



The Untold Story*

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They are a minority – they always have been. Their first national leader described them as the “smallest of peoples” and that assessment remains true today more than 3,500 years later (Deut.7:7). In the world’s population of more than 6 billion, they are a mere handful comprising only one-fifth of one percent. Despite their modest number, however, life on planet earth would be drastically different without them. In fact, their largely overlooked contributions are blessings enjoyed by all who live in the Western world.

Spiritual Blessings to the World - Monotheism

Their legacy began over 4000 years ago when God entered into a unique relationship with Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees. Calling him to leave his hometown, God made four unconditional promises including the promise that through the lineage of Abraham, all families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3). Abraham’s relationship with God was not a modification or evolution of contemporaneous worship, but distinct from everything else around him. When Abram obeyed God’s call, he not only walked away from a sophisticated cosmopolitan city, he also turned his back on the prevailing worldview.

Archeologists, unearthing bricks inscribed

with the word Hur, connect Abraham’s hometown with the god Hurki identifying the ziggurat at Ur as a major center of moon-worship in the ancient world.¹ Every city had a ziggurat that was as important to the religious landscape in Mesopotamia as the cathedral was to medieval Europe.² The predominant Sumerian civilization of Abraham’s day venerated four principle gods corresponding to sky, air, water and earth. In addition to the lesser gods associated with the sun, moon and fertility, they worshipped more than 3,000 local deities.³

It was a confusing, chaotic and superstitious existence with city-states continually at war defending the honor of their regional gods. Failure to appease the gods they knew and the possibility of offending those they didn’t, contributed to a life of helpless desperation as illustrated in Sumerian poetry:

“The god whom I know or do not know has oppressed me;

The goddess whom I know or do not know has placed suffering upon me.

Although I am constantly looking for help, no one takes me by the hand;

When I weep they do not come to my side.”⁴

Amidst this hopeless milieu, the God of Abraham revealed His plan for blessing the whole world. Although the Bible records that men like Job and Melchizedek worshipped God, they were islands in the sea of idolatry that threatened to drown out what little knowledge of God remained.⁵

In subsequent years, God continued to unfold His plan first to Abraham’s son Isaac and then grandson Jacob, who was later renamed Israel. Israel fathered twelve sons who became the twelve tribes of Israel. Following 400 years of bondage in Egypt, the fledgling nation of Israel led by Moses, met at Mount Sinai where God gave the Law and principles to govern

them as a people. The God of Abraham required righteousness, justice and moral accountability and the people agreed to serve Him. The Great Shema: Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One!, became the central pillar to their national identity (Deut. 6:4). Practicing monotheism in a world dominated by polytheistic ideology and a glut of man-made gods, Israel was unique.

Spiritual Blessings to the World – The Bible

As God’s exclusive people, the nation of Israel became the vehicle for recording God’s revelation to man, which explains why our Bible is distinctly Jewish. The Bible is filled with Jewish names, places and events that center in the land God gave Israel. The Hebrew Scriptures comprising our Old Testament communicate the moral values and worldview foundational to Israel’s way of life as God’s Chosen People and the Judeo-Christian ethic that most take for granted in the Western world. Unlike the surrounding nations that



saw life as nothing more than an unending natural cycle over which their gods had little or no control, Israel served YHWH, the transcendent God who had a plan and purpose for His creation. This fact becomes apparent as the biblical narrative unfolds.

