

The Sanctity of Covenant, Moral Justice and Prophetic Blessing



**WHY STILL CARE
ABOUT ISRAEL?**



Foreword by
MICHAEL L. BROWN

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WHY CARE ABOUT ISRAEL?

*The Sanctity of Covenant, Moral Justice and
Prophetic Blessing*

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©2024

UNPUBLISHED DRAFT UPDATE OF

WHY CARE ABOUT ISRAEL?

PUBLISHED IN 2004

AND UPDATED IN 2013 AS

WHY STILL CARE ABOUT ISRAEL?

© 2024 by Sandra Teplinsky

Revised and updated edition of *Why Care about Israel?* and *Why STILL Care About Israel?*

Originally Published by Chosen Books, 2004 and 2013

11400 Hampshire Avenue South

Bloomington, Minnesota 55438

www.chosenbooks.com

Chosen Books is a division of

Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Teplinsky, Sandra.

[Why care about Israel]

Why still care about Israel? : the sanctity of covenant, moral justice, and prophetic blessing / Sandra Teplinsky ; foreword by Michael L. Brown. — Revised and updated edition.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references.

Summary: "Completely revised and updated with the clarity and urgency of today's headlines, this biblically based guide reveals why Israel matters more than ever and why it affects you" — Provided by publisher.

ISBN 978-0-8007-9529-0 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Israel (Christian theology) 2. Palestine in Christianity. I. Title.

BT93.T435 2013

231.76—dc23 23013017679

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Cover design by Dan Pitts

13 14 15 16 17 18 19 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

“With precision and passion, Sandra Teplinsky weaves a wealth of material and presents a compelling case for why we still need to care about Israel. It’s a powerful treatise and treasure ‘for such a time as this.’”

Chris Mitchell, Middle East bureau chief, CBN News;
author, *Dateline Jerusalem* and more

“A dividing line of the true Church will be its position on the Jew and Israel. You *must* be on God’s side. Read this book!”

Sid Roth, host, *It’s Supernatural!*; founder *It’s Supernatural Network*; author, *The Incomplete Church* and more

“This book is an amazing display of worthy passion, solid scholarship, historical grasp and sound biblical exposition. Its message could not be more needed than in this present hour of global conflict, both political and spiritual. Sandra balances conviction with compassion, and prophetic passion with objectivity and patience that will dissolve much confusion and focus on timely action and intercession. This is a handbook of immeasurable worth for every thoughtful believer—especially leaders who honor God’s Word.”

Jack Hayford, author, *Secrets of Intercessory Prayer* and more; founder, The King’s University

“Sandra Teplinsky takes a much-needed and fresh approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict from a Messianic Jewish Israeli point of view. With pastoral warmth and solid, balanced theology, she exposes facts and truths that every justice-minded believer should know. Readers will be left well informed and caring

deeply about the Jewish people (and others) because they encountered in this book the heart and voice of God.”

Jonathan Bernis, president, Jewish Voice Ministries International; author, *A Rabbi Looks at the Last Days*, *A Rabbi Looks at Jesus of Nazareth* and more

“Inspirationally written, biblically accurate, extensively researched and user friendly to the common believer, Bible student or seasoned minister—all these describe *Why Still Care about Israel?* I applaud Sandra Teplinsky for a job well done. This book articulates with prophetic clarity and integrity God’s call to the Church regarding Israel in this tumultuous hour. A desperately needed message!”

James W. Goll, director, Encounters Network and God Encounters Training eSchool; author, *The Seer*, *The Coming Israel Awakening* and more

“Knowing the Teplinskys well, I can attest to Sandra’s heart not only for her Jewish brothers and sisters but for Palestinian Arabs as well. With ‘Christian Palestinianism’ on the ascent, Sandra has written a courageous book. As a former attorney, Sandra brings to light the exaggerations and fabrications of Israel’s accusers, yet somehow with grace and sensitivity. *Why Still Care about Israel?* has moved into my top three reference works on this crucial subject.”

