

Why Do the Nations Rage?

Psalm 2, the covenants, and the most documented survival pattern in history.

By **Brett Henry** · June 23, 2026

Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, the Inquisition, the Pogroms, the Third Reich, Hamas.

Every power that set out to erase the Jewish people from the earth is gone or diminished. The Jews remain.

This is the most documented pattern in the history of civilization. No other people has survived what the Jewish people have survived. They have come through extermination campaigns spread across three thousand years and emerged each time with their identity, their language, their customs, and their religion intact.

It started before they were even a nation in their own Land. In the book of Numbers, Balak son of Zippor watches Israel camped near Moab and panics about what they might do to his kingdom. He sends for the prophet Balaam and offers him payment to curse Israel so that he can defeat them. God tells Balaam he cannot curse the people, because they are already blessed, and in the end, Balaam can only say what God puts in his mouth.

From Balak to Bashar al-Assad, from Haman to Hamas, Israel is still here. How? Why?

Three thousand years ago a poet in Jerusalem, who also happened to become a king and a prophet, put the question plainly. Psalm 2 opens with it:

“Why do the nations rage, and the peoples plot in vain?”

It is the oldest description of a pattern that has never stopped repeating. The rulers of the earth set themselves against the Lord and against His anointed. The nations conspire. They gather. They rage. And the One who sits in the heavens laughs.

The God of Israel is not worried about the outcome. He made covenants, and He intends to keep them. God chooses, and God distinguishes. That is part of His nature. And across history, nations and people have kept taking issue with the choices He makes.

The List That Should Unsettle Every Historian

Start the count.

The Egyptian civilization that enslaved the Jews for four hundred years and tried to kill their male children at birth is gone. Its ethnic descendants, the Copts, are now a Christian minority in a land governed for most of the last century under Islamic rule. The modern state that carries the name is a different country. It went to war against the Jewish state again and again across the last hundred years, lost every time, gave up the Sinai, and eventually chose peace. Today Egypt cooperates with Israel. The Jews remain.

The Assyrian empire conquered the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC and scattered ten tribes across the ancient Near East. Assyria no longer exists. The Jews remain.

Babylon destroyed Solomon's Temple in 586 BC and carried the southern kingdom into exile. Babylon is an archaeological site in modern Iraq. The Jews remain.

The Persian empire produced Haman, whose plan to annihilate every Jew in the kingdom was overturned by Esther. Persia cycled through empires, conquests, and revolutions for twenty-five centuries. The Jews remain.

The Greeks under Antiochus IV Epiphanes desecrated the Temple and forced Hellenization on Jewish worship and identity. The Seleucid empire collapsed. The Jews remain. That deliverance is still celebrated every December. It is called Hanukkah.

Rome destroyed the Second Temple in 70 AD, killed over a million Jews in the siege of Jerusalem, and renamed the province of Judea "Syria Palaestina" to sever the connection between the people and their Land. The name was a deliberate insult. Rome chose it to honor the Philistines, the ancient enemy of the Jews, and to write the Jewish people out of their own country. The Western Roman Empire fell four centuries later. The Jews remain. And they are back in the Land from which Rome tried to permanently erase them.

The Spanish Inquisition expelled the Jews from Spain in 1492 and tortured those who stayed under suspicion of practicing Judaism in secret. The same crown wanted Jerusalem for itself. Christopher Columbus, sailing that very year under Ferdinand and Isabella, filled his Book of Prophecies with the conviction that the Spanish monarchy was destined to reclaim the holy city. The Spanish empire declined for centuries afterward. Today the Jews govern themselves and rule in Jerusalem. The Jews remain.

The Pogroms across Russia and Eastern Europe in the 19th and early 20th centuries murdered tens of thousands and displaced millions. Those regimes fell. The Jews remain.

The Third Reich carried out the most systematic genocide in human history, murdering six million Jews in the Shoah (Holocaust). Nazi Germany was destroyed within twelve years of its founding. Three years after the gas chambers closed, the modern State of Israel was established. The nation-state of Israel was reborn in a day, just as the prophet Isaiah foretold.

No historian has an adequate secular explanation for this. The odds of a stateless, scattered people surviving one such campaign are nearly zero. Surviving all of them across three thousand years, with identity and faith intact, language restored, and returning to the specific Land promised to their ancestors in Genesis 12, is without parallel in the human record. No people scattered from its ancient homeland has ever been restored to it the way the Jews have. It is not just extremely unlikely; it has never been done.

Name another people for whom this is true. There is not one.

The Jealousy Beneath the Rage

I have spent years thinking about why the hatred persists. The theological answer is real, and I will get to it. But there is a layer that operates in plain sight, and it explains something the purely theological reading sometimes passes over.

Much of the world's hostility toward the Jewish people comes down to jealousy.

It is an uncomfortable claim. Follow the evidence anyway.