The Hebrew Scriptures reveal a personal God, who unlike the deities of surrounding nations required righteousness, justice and moral accountability. Through His revelation, God taught Israel how to worship and live. The Bible alone describes God's creation of the cosmos in six literal days along with the singular act of making man in His own image. Without the context of special creation, the uniqueness of man as a complex being capable of contemplating abstracts such as beauty, love, worship, as well as his own meaning and existence is a mystery. The God of Israel instituted and defined marriage as a life-long union between a man and a woman designed to ensure stability in the home. Likewise, the concepts of justice, social responsibility, respect for life and precepts regulating human government outlined in Scripture provide a foundation for orderly social structure. The introduction of sin, the reality of good and evil, as well as man's fallen condition are honestly explained with the assurance that evil will ultimately be eradicated in accordance with God's will and purpose.⁶

Meticulous methods used by Jewish scribes copying the Hebrew Scriptures throughout successive generations resulted in a carefully preserved error free Hebrew text. Using a series of checks and counterchecks, they were able to maintain amazing accuracy. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls underscores the precision used in copying the text. Among the findings was a complete Isaiah scroll along with fragments representing 21 additional copies. Dated around 100 B.C., this copy of Isaiah predates the earliest known manuscript (Masoretic text) by almost 1,000 years and may have actually been in use at the time of Christ. Incredibly, other than spelling and stylistic changes, there were no significant variations between the Isaiah scroll and the book of Isaiah as it appears in the Masoretic Text or King James Version of the Bible.⁷

The New Testament is also distinctly Jewish consisting of writings by men who were all Jewish with the possible exception of Dr. Luke, and the canonized New Testament was accepted by a predominantly Jewish church before the end of the first century. We as evangelicals share the Bible with the Jewish people, and the New Testament is incomplete without the Old. Almost all major doctrines central to biblical Christianity were first revealed to Jewish writers and included in the Old Testament long before the inauguration of the church.

Temporal Blessings— Humanitarian

During 2,500 years of the Diaspora, the Jewish people have been scattered to nearly every region of the globe. Suffering



one exile after another, the Diaspora thrust the Jewish people into the mainstream of civilization. After centuries of tradition centered in the Mosaic Law, the Jewish obligation to relieve suffering and provide for the underprivileged has become an integral part of Jewish culture known as tzedakah, a Hebrew word meaning justice or righteousness.⁸ As a result, Jewish people lead the world in supporting charitable causes and aggressively mobilizing assets to relieve suffering. Long before there was a welfare state, the Jewish community led the way in providing for the underprivileged. During the Middle Ages, European Jewish communities efficiently distributed food and clothing for the poor, provided rooms for travelers and gave practical assistance

to widows and orphans.⁹

Closely associated with the concept of tzedakah is Tikkun Olam. Today, Tikkun Olam is a term used most often to describe the Jewish sense of obligation to improve world conditions. MASHAV, the Center for International Cooperation established by the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is committed to international cooperation and world-wide assistance. Among its numerous operations, MASHAV currently assists: AID's victims in Malawi through a multi-faceted program, child development activities in Ethiopia, the Egyptian government in reclamation of desert lands, training facilities and technology transfer in Swaziland, Beijing and for Tibetan refugees living in India. Israel is at the forefront of efforts to provide relief when natural disaster

strikes. In recent years, the Israeli Army Home Front Command Search and Rescue Unit has participated in relief operations in Nairobi, Kosovo, Turkey, Greece and India after devastating earthquakes and following the tsunami in Indonesia.¹⁰ Israel also offered assistance in the aftermath of the 2005 earthquake in Pakistan, but the offer was rejected. Despite daily missile attacks from the Gaza Strip and a direct mortar hit on the Kerem Shalom Crossing where relief supplies pass into southern Gaza, Israel continued daily transfer of thousands of tons of humanitarian supplies. From June 15 to July 19, 2007, approximately 7,500 tons of food, more than 50

tons of medical supplies including 98,000 vaccines against chickenpox, tuberculosis, tetanus and rubella along with supplies including pumps, generators, construction materials, seed, truckloads of animal feed (more than 3,500 tons), thousands of liters of hypochlorite (water purifier), disinfectants, hundreds of thousands of gallons of fuel (over 250 tankers) and more than 40 tons of diapers were transferred from Israel to Gaza.¹¹