Wayne Hilsden, founder, King of Kings Community and Fellowship of Israel Related Ministries, Jerusalem

“Israel: What other small nation can stir such strong passions and release such heated arguments? Sandra Teplinsky’s wonderful book brings together the careful thought and research

of an attorney with the heart and spiritual insights of a prophetic intercessor. Even after fourteen years of living in Israel, I was challenged deeply by Sandra's writings."

Rick Ridings, founder/director, Succat Hallel, Jerusalem;
author, *Shifting Nations Through Houses of Prayer*

NOTE: ALL ENDORSEMENTS ARE OF THE LAST PUBLISHED UPDATE IN 2013, ENTITLED *WHY STILL CARE ABOUT ISRAEL?*

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Foreword

Sandra Teplinsky has navigated her way through a biblical and theological and political field of land mines, and she has done it with grace, with sensitivity, with compassion, with courage and with exegetical acumen, thereby helping to navigate the way for all of us. And it was not an easy task.

How can you call the Church to care for Israel without being accused of neglecting the Palestinians? How can you claim a special calling on the Jewish people without being accused of favoritism and even advocating ethnic/racial superiority? How can you have a deeply spiritual approach to the Scriptures while still maintaining the importance of a physical plot of land? How can you develop a Jesus-centered theology while claiming that the Church cannot be whole without a restored Israel?

I believe that Sandra is uniquely qualified for the task at hand. First, more than anything, she is a lover of God, desiring to please Him more than side with a people or a cause. Second, she is a woman of prayer and compassion, and she is just as moved by the plight of a suffering Muslim child in Gaza as she is by the plight of a suffering Jewish child in Jerusalem. Third, as a trained attorney, she is meticulous in her research and understands proper legal (and logical) argumentation. Fourth, as a careful student of the Scriptures and history, she knows how to avoid common interpretive errors by using reliable scholarly sources. Fifth, as a Messianic Jewish woman who lives part

time in Israel with her Jewish husband, Kerry, she loves and supports the Jewish state without idealizing it (or demonizing Palestinians), as some sincere Christian Zionists have sometimes done.

I have watched Sandra work on this book for years—burdened to be fair to all, burdened to keep pointing readers to Yeshua (Jesus), burdened to be meticulously accurate in all she writes, burdened to convey God’s heart for Israel—and I wholeheartedly commend this book to you.

If you will read it with a prayerful, open mind—and a healthy dose of courage!—it might just change your life.

Michael L. Brown, Ph.D., 2013, president,
FIRE School of Ministry, Concord, North Carolina;
author, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus*

1

Why Care About Israel?

A vast army descends upon a desert wilderness in the ancient Middle East, signaling that life on earth is about to change forever. Outside the camp a stalwart warrior paces in resolute silence. Normally the man is seen presiding over a feisty multitude. But today he is alone, his eyes locked onto the horizon ahead. His is known as Joshua, son of Nun.

Suddenly an imposing figure with sword in hand appears before him. Startled, the seasoned leader demands to know: "Are you for us or against us?"

None other than the voice of God replies. "No! But as Commander of the Lord's army I come!" The figure in human form is a manifestation of YHVH Himself.

Despite Joshua's personal history with the Almighty, we can imagine his heart skips a beat. The man falls facedown. "What message does my Lord say to His servant?" he stammers, appropriately humbled.

"Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground" is the divine response.

With a quick brush of the hand, both sandals are off.

If further conversation between the Lord and His servant took place in this encounter, it was not recorded in Scripture.

(Joshua 5:13-15). Nevertheless, we can surmise the correct question for Joshua to have asked was not whether the strange, desert visitor was for or against the Israelites. A better question—the one he did not ask—might have been, “*Who are You and what are You doing here?*”

Christian discussion about Israel today often starts by asking, not unlike Joshua, if God is for or against Israel and the Jews. A better question would be, “*Who are You, Lord, and what are You doing on earth today?*”

The Creator is not for or against nations or people groups as we tend to think. His heart, His character and His ways are different from ours; they are higher and greater. He is a King who is for a Kingdom, *His Kingdom*. The Kingdom of God is for *all* humankind, summoning into it “whosoever” would submit to His leadership of holy love.

