

Madelyn Campbell

Divine Violence in Joshua

May 12, 2012

The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: Meir Kahane, Exodus Mentality and Joshua Theology

In the seemingly endless conflict between Palestinians and Israelis, it is clear to most of the world that the Israelis have most of the power in this struggle. However, I contend that the Israelis, for the most part, are coming from a position of Exodus; that is, they believe that they are constantly under siege, that they do not have the power, and that the world is out to get the Jews. Further, there are elements within Israeli society, most strongly exemplified by the former Knesset member Rabbi Meir Kahane, who, coming from a psychology of Exodus, are guided by a Deuteronomistic theology, specifically a theology of Joshua in their approach to the conflict.

Given the tendency of the Israelis to view themselves as victims, I believe that traditional approaches of dealing with the Israeli government to work toward peace (sanctions, boycotts, and censures, for example), do not work, and only serve to strengthen the arguments of extremists such as Kahane who advocate measures including violence.

Kahane was born in Brooklyn in 1932, the son of a Rabbi. He also became a Rabbi, and was disturbed at what he believed was the victimization of Jews in New York City. He decided to change the traditional image of a Jew from weak and vulnerable to "a mighty fighter, who strikes back fiercely against tyrants."¹ In 1968 he founded the

¹ Shyovitz, David. "Rabbi Meir Kahane." Jewish Virtual Library.org. The American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise. Web. 12 May 2012. <<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/kahane.html>>.

Jewish Defense League (JDL) in New York, a vigilante group from which other Jewish groups in the U.S. quickly dissociated themselves. Kahane emigrated to Israel in 1971 (possibly to avoid legal troubles in the U.S.), and founded an Israeli branch of the JDL.

Kahane also founded the Kach (כך) party, and after three attempts, was finally elected to the Knesset in 1984. On the day following the election, Kahane deliberately incited a riot in the Arab section of the old city of Jerusalem, as he and his supporters held a victory parade to the Western Wall, passing through the Arab section, smashing the market there, overturning stalls, attacking bystanders, and telling the Arabs “that the end of their stay in the Land of Israel (הארץ ישראל) [an important biblical concept, not just a geographic description] was near.”² Kahane and his followers intended to clear the land.

Kahane himself likened the Arab residents of Israel to the Canaanites. According to him, since the Arabs claim the same land as the Jews, and since, in Kahane’s eyes, they refuse to recognize biblical law, “This places them in the same position as the native population of Canaan at the time of the Israelite conquest, and all biblical rules and regulations adopted and applied by Joshua against the Canaanites are relevant today.”³

Kahane was a boy during the *Shoah*, which had a profound impact on his life. Even though he was born in the U.S., he was touched by it. Many survivors moved to the U.S. as well as to Israel. Growing up in and around New York City, I certainly knew

² Sprinzak, Ehud, “Kach and Meir Kahane: The Emergence of Jewish Quasi-Fascism” reprinted from *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 19, no.3, no. 4, 1985, The American Jewish Committee, p. 1.

³ *Ibid.* p. 10.

Shoah survivors. Kahane was of my parents' and teachers' generation - those who were teaching me and my Hebrew School classmates that the world was against the Jews, that this had always been the case, and this would always be the case. We were taught that Israel was the only safe place, and that we had to defend Israel because all Arabs wanted to push all the Jews into the sea. If any of us doubted this, there were periodic reminders that this was so. In 1972, a small group of Palestinian terrorists massacred nine members of the Israeli Olympic Team in Munich, Germany. Not long before that, I personally was physically attacked by six Catholic boys in my fifth-grade class for being Jewish, and they had learned at their church that Jews killed Jesus. My grandmother told me stories of trying to get a job in New York and being told by company after company that they didn't hire Jews.

Further, these events continue today. In March, 2012, a French citizen and self-described *jihadist* shot and killed three small Jewish schoolchildren and their Principal in Toulouse. However, Frida Ghitis pointed out that there has been an atmosphere of anti-Semitism in Europe that people just don't talk about. She notes that at Dutch soccer games, "Jews to the gas!" is a common cheer.⁴ In Poland, it is common for fans of one soccer team to call fans of a rival team "Jews." Ghitis notes that a recent survey has found that European anti-Semitism is on the rise.⁵

It is no wonder then, that Jews are in a psychological state of Exodus. This is a vulnerable place, and as Raphael Lemkin noted, those who have been persecuted can

⁴ Ghitis, Frida. "Europe's Blind Spot on Anti-Semitism - CNN.com." CNN. Cable News Network, 22 Mar. 2012. Web. 22 Mar. 2012. <http://www.cnn.com/2012/03/22/opinion/ghitis-toulouse-palestinian/index.html?hpt=hp_t3>.

