

August 2008—Guest Columnist: Clinton M. Jenkin

In March I visited Auschwitz, the most notorious Nazi extermination camp. Historians estimate that over 1 million Jewish, Gypsy, Russian, and Polish prisoners were executed at this camp complex.

Auschwitz began as a 15-acre labor camp for Polish political prisoners. Every morning the inmates would march out the front gate (underneath the now infamous "Arbeit Macht Frei" slogan) to a 12 hour shift at a local factory, then march back in, exhausted, at the end of the day. Inmates who were caught violating camp rules were sent to Block 11, the "Death Block," where punishments included starvation, suffocation in a "dark cell," or 10 consecutive nights in a "standing cell"—a 3'x3' cell where 4 to 5 inmates would spend the entire night upright. Of course the next day they were expected to work their normal shift. And next door in Block 10, Dr. Mengele did horrific experiments with twins in his search for the secrets of genetics, and Dr. Clauberg tested various chemical sterilization techniques on young women.

As the Nazi party decided on their "Final Solution" for the extermination of the Jews, they pioneered gassing and crematoria techniques at Auschwitz. Nearby they built Auschwitz II, a 250-acre monstrosity whose sole purpose was mass extermination. The techniques pioneered at Auschwitz I were implemented here on a massive scale. A spur line ran directly into this camp, so an entire train could be unloaded in the center courtyard. From here medical personnel would carry out "Selection," where they identified the 20% of the prisoners who were fit for labor. These went to the left to be processed and decontaminated. The other 80% marched down the road to their right—directly to one of the six gas chambers. Here were the famous gas chambers that looked like showers. Prisoners would hang their clothes on a numbered hook—they were told to remember their number for after they were "decontaminated." At this point many still thought they were simply being processed before relocation to settlements in eastern Poland. Some had already paid for a house in their new town.

Why am I talking about this? Because in Jeremiah 29:11 we find this promise, "*For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.*" This was a promise from God to the Jews. And who was being slaughtered by the thousands in Auschwitz? *The Jews*. How then can we trust the promises of God? How could a young Jewish girl trust Jehovah when she was being injected with chemicals and then having a hysterectomy—all without anesthesia? How could a Rabbi teach his students about God's promises when they were slowly suffocating in a dark cell with no light or air? How can we trust God when we see these atrocities juxtaposed with a promise of prosperity, hope, and a future?

The answer comes from Daniel. You know the story. Daniel's three friends have been arrested and threatened with execution in a furnace. What is their response to Nebuchadnezzar? "God will deliver us, and perhaps we'll even survive that fire." These guys understood that their

physical destiny was separate from their eternal hope. They expected prosperity—whether they died a horrific death or became a legendary miracle.

Do we put God's promises in a box? Do we expect certain things from him because that's how we would define his promises? Or are we open to God working in our lives to be more like Christ—no matter what that looks like to other people?

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