Yet, as we grow in the knowledge of the Most Magnificent, we discover He chose Israel, despite the contention against her, to very much be about His Kingdom and ultimately, *Him*.

This does not mean everything Israel does is right or correct, just as not everything the Christian Church does is right or correct. But similar to how God has chosen to use and set apart the international Church, or Body of Christ, for His sovereign purposes, He has chosen to use and set apart national Israel.

Therefore, when we ask if God is for Israel or for her enemies, we stand, in a sense, on holy ground. We'd best take off our shoes, so to speak, and like Joshua, bow low. We'd do well to prepare for startling revelation of truth and sharpened discernment of God's ways that might prove challenging, but most rewarding.

Are you among the many who want to better understand and navigate the complex times in which we live? In an era of rapid and rancorous change, is it your desire to stand firm in

love, anchored in God's Word? If so, then a Bible-based and factually honest understanding of Israel will be essential.

I realize that may seem an outlandish, even outrageous claim. But if you are a Christian believer who is (or at least aims to be) open minded, I wholeheartedly believe this book will unveil how the Creator is displaying His present-day passion for all humankind—including you—personally and intimately, through Israel. In the process, He is testing and refining the hearts and faith of His people. He is shaking civilizations, gathering a last days harvest of souls and establishing His Kingdom on earth. He is doing it all with extravagant, holy love, using Israel—and He invites you to participate.

Who Should Read this Book?

This book was written mainly for three types of readers:

Christians who are not very familiar with issues pertaining to Israel and the Jews but realize it may be time to learn more, particularly from an Israeli Messianic Jewish (Jewish Christian) perspective;

Christians who already understand and care much for Israel, but want to be even better equipped to navigate and lead others through difficult issues of our times involving the Jewish nation; and

Christians who doubt or deny that God still has covenant-based plans for Israel, and as a result may even resent Jews and those who support them. If this describes you, may I encourage you, in a spirit of Christ-like love, to open your heart and mind to consider another point of view?

In addition to these three groups, I have also written to a

fourth: non-Christians who are puzzled or troubled by the controversy of Israel and reality of antisemitism. If this includes you, I believe you will find it beneficial to consider the matter from a biblical perspective. This is because political and religious-ideological conflicts in our day are inextricably connected. Moreover, such conflicts are no longer limited to certain regions of the earth. When they erupt, they go global, fast.

Moreover, ours is a generation that has been taught what to think, but not how to think. Concerning Israel and the Jews, the inspired, inerrant, and timeless writings of the Bible, reflected in the pages of this book, offer clear direction. Correctly interpreted, they teach us how to think about unfolding facts and events, and then, what to think.

If you happen to be Jewish and do not believe in Jesus, you may be challenged by some of the material that follows. While the purpose of *Why Care About Israel?* is not evangelistic or missionary, the text relies heavily on New Testament teachings. Like other non-Christians, I hope you find those teachings to be of interest and benefit. Bear in mind that evangelical Christians are among today's most vocal supporters of Israel. They find nothing anti-Jewish or anti-Israel in the Gospel. Because there isn't.

To be forthright, *Why Care About Israel?* is intended to inspire Christ-like, Bible based knowledge and love for the Jewish people and their state. But that knowledge and love is not at the expense of Palestinians or any other people group. As stated earlier, I do not suggest or personally believe that Israel does everything right. But neither do I point a finger at her wrongdoings; many others mercilessly do so. My goal is to offer you, as best I am able, fresh revelation of God's heart for Israel through biblical and factual truth.