⁵ *Ibid.*

easily become persecutors themselves. John Docker made this link specifically in the biblical narrative of Exodus to Joshua and Judges, noting that wandering and misery eventually leads to the Israelites' becoming "victors and conquerors themselves."⁶ Further, as long as they continue to view themselves as victims, they are unable to "view themselves as victimizers, as responsible for the suffering and hardship and tragedies they inflict on others, those they displace and dispossess and persecute."⁷

It was easy for the Jews to make the link between the *Shoah* and the Palestinians, and for Kahane and others to exploit that link. In the 1930s, some Arabs in Palestine (in particular, the Grand Mufti) had aligned themselves with the Nazis.⁸ Kahane exploited this and the *Shoah* experience for his own ends. He argued that Germans were not devils, but humans, and that what happened in Europe could happen anywhere. He said, "As long as one gentile lives opposite one Jew, the possibility of a holocaust remains."⁹ He characterized the Arab-Israeli conflict as "the latest manifestation of Jew-hatred, of the eternal struggle between Jacob and Esau."¹⁰ He attempted to disarm his

⁶ Docker, John, *The Origins of Violence*, USNW Press, Sydney, 2008, p. 117.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 121.

⁸ Eisen, Robert, *The Peace and Violence of Judaism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, 2011, p. 176.

⁹ Cromer, Gerald, "Negotiating the Meaning of the Holocaust: An Observations on the Debate About Kahanism in Israeli Society" in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* Vol. 2. No. 2 1987, p. 290.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

opponents by accusing them of exile thinking (ironic, as he, himself was coming very much from a place of exile) or else by accusing them of Nazism.^{11,12}

Once Kahane was ensconced in the Knesset, he introduced legislation that, his opponents pointed out, was similar to the Nuremburg Laws of 1935 (the comparison was published in the Israeli newspaper *Hadashot*).¹³ The similarity is clear, but the laws Kahane was proposing were right out of Deuteronomy and Joshua. Kahane proposed that non-Jews not be allowed to live within Jerusalem city limits (Deut. 7:2b; Josh. 9 - here, while the Gibeonites did live in the proximity of the Israelites, they were clearly subservient and at the mercy of the Israelites), that intermarriage, and even sexual relations between Jews and non-Jews be prohibited (Deut. 7:3, Josh. 23:12), and that students and all youth meetings be strictly segregated (while school and youth meetings are not addressed as such in the Bible, they did not exist as we know them in the Ancient Near East. The proscriptions against being turned away by the idols of others would likely apply here).

Kahane was able to rationalize his behavior because he viewed the Arabs as Canaanites. He pointed out that (according to Midrash), Joshua “sent the Canaanites three letters offering them three alternative courses of action: leave the land, fight for it

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Cromer, Gerald, “The Creation of Others: A Case Study of Meir Kahane and his Opponents,” in *The Other in Jewish Thought and History*, New York University Press, New York, London, 1994, pp. 281-304.

¹³ *Ibid.* pp.293-294.

and bear the consequences or peacefully surrender to the Jews and obtain the status of loyal 'resident strangers'"^{14, 15}

Kahane was an extremist, and he died in the violent manner that he championed; he was assassinated in New York in 1990. However, he was influential. His first two attempts to be elected to the Knesset failed, but his third succeeded, indicating that his support was growing. Further, Kahane is only one example of the extreme right-wing in Israeli politics. His support was largely among younger voters,¹⁶ and that is disturbing, as it is indicative of the future of Israeli politics.

In 1995, Yigal Amir, a Sephardic Israeli Jew assassinated the Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin. While Kahane was dead by that time, Amir's actions were sanctioned by Kahane's son and heir, Binyamin Zev Kahane, who was himself murdered in 2001.¹⁷

The Exodus mentality is not proprietary to extremists. Each year the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) sends troops to tour sites of the *Shoah* in order to remind them of who they are and where they come from. They tour the sites in uniform and as a unit, and lay special IDF wreaths (in the form of the *Mogen David*) at all the memorials (see photos in appendix). The refrain of the the *Shoah*, "Never Again," is drilled into the minds of the soldiers just as it is carved into stone in the monument at Treblinka.

As more secular Israelis have taken a decidedly non-militaristic stance and found ways to avoid what has generally been compulsory military service, the IDF, and particularly the officer corps, has become increasingly populated by more radical

¹⁴ Eisen, p. 156.

¹⁵ Sprinzak, p.10.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p.1.