Jewish cultural cohesion is exceptional by any measurable standard. Shabbat observance creates a weekly rhythm that has bound families and communities together for over three thousand years. Dietary laws structure daily life around discipline and shared identity. Marriage customs reinforce continuity across generations. The expectation of literacy, of wrestling with sacred texts, of debating interpretation rather than simply receiving doctrine, predates the printing press by more than a millennium. Communal obligation is written into tzedakah (a deeply engrained cultural norm in Jewish life, aka "righteousness") and into the deep structure of Jewish law, where caring for the vulnerable is binding justice rather than optional charity. A Passover seder in Buenos Aires in 2026 follows the same structure as a Passover seder in Jerusalem in the fifth century.

These practices have consistently produced measurable, visible, world-shaping outcomes.

Jews represent roughly 0.2% of the global population. They have received about 22% of all Nobel Prizes since the award was established in 1901. In physics, chemistry, medicine, economics, and literature, the overrepresentation is staggering. Albert Einstein. Niels Bohr. Richard Feynman. Jonas Salk. Paul Ehrlich. Milton Friedman. The list of Jewish contributors to modern science, medicine, economics, and thought runs so long that compiling it becomes its own argument.

Israel is a country smaller than New Jersey and younger than most American suburbs. It ranks among the top nations on earth in patents per capita, startup formation per capita, and research publications per capita. The World Intellectual Property Organization has consistently ranked Israel in the top twenty of its Global Innovation Index. Ten million people punch at the weight of countries ten and twenty times their size.

Everyone can see these outcomes, and they provoke a reaction the world has never been fully honest about.

Other cultures look at the fruit of Jewish life. The educational achievement. The economic resilience. The scientific contribution. The staying power across millennia, through dispersion and persecution and genocide and return. They see the results and assume there must be a strategy to copy, a system to reverse-engineer, a secret to expose.

There is no secret. The outcomes are a result of three forces working together: covenant, culture, and controversy.

Covenant, because God bound Himself to this people in promises He calls everlasting. More than one of them, and not the kind a nation earns or forfeits by good behavior in a given century.

Culture, because the same God gave Israel a way of living built for their thriving. The laws, the traditions, the festivals, the weekly and yearly rhythms. All of it was designed to make a people flourish, and it did.

Controversy, because crisis is a crucible. Gold and silver are refined by fire, and a people can be refined the same way. The durability, the intelligence, the relentless innovation are forged in part by the pressure of constant threat. Comfort alone does not produce what Israel has produced. The crucible does.

You cannot replicate the fruit without the root. And the root is a relationship with the God who chose this people, gave them specific instructions for how to live, and promised that the relationship would never end.

When people meet excellence they cannot reproduce, they rarely respond with admiration. They respond with resentment. And when that resentment fixes on a single people across millennia, through every political system and cultural configuration the world has produced, it stops being ordinary envy. It becomes a spiritual pattern.

The Covenants That Will Not Break

Here is the theological center of this reality.

God made covenants with Abraham ([Genesis 12, 15, 17](#)), with Moses at Sinai ([Exodus 19-24](#)), and with David ([2 Samuel 7](#)). Most people stop there, if they get that far. They picture one covenant, made once, broken somewhere along the way, and quietly handed off to someone else.

That is not what the text shows. God made a whole series of covenants with Israel, far more than three. The covenant with Noah. The priestly covenant with Phinehas. The renewals under Joshua, Josiah, and Nehemiah. The New Covenant the prophets promised. Some of them are conditional, framed as an 'if you do this, then I will do that' scenario. The covenant at Sinai is the clearest of these, with blessings for obedience and consequences for rebellion. Others are unconditional and everlasting, promises God binds to Himself with no exit clause. Scripture calls several of them everlasting by name. Paul knew the count. Writing to Rome, he listed the covenants and the promises among the things that belong to Israel, both words plural ([Romans 9:4](#)).

The everlasting ones are the point of emphasis here. They do not depend on Israel's behavior in any given century, and they were never offered as metaphors.

Paul, himself a Jew and a Pharisee writing to Gentile believers in Rome, states their nature plainly in [Romans 11:29](#):

"For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable."

Paul chose that word on purpose. The gifts and calling on Israel are irreplaceable, irreversible, and irremediable. God does not take them back. And '[He is not a son of man that He should change his mind.](#)' Right Balaam?

A promise that can be revoked means nothing. The entire architecture of Biblical faith rests on a God whose Word holds. If God could walk away from Israel, He could walk away from anyone. If the covenant with Abraham can fail, every other promise in Scripture can fail too, including the ones Christians lean on for their own salvation.

Replacement theology asks us to believe that God broke His Word, that His irrevocable gifts were revoked, and that the most documented survival story in human history is a coincidence.

I do not find that persuasive.

And His Word is more than promises on a page. Is Jesus not the Word of God become flesh ([John 1:14](#))?

If He is, then He stands as the embodiment of every covenant God made with Israel. That is why He set none of them aside. In His own words, He did not come to abolish the Law but to [fulfill it](#). He did not lower the bar. He raised it. He moved the Law from the hands to the heart,

where it is harder to keep, not easier. In the eyes of God, anger became equivalent to murder, and lust equivalent to adultery.