Despite the gravity of some issues discussed in this book, its

ultimate focus is on the Lord Himself. When everything is changing around us, we must cling to the One who is the same today as He was yesterday, and will be tomorrow. No amount of information, no plethora of prophetic insight, can substitute for a heart humbly fixed on Him, a life surrendered to the Savior. If we wholeheartedly follow Jesus into the future, I believe we should be optimistic about it. The truths and facts unpacked in this book are intended to help you do precisely that. They are meant to serve as guiding principles for years to come, however matters unfold in Israel, the Middle East and rest (or unrest) of the world.

So before you read further, I would ask that you set aside certain preconceptions, if you have them. Suspend the echo of endless indictments against an allegedly genocidal or colonial Jewish state. Subdue the extreme opposite cries of others who might romanticize or worship Zion. Ask the Holy Spirit, right now, to graciously attune your heart and mind to His on the subject. Then look with me at the inspired and authoritative Word of God.

In it we will see that the Creator King picked an otherwise sorry little strain of humanity called Israel, for the sake of His glory. To them He lovingly assigned irrevocable responsibility for service, *not superiority*. His concept of a chosen people differs radically from what is portrayed in some church sermons, most mainstream and social media, on college campus protests and in plain, everyday talk.

Do not be surprised that Israel stirs controversy no matter what she does. Not only in the Old Covenant, but also in the New, she has always been about something and Someone much bigger than herself. As we head into what the Bible calls the end times of this present age, contention against her will

intensify. Among many other things, God is using the tiny Jewish state, roughly 1/500th the size of the US or China, as a microcosm of what He is doing with us all. He is using her to reveal and refine, expose and evaluate, the hearts of humanity. About that, I would like to tell you a story.

Israel and You in the Last Days

Matthew 25:31-46 recounts Jesus' well known parable about sheep and goats. The tale, as you probably know, is about more than farm animals and good deeds. What you may not know is that it directly concerns Israel.

When we gather before our Lord and King in judgment, He will separate the righteous—those who feed, clothe, nurse and care for His needs—from those who do not. The righteous (portrayed as sheep) receive their good inheritance in the Kingdom of God, prepared especially for them. The unrighteous (portrayed as goats) are cast from His presence, even cursed. At that time, you and I will ask when it was that we saw and cared for Him—or did not. He will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these *brothers and sisters of mine*, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40).

I was taught, probably like you, that this passage refers to the poor and needy, the oppressed and maligned, throughout human history. Indeed, that is a good and proper, secondary interpretation and application of the parable. But the story has a more fundamental and primary interpretation that we often overlook.

One day, in a devotional study, I sensed the Spirit speak, *Look carefully, Sandra. These “brothers and sisters of mine” are the Jewish people.*

Startled, I pored over several translations of the verse and plowed through weighty commentaries. I researched the Greek and consulted expert seminarians. Here is what I found:

The Lord was speaking to His disciples in Matthew 25 explicitly about the end times. They had asked what would be the sign of His return and end of the age. In response, Jesus described several events, indicating Israel's enduring of great hardship (see Matthew 24:3–25:30). He told His followers how to prepare for that trying time and stand firm in faith until the end of it. Soberly, He cautioned that our actions toward His “brothers and sisters” in that day would affect our eternal destiny.

I discovered that in this context, most scholars agree that Jesus’ brothers and sisters refer fundamentally and unequivocally to the Jews.¹ The language used in verse 40 was exclusively used by the Jews of New Testament times for members of their own physical or biological family. To be sure, secondary interpretations and extended applications to nonfamily members can be made, but not at the expense of the primary interpretation of the text. Commenting on Matthew 25, a team of respected Gentile Bible scholars collectively writes, “Ultimately, how a person treats the Jews will reveal whether or not he is saved.”²

Please do not misunderstand. Salvation is solely by grace through faith. But true salvation is evidenced by love and fruits of righteousness—which are reflected in our attitude and actions toward the Jewish people. Why? As we will see in this book, how we treat Israel reflects to a real extent how we would treat the Lord Himself, Jesus the Jew.

