the Divine Scriptures.

Few themes are so interesting and certainly, in my judgement, none so important as the theme we now enter together in this message wherein I begin a series of talks on the wonderful prophecies of יחזקאל, Ezekiel, as they appear in our own Jewish Scriptures so often misnamed the "Old Testament" but which we people of Israel know more affectionately as the Tenach.

Together, we shall consider Ezekiel's prophecies as they relate to the restoration of Israel coincident with the rising menace of a great godless confederacy, the centre of which is Divinely revealed as being just north of the Holy Land.

The importance of the subject calls for poise and balance in its consideration; therefore, avoiding unwarranted sensationalism and unworthy extravagance, I will seek to lead your thoughts along sober and trustworthy highways.

I have entitled this first address "The Minute Hand of History" and I invite you to enter the subject through twin facts, irrefragable and indisputable, and of such significance and importance as to cause them to assume the appearance of two enormous pylons dominating the approach to our whole present theme.

The first unshakeable pylon of fact to which I direct your concentrated attention is that on the fifth day of Iyar, 5708, at about 4 o'clock Israel time, towards the evening of the fourteenth day of May in the year 1948 of the Gregorian Calendar, מדינת ישראל — the State of Israel — was proclaimed.

It was to come to life at one minute past midnight on the 15th, that is, at 6:01 p.m. Eastern Daylight Saving Time in U.S.A. Thus, when it was 6 p.m. in Washington, the British Mandate expired after 26 years duration and at 6:01 p.m. the new-old State of Israel came into existence. At 6:11 p.m. — within ten minutes — the United States accorded its official recognition to the new State.

After two thousand years of exile and statelessness, the twelve tribes of Israel, now known more commonly as the Jewish people, had a national home again!

If we can recapture but for one moment the lost art of meditation, that same captive moment will be sufficient to convince us that in the reestablishment of the State of Israel we are confronted with a most amazing and wonderful event, an event which — if standing apart, aloof and isolated — would possess in itself, intrinsically, sufficient of the phenomenal to cause us all to raise our collective eyebrows in the liveliest astonishment.

Just look at the dark and sombre background against which this first dazzling fact is silhouetted. Two thousand years ago a people were Divinely expelled from their land and they began a long, hopeless, stateless trek down the ages of time.

Insecurity was their only guarantee; uncertainty was their only shadow of stability; unkindness their major balm; hate their constant travelling companion, and fear their very food!

Thus, down the long weary centuries trudged the haunted, hunted, harassed Hebrews; and every step they took seemed but to stamp into even harder hopelessness the surface ground of future restoration prospects.

Then, suddenly, unexpectedly, out of rumours and counter-rumours, manoeuvres and counter-manoevres, pressures and counter-pressures, and in the very agony of war, Israel was reborn!

After two thousand years! Oh, that I had the time and the ability to portray adequately the unsurpassed historical wonder of this first pylon of fact that it may take its proper place in your consciousness and be recognized adequately for what it really is — a miracle of history!

In the historical landscape, therefore, this reappearance of Israel is a commanding pylon, large enough to cast a most prolonged and arresting shadow over the total world vista.

But this first fact, already of sufficient magnitude, assumes titanic significance and appears in altogether new dimensions when canopied by the golden sublimity with which I now choose to enshrine it for you.

My friends, this event which punched a hole through the blackness of 1948, admitting the light of a new hope to our Jewish people, was an event well within the content of Divine predictive prophecy!

Don't let this notable fact slip past your conscious and alert observation. Rolling ages before the event, the Holy Spirit-inspired prophets of Israel had prepared us for it!

That great German metaphysician Hegel declared that the history of the Jews was an enigma to him, a problem that he could not solve.

Had Hegel only realized that the history of Israel was incontrovertible evidence of the validity and truth of the predictive prophecy of the Bible he would have had the answer to his quandary within his very grasp.

May we, therefore, not fail to grasp it; moreover let us not fail to link it, too, with the realization that the whole history of Israel, both before and after the גלות, the Dispersion, the scattering among the nations, is similarly the subject of prophecy in much detail. The actual physical, spiritual and moral condition of our Jewish nation and people down the long rolling centuries right up to this present time runs exactly parallel with Bible prophecy; we conclude, then, with every reasonable and logical justification, that only Omniscience could have foreseen and foretold it.

Will you place, therefore, this second pylon of fact in juxtaposition and relevancy with the first and you will have a gateway of approach and entrance into the knowledge and understanding of the Divine plan and purpose in human history.

The reappearance of the State of Israel is an event the implication of which is so momentous, so portentous that only the spectacular, unprecedented billowing mushroom of the hydrogen bomb itself could possibly serve to typify it.

If the first fact was the miracle of history, the second is the history of miracle and the two facts when taken together should excite our ardent curiosity and provoke our intent inquiry; for surely here is satisfactory evidence of the Divine Hand in human history.

I agree with Carlyle when he says, "All history ... is an inarticulate Bible." (Carlyle, Latter Day Pamphlets) Yes, indeed, the rapport between the Bible of the Jews and the history of the Jews is amazing; yet it is even more amazing that very few of our Jewish people themselves understand either that history or that rapport.

It is my earnest hope that these messages will remedy that defect where it exists among our people of Israel, and will also excite the warm love and sympathetic understanding of non-Jewish folk everywhere.

Let us all learn the lessons which lie behind the subject of Divine prophecy; let us all view with adequate awe the fact that the initial loss of the statehood of Israel was prophesied; the destruction of the Temple in the year 70 of the Common Era was prophesied; the scattering among the nations was prophesied; yes, even anti-Semitism was prophesied; the return to the land was also prophesied — and that brings us right up to this present moment, doesn't it?

But it does something more. Or, it should do something more. It should constrain us — nay, indeed compel us — to enquire, "Is there yet more prophesied? What is to be the future of the little newly-reborn State of Israel? From whence comes Israel's greatest peril; from the east, from the west, from the south or from the north?"

If you will grant me the pleasure and the privilege of your regular company, we shall, together, explore this fascinating and vital subject to a Biblical and, hence, satisfactory conclusion, and of prophecy — Biblical prophecy — we shall be able to cry in the words of Byron:

"Be thou the rainbow to the storms of life!

The evening beam that smiles the clouds away

And tints tomorrow with prophetic ray! (Byron, The Bride of Abydos, Canto II)

Dr Lawrence Duff-Forbes

(1900–1964)

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This article is an extract from the very popular radio series, "Treasures From Tenach", which are also transcribed. Both audio (click MP3 tab, then "001minutehandofhistory.mp3", and transcriptions are available for free download at www.thevineyard.org.au