

Rabbi David Wolpe's

# *Off The Pulpit*

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## **Astonishing Endurance**

History can change by very slim margins: had Blucher been a little late to Waterloo or, as Pascal put it, had Cleopatra's nose been longer, the world would have been different.

For all its calamities, Jewish history is studded with astonishing stories of survival. Had Yochanan Ben Zakkai not asked for Yavneh, had the Maccabees not triumphed, had the rigidity of the Karaites prevailed over the arguments of Saadiah and the defenders of rabbinic Judaism, we would have gone the way of most small peoples who have vanished. Ironically, the names of once formidable nations — from the Jebusites to the Philistines to empires such as Babyonia and Assyria — are remembered because on their march to oblivion they brushed up against the tiny nation of Israel.

No one can know what initiative or incident or thinker or skirmish or decision will guide the Jewish future. There

are troubling signs to be sure. Yet through our past runs a golden thread of providence that has not been snapped by catastrophe, enmity or indifference. So Jews continue to study, learn, defend and treasure our tradition, never knowing what might decide what is erased and what will endure.

[Watch Rabbi Wolpe being interviewed on Al Jazeera America on Europe, 70 years after the liberation at Auschwitz.](#)

Get Rabbi Wolpe's new book *David: The Divided Heart*.