The Israeli government in cooperation with Jewish relief agencies is prominent on the world scene providing assistance in agriculture, medicine and education to improve the quality of life in numerous countries of the world. Israel's agricultural innovation is the result of struggle against

harsh adverse conditions to develop flourishing crops in a land that is more than half desert. Technologies such as drip irrigation, water desalination, integration of fresh water sources, breakthroughs in hybrid crop development and efficient use of saltwater irrigation are all technologies Israel developed to increase the amount of arable land, crop productivity and agricultural efficiency. With a seven-fold increase in agricultural output over the past 25 years, Israel leads the world in recycling and reclamation expertise which it shares with the rest of the world.¹²

As early as the second century B.C., Jewish people have been known for their excellence as physicians becoming the foremost medical practitioners during the Middle Ages. When Rudolf Virchow addressed the International Medical Congress in 1894, he stated that, "Hebrew manuscripts have been brought to light which show with what zeal and learning Jewish physicians of early medieval times were active in the preservation and advancement of medicine. We may, in truth, say that down to these times there can often be discerned this hereditary talent of the Jewish people which has contributed so much that is great in medical science."¹³ Today, the number of Jewish doctors is proportionately higher than those of other ethnic groups.¹⁴ Considered the most exalted calling to which any Jewish person can aspire, the alleviation

of pain and suffering is inseparably linked to their unique worldview and finds ultimate expression in the medical profession.

Jewish people continue to be on the leading edge of medical science contributing to technologies that have vastly improved medical care along with detection and treatment of a myriad of illnesses. Transdermal patches delivering medication through the skin, laser eye surgery, cataract surgery, vaccines for polio, cholera, bubonic plague and Hepatitis-B, anti-leukemia drugs, Digitalis, the flexible endoscope, non-invasive cancer treatment therapies, an ingestible pill-sized video camera revolutionizing digestive tract diagnosis, the remote controlled cardiac catheter, pacemakers and heart monitors, as well

as implantable cardioverter-defibrillator or ICDs, are only a few medical advancements taken for granted at most health care centers in North America. Medical research continues with unprecedented discoveries. Within the past few months Michael Ovadia, a researcher at Tel Aviv University, made patent application for an antiviral derived from a cinnamon extract that could be used to "quell viral infections from HIV to the Avian Flu".¹⁵ Researchers at a biopharmaceutical company in Tel Aviv are currently testing a revolutionary immunotherapy drug utilizing living cells to stimulate the body's immune system to fight cancer. The therapy has progressed through preliminary testing and is scheduled for phase I and II clinical trials by 2008.¹⁶

Before the advent of hospitals, Jewish



communities, no matter how small, were committed to providing lodging, food and care for the sick. This provision extended beyond their own to include all in the community. In larger cities, the Hekdesh or community guesthouse provided for these needs.¹⁷ Where there was no Hekdesh, the sick were assigned to the care of individual families. In the last century, Jewish hospitals have become synonymous with exceptional medical services and cutting edge scientific research. Barnes Jewish Hospital in St. Louis, the Jewish Hospital of Cincinnati, Einstein Medical Center in Philadelphia and Mt. Sinai Hospitals in North American cities are not only known for excellence, but programs providing health care for the neediest of the community.

Jewish hospitals are characteristically known for treating all in need regardless of ethnic or religious background. The Jewish Hadassah Medical Centers carry on this tradition even in Israel where all are treated with equality whether Jewish, Christian or Muslim. That no one is refused treatment is graphically illustrated by the fact that in some cases a terrorist and his victim lie in adjacent beds being treated with equality.¹⁸ During the civil strife between Fatah and Hamas in 2007 and while Israel was under a daily barrage of rocket and mortar attacks, at least 40 Palestinians wounded in the conflict were transferred from Gaza to Israeli hospitals where they were treated free of charge.¹⁹