I realize that is a bold statement. To repeat, I do not suggest we approve of everything Israel does or dismiss her sin. Nor do I say we should not care about, bless and lovingly reach out to

Palestinians and others In the Middle East. In fact, if our love for Israel means we have no love for these others, I daresay something is not right about our love for Israel.

The Creator does not play favorites. He chose Israel so that people like you and me in every nation and period of history would know—through her Scriptures, her Savior and her collective soul—His loving mercy and grace. He is not finished with Israel—or with how He wants to bless others through her. Meanwhile, will we honor His ways which are higher than ours, even ways that reflect a degree of mystery we cannot comprehend in this life?

To rephrase the question, do you desire to lay hold of all God has for you, standing firm in Him to the end? (Matthew 24:13) Then, my friend, He beckons you into His heart for His ancient covenant people. There you will discover a jealous and zealous, blazing love for the Jews, pulsating with passion. As a result, you will learn more of His love for *you* and lay hold of blessing for *you* personally that cannot be accessed, I am convinced, any other way.

Be forewarned: Others may not go with you. God is allowing Israel to serve as a strategic point of division. Some in the Body of Christ will stand with the sons and daughters of Jacob; some will turn away. As conflict escalates between Israel and her enemies, your stand in the end will be less about the Jewish state and more about *Him*.

Threshing and Testing in Justice

Long ago, the Sovereign One picked a seemingly ordinary spot on earth where He would place His Name forever (see 2 Chronicles 33:7; 1 Kings 9:3). The area served for centuries as a

threshing floor, where wheat was sifted from chaff. God also chose a people—the Jews—to inherit and inhabit the place. At His instruction, King David purchased the site and built an altar for Him on it (see 2 Samuel 24:15–25). On this precise plot of real estate, David’s son Solomon constructed God’s Holy Temple. There His glory came down, dwelling in unequaled grandeur on earth. Located in Jerusalem, the place is known today as the Temple Mount (*Har HaBayit* in Hebrew).

Today the Temple Mount serves as a threshing floor no less than it did when David bought it three thousand years ago. This dry and dusty hilltop sifts nations’ souls through their contest for its control. And little wonder, for there Jesus will rule and reign in Kingdom splendor—something His enemies are fearfully scrambling to prevent (see Isaiah 2:2–3; Psalm 132:13–14; Acts 3:21). In time, the Temple Mount will prove the consummate testing ground of humankind, the place where Messiah and anti-Messiah, and the followers of both, will be exposed. It is a test God wants you to pass—because it is a test of love.

The test would prove less genuine if issues involving Israel were simple, or if Jewish people never sinned. But sometimes Israel acts unjustly. Like other nations, sometimes her government or military or ordinary citizens make tragic, even devastating mistakes. Yet, as we will see, *true* justice is typically more often perverted, and egregiously so, by the world’s response to Israel’s misdeeds. Time and again, the international community has repeatedly singled her out for harsher treatment than any other nation, regardless of whether she did right or wrong in any given instance.

What does God say about the nations’ unjust response to the error of Israel’s ways?

“I am very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion, and I am very angry

with the nations that feel secure. I was only a little angry [at Israel], but they [the nations] went too far with the punishment. . . . Whoever touches [Israel] touches the apple of [my] eye—I will surely raise my hand against them.”

Zechariah 1:14–15; 2:8–9

Those who treat Israel unjustly raise their hand, so to speak, to poke the Almighty in His eye. In response, God raises His hand against *them*. They suffer a loss of spiritual vision. In a sense, we could say they are cursed.

It is not mere happenstance, therefore, that as nations increasingly mistreat Israel, spiritual darkness increases over the earth. To the extent castigation is heaped on Israel based on devilish lies against her and gross distortions of fact, darkness descends on the planet. More and more, the world views good as evil, and evil as good.