¹⁷ Shyovitz.

religious elements in Israeli society. There have been reports of many of these religious soldiers expressing an unwillingness to evacuate West Bank settlements if so ordered.¹⁸ This is disturbing if we consider how the political strategy would need to be implemented, even if the sentiment should swing back to the left.

On April 14 of this year, an Israeli officer struck a pro-Palestinian protester in the face, and the action was caught on video and published on youtube.com. It is perhaps ironic that the event took place near Jericho. The young man (who appears to be European) was on a bicycle tour when they encountered the road block. When they walked peacefully toward the officers, they were attacked. The Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu said, "This behaviour does not characterize the soldiers and commanders of the (Israeli Defense Forces) and has no place in the IDF and the State of Israel."¹⁹ However, one must ask where the officer (who was suspended following the event) learned this behavior?

There are many external forces pressing on Israel to make peace with the Palestinians, but much of the pressure, in the form of suggested sanctions, or boycotts, or diplomatic censures, will only be interpreted, in the mindset of Exodus, as more evidence of the world being against the Jews. In the Exodus narrative, the Israelites had to wander in the wilderness for 40 years (biblical code for a generation) so that the enslaved generation would die off before entering the Promised Land. It is unrealistic to expect that in the roughly 60 years since the beginning of the political nation of Israel,

¹⁸ Eisen, p. 159.

¹⁹ Flower, Kevin. "Israel Suspends Officer Videotaped Striking Activist - CNN.com." CNN. Cable News Network, 16 Apr. 2012. Web. 16 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.cnn.com/2012/04/16/world/meast/israel-activist-video/index.html?iref=allsearch>>.

everything will have worked out and the people should be living peacefully together.

There are still living survivors of the *Shoah* in Israel, and while not all have become oppressors,²⁰ all have certainly been oppressed. As in the biblical text, the hope lies in the generations.

Kahane himself understood this, which is why he was so afraid of mixing children together. He called the compulsory meetings between Arab and Israeli schoolchildren “a deliberate policy of obliteration and assimilation...likely to cause a ‘spiritual holocaust.’”²¹ Like Joshua, (chapters 23 and 24) Kahane warns that the Jews are in danger of losing who they are by mixing with the Arabs who surround them. However, like the Israelites at their best, the best hope for Israel is that they will do exactly that. When the children are able to grow up together, they will learn to make peace.

²⁰ indeed, one survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto and Buchenwald was so opposed to the war in Lebanon that he staged a hunger strike outside *Yad VaShem*, and issued this statement: “When I was a child of ten and was liberated from the concentration camp, I thought that we shall never suffer again. I did not dream that we would cause suffering to others. Today we are doing just that. The Germans in Buchenwald starved us to death. Today in Jerusalem, I starve myself and this hunger of mine is no less horrific. When I hear ‘filthy Arabs’ I remember ‘filthy Jews.’ I see Beirut and I remember Warsaw.” Cromer, 1987, pp.289-290.

²¹ Cromer, 1987, p. 292.

Appendix



IDF wreath at Warsaw
Ghetto Uprising Monument
Warsaw 2011



IDF wreath at Treblinka
2011



IDF wreath at Birkenau 2011

all photos taken by Madelyn Campbell in May, 2011.

Work Cited

Cromer, Gerald, "Negotiating the Meaning of the Holocaust: An Observations on the Debate About Kahanism in Israeli Society" in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* Vol. 2. No. 2 1987, pp. 291-297.

Cromer, Gerald, "The Creation of Others: A Case Study of Meir Kahane and his Opponents," in *The Other in Jewish Thought and History*, New York University Press, New York, London, 1994, pp. 281-304.

Docker, John, *The Origins of Violence*, USNW Press, Sydney, 2008.

Eisen, Robert, *The Peace and Violence of Judaism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, 2011.

Flower, Kevin. "Israel Suspends Officer Videotaped Striking Activist - CNN.com." CNN. Cable News Network, 16 Apr. 2012. Web. 16 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.cnn.com/2012/04/16/world/meast/israel-activist-video/index.html?iref=allsearch>>.

Ghitis, Frida. "Europe's Blind Spot on Anti-Semitism - CNN.com." CNN. Cable News Network, 22 Mar. 2012. Web. 22 Mar. 2012. <http://www.cnn.com/2012/03/22/opinion/ghitis-toulouse-palestinian/index.html?hpt=hp_t3>.

Shyovitz, David. "Rabbi Meir Kahane." Jewish Virtual Library.org. The American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise. Web. 12 May 2012. <<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/kahane.html>>.

Sprinzak, Ehud, "Kach and Meir Kahane: The Emergence of Jewish Quasi-Fascism" reprinted from *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 19, no.3, no, 4, 1985, The American Jewish Committee.