He kept the feasts. He journeyed to Jerusalem for Sukkot. John's Gospel places Him in Jerusalem for Hanukkah, the Feast of Dedication. He celebrated a Passover Seder with His disciples just before His death. The laws, feasts, rhythms, types, and the shadows did not end with Him. They became more meaningful because of His life. Everything God gave Israel became whole and fulfilled in Him and through Him.

That is why replacement theology is not only an error. It is a forfeiture of the 'depth of the riches and the wisdom and knowledge of God,' as Paul pointed out in his famous Romans 11 doxology. To insist the old covenants are finished is to walk right past real treasure. Jesus did not discard them. He doubled down on them. And the heart He pointed to was never a new idea. It runs through the whole of the Jewish Scriptures. Samuel told Saul that to obey is better than sacrifice. Micah wrote that what the Lord requires is to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with Him. Isaiah asked whether the fast God chooses might be to loose the chains of injustice and set the oppressed free. It was always about the heart. Those who ascribe to a supersessionist theology might take issue with the unsearchable nature of God's ways, but we should all ascribe honor, glory and holy fear to His judgements.

As far as the matter of Jesus making whole the commands given to Israel, Sabbath is one of the clearest examples. God gave it as a gift, made for man and not man for it, a weekly blessing of rest. What is permitted on Shabbat is to do good. 'Doing good' is the heart of the matter. When Jesus healed on Shabbat, He was not declaring work suddenly allowable. He brought the command to its full purpose. He embodied that, and He said it plainly.

The rage of the nations is, in part, the rage of watching the covenants hold when every human prediction said they should have broken. Every empire that tried to end it is gone. The people remain. The language remains. The Land is restored. The customs endure. By the testimony of history itself, the God who promised all of this is still keeping His Word.

A God who keeps His covenants with Israel across three thousand years infuriates a world that does not want Him to be real; yet for every follower of Jesus, this is the good news! We serve a covenant-keeping, promise-keeping, faithful God! And his covenant faithfulness is not annulled by our faithlessness.

The Obsession That Has No Political Explanation

The same pattern has repeated across the centuries. Only the methodology and instruments the persecuting nations use have changed.

The United Nations Human Rights Council has, since its creation in 2006, passed more resolutions condemning Israel than it has passed against all the other nations on earth combined. Not more than any single country. More than every other country on the planet put together.

The UN General Assembly has done the same for decades. UN Watch documented that in 2022 the General Assembly adopted 15 resolutions against Israel and 13 against the rest of the world's countries combined. Nations running active genocide, forced labor, mass imprisonment, and systematic torture of dissidents drew a fraction of the scrutiny aimed at a democracy of ten million people.

The BDS movement holds Israel to a standard of economic and academic boycott it applies to no other country on earth. Academic boycotts target Israeli universities while no comparable movement exists against Chinese, Russian, Iranian, or North Korean institutions, despite human rights records that make Israel's look exemplary by comparison.

The double standard is too consistent, too durable, and too disproportionate to explain by policy disagreement. Dozens of countries occupy disputed territories. Dozens keep military forces in contested regions. Dozens enforce immigration and security policies more restrictive than anything Israel has in place (though many nations are realizing the importance of strict immigration policies). But only one nation receives the double standard treatment that Israel gets year after year.

A disproportionate, obsessive focus on a single people, sustained across every century and every political system, has an older name than criticism. Psalm 2 named it three thousand years ago... Rage.

The Most Compelling Evidence I Have Found

I am not Jewish. I want to say that clearly, because it shapes everything about how I arrived here.

I am a Christian raised in the American South. Nobody handed me a theology of Israel in church. I did not grow up thinking about covenants or replacement theology or the significance of Jewish survival. I came to this the way I come to most things, by looking at the evidence and asking whether the story I had been told was complete.

It was not.

A people were promised a specific Land in Genesis 12. They lost it through disobedience and discipline. They were scattered across the earth for two thousand years. They held their identity and their faith and their customs through every form of persecution human cunning could devise, and then they returned to that same Land and built a nation in it. That is not a normal historical outcome. Spoiler alert: No other people group has ever done it.

Every empire in recorded history that tried to shatter these covenants failed. Egypt failed. Babylon failed. Rome failed. The Inquisition failed. The Pogroms failed. Hitler, with the full industrial capacity of the Third Reich behind him, failed. The United Nations, with all its resolutions, is failing now.

The endurance of the Jewish people across three thousand years of sustained, pointed hostility is the single most compelling evidence I have found that God is real and active in history. Not a god in the abstract, but the God of Israel – the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. People say the word God and mean a hundred different things by it. The right question is always “which one?” And the God of all Creation answers it Himself. Over and over in the Biblical text He gives the same Name: the God of Israel.

If He were not keeping His Word, they would be gone. Every precedent says they should be.

They are not.

Am Yisrael Chai. Israel lives.

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