God, however, does not want the earth cursed with evil or spiritual darkness. In the word picture of Zechariah 1-2, I see His fiery passions not just for Israel, but for the nations. Certainly, He does not tell us we are to give Israel blind support in every matter. He does, however, want us to make choices concerning her that enable our vision to be preserved. He wants to rekindle in us a holy fear of, and respect for, His choices and truth--so we are postured us to receive His gracious blessing. If that is your desire too, please read on.

"The Goal of Our Instruction is Love" (1 Timothy 1:15)

The Bible's most concise yet comprehensive teaching on the relationship between Israel and the Church—which includes you if you are a Christian—is found in Romans chapters 9–11.

There God bares to us the burden of His heart, with patience and passion, for the Jewish people. In those pivotal chapters, He instructs New Covenant followers of Jesus to purposefully understand and share His dreams for Israel. He does not tell us to romanticize Israel or excuse her sin. Instead, He tells us to love over Israel's shortcomings so as to tenderly draw her to Himself. In the process, He transforms us more and more to the precious likeness of Messiah.

Why Care About Israel? follows the general flow of Romans 9-11. In so doing, time and space must necessarily be devoted to the jihadi/Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In that context, any denunciation of terror, jihadi Islam or international enmity against Israel is not intended to reflect anything less than Messiah-like love toward people groups who outspokenly despise Jews or the Jewish state. Recall the opening story of Joshua and his encounter with the Most High. God's perspective is Kingdom oriented; ours must be, too.

Why Care About Israel? digs deep in the pursuit of truth. As a former attorney with a political science degree and seminary background, I have spent decades researching thousands of theological, historical, political, legal and journalistic works, distilling them into a format most readers can readily understand.

As an Israeli, I have lived through war and terror, yet maintained solid friendships not only with other Messianic Jews, but with Palestinians, Muslim-background believers, Christian Zionists with whom I disagree on certain matters, a wide spectrum of non-Zionist believers from the nations, and Jews who do not believe in Jesus. I have ministered in several nations, including Islamic regions of the Middle East and in countries that remain, at this writing, staunchly anti-Israel. These experiences have hopefully, by God's grace, broadened

and deepened my understanding on why, as we approach the mid-21st century, we should care about Israel.

At least as important as all of the above, the information I share in this book has been drenched in many years and tears of soul searching, surrender to the Spirit, and intercessory prayer. In the pages that follow, you will not encounter dry facts or superficial arguments, but reality replete with heaven's heartbeat.

A companion website, whycareaboutisrael.com, supplements this book. Helpful study aids, including notes documenting or expounding on topics mentioned in the book, may be found there. Notes available online are designated by letters (a, b, c, etc.), while notes in the back of this book are designated by numbers (1, 2, 3, etc.). Some notes contain a dual designation. In that case, a portion of the note appears in the book, but expository matter is accessible online. This book can be easily read, however, without referring to any of the notes at all. They exist mostly for more serious readers as a complementary tool.

Why Care About Israel? employs terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Where Hebrew or Arabic words are used, translations are provided. Jesus' name is substituted many times with the Hebrew *Yeshua*. In some instances I refer to God as *YHVH*, based on a Hebrew expression of the standard English Tetragrammaton. The terms *Old Covenant*, *Tanach* and *Hebrew Scriptures* are employed synonymously with *Old Testament*. (Bear in mind, however, the Old Covenant actually contains several covenants within it.)

I use *Israel* interchangeably with *Jewish state*, *Jewish nation*, *national Israel*, *ethnic Israel* and occasionally *Zion*, referring either to the geographic territory or the Jewish people or both. This parallels the biblical usage, which reflects a dynamic unity

between the people and the land.^b The intended referent (land, people or both) should be clear from the context. The Jews are sometimes described as God's Old Covenant people; and the Church, His New Covenant people or *ekklesia*.