Temporal Blessings— Technological

Not only do Jewish people recognize an obligation to improve the society in which they live, circumstances have forced them to be innovative to survive. Long before the term "high-tech" entered mainstream vocabulary, the Jewish people were at the forefront of advances in science and industry. Carl Jacobi founded modern mathematical physics and is credited with the theories of dynamics, elliptic functions and functional determinants known as "Jacobians". Georg Cantor introduced the concept of transfinite numbers. Leopold Kroneker is known for his

development of the theory of numbers and equations. Luigi Cremona furthered the study of synthetic geometry and the bi-rational transformation theory. Tullio Levi-Civita co-founded absolute differential calculus making possible the mathematics used by Albert Einstein to formulate the theory of general relativity.²⁰

Many important discoveries of the past two centuries are also attributed to Jewish physicists. Gustav Hertz discovered the Hertzian wave. Richard P. Feynman and Julian Schwinger made major contributions to quantum electrodynamics theory. Several Jewish physicists and mathematicians received Nobel Prizes for atomic research. Hag Bohr and Benjamin Mottelson pioneered research of atomic structure.

James Franck researched the electron's effect on the atom. Robert Hofstadter pioneered research of subatomic particles which Burton Richter discovered and named J/psi particles in 1974.²¹ Jewish scientists were responsible for discovering photoelectric phenomena and gamma rays, isolating isotopes, developing electron kinetics and unlocking the secrets of the atom. Since the program's inception in 1899, more than 25 percent of the Nobel Prizes have gone to Jewish scientists.

In addition, there are a host of inventions and products central to daily life credited to Jewish entrepreneurs. What would life in North America be like without the department store, shopping carts, the drive-in gas station with pumps accurately dispensing fuel and tallying the price, cafeterias, the telephone, the movie theatre, radio and television broadcasting, comic books, ready-made clothing, Levi jeans, moist towelettes, flexistraws and countless other innovations conceived and implemented by Jewish people. Many conveniences we currently take for granted were invented or pioneered by Jewish researchers and inventors. Cell phones, solar power cells, Duracell mercury batteries, the camera phone, ICQ—the backbone of AOL's instant messaging technology, printed circuit boards, VCRs, fax machines and geosynchronous satellites are all attributed to Jewish scientists and engineers.²²

The Ultimate Blessing— The Messiah

Jewish contributions to the well-being of this planet are incalculable, but their greatest contribution to the world is the Savior promised throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. Given the Hebrew name Yeshua (Jesus), He was as to His physical background a descendent of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as well as the royal line of David (Matt. 1; Luke 2). He was born in the Jewish village of Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2; Lk. 2:15). He grew up in Nazareth, attended synagogue, observed the cycle of feasts and Temple services (Mt. 2:22; Lk. 4:16; Jn. 10:22-23). He carried on His ministry within the borders of Israel, was crucified, buried and rose again in Jerusalem (Lk. 23-24). He ascended into heaven from the Mount of Olives promising a spectacular return to the same location as the prophets foretell



(Zech. 14:4; Mt. 24:30; Acts 1:9-11). More than forty Messianic prophecies found in the Hebrew Scriptures are fulfilled in the person of Jesus including those related to His suffering and sacrifice for sin (Psa. 22: Isa. 53). Were it not for God providentially choosing the nation of Israel through whom the promised Messiah came, there would be no sacrifice for sin and no possibility for any one to have a relationship with God (Jn. 4:24; Gal. 4:4). Without a doubt, life would be vastly different had Jewish evangelists not aggressively taken the gospel to the first century world.

The Jewish people have truly been a blessing to the world as promised (Gen. 12:3). Knowledge of the one true God, the Bible, countless humanitarian, technological and cultural contributions and ultimately the greatest blessing of all, the Messiah, have come to us through the Jewish people. Although maligned and reviled throughout history, humanity owes the Jewish people a great debt. In a world that would rather ignore or denigrate their contributions, it is only right that Christians gratefully and enthusiastically recognize them.

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Endnotes

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