At this writing, a sovereign Palestinian state does not officially exist. For the sake of accuracy, I use the names *Palestinian Authority (PA)*, *Gaza*, *West Bank*, *Judea and Samaria* or *Palestinian people*. I trust that any offense taken at any of these terms will be minimal and forgiven. For linguistic integrity, I have tried to use the most appropriate name in each instance, given the particular context.

Where it is necessary to talk of antisemitism, the word refers to prejudicial hostility toward Jews, not other Semitic people groups. In discussions on militant Islam, the term *Islamism* or *Islamist* is used interchangeably with *fundamentalist*, *jihadi* or *extremist*. The phrase *the West* or *Western world*, *civilization*, *culture* or *society* refers to any or all nations, wherever located, that have in the past or currently identify with, traditional Judeo-Christian, Western and democratic values.

Enmity against Israel in the Middle East can be difficult to succinctly describe. I have chosen to characterize it as the jihadi/Palestinian–Israeli conflict, as the jihadi component encompasses Iran and its proxy terror groups. (At this writing Iran threatens, as it has for decades, to destroy Israel and wipe it off the map.)

"It is Zion, for whom nobody cares." (Jeremiah 30:17)

Originally published by Chosen Books of Baker Publishing Group in 2004, this book was later revised, updated, and released by the same publisher in 2013 as *Why Still Care About Israel?* In 2024, it is now in process of another update, with

new material being added in response to new global realities. The 2024 update will retain many of the information sources cited in earlier versions of the book. This is because those sources are just as accurate today as they were many years ago. Current events have only served to confirm the biblical principles and on-the-ground facts described and cited in the earlier versions.

On October 7, 2023, the jihadi terror group Hamas, Gaza's duly elected government, launched an invasion on Israeli soil called the "Al Aqsa (Temple Mount) Flood." In the assault, Hamas slaughtered, brutally mutilated, raped and kidnapped over a thousand Israeli civilians and foreign nationals.³ As any other nation would do, Israel responded by striking back at Hamas and undertaking to rescue kidnapped hostages. But achieving these goals would require nothing less than neutralizing Hamas. Here's why:

By its founding charter, Hamas came into existence for the purpose of destroying Israel. For nearly two decades, it launched murderous terror attacks against Israeli civilians and communities. It broke every ceasefire agreement it made with the Jewish state. With funds and resources from Israel and the international community, it constructed an elaborate city-state of tunnels, running underneath much of Gaza, to serve as military headquarters. There it built and stored huge stockpiles of weapons, mostly under homes, hospitals, mosques, schools, and humanitarian facilities.

Hamas embedded itself so deeply in the noncombatant population of Gaza that civilians became practically indistinguishable from terrorists. As a result, Israel found herself fighting a war in Gaza unlike any in history. Military tactics were required that never before existed.

Days after the attack by Hamas on October 7, the international community denounced Israel's military response, but not Hamas's terror operation or start of the war. A few days later, Jewish people around the world were suddenly thrust into an era of unprecedented antisemitism. At this writing, anti-Israel animus is so extreme that, apart from God, Jewish people might have little hope to survive. "It is only Zion," say the nations, "for whom nobody cares."

As you read this book you may at times feel grieved, or even a bit angered. I do not apologize for disclosing important information that may provoke your emotions. Sometimes, difficult truths must be told so we can pivot toward righteousness. I ache, as will many of you, for the fallen nature of humankind giving rise to disturbing facts detailed in some of the following pages. My hope and prayer is that, as *Why Care About Israel?* brings to light compelling realities and scriptural truths, you will also encounter God's magnanimous heart of love and redemptive grace—for all parties involved—as never before.

No single book about Israel can claim thorough and complete coverage of the biblical, historical, geopolitical, and sociological dimensions of the Jewish state. Nevertheless, I submit this work to the Christian world with faith God will use it to draw many hearts more fully into His for His ancient covenant people, the nations, and for you personally. I pray that as you read, you will not only be informed but inspired. And when you turn the final page, may God show you what to do with what you have learned.

Because Israel has been, is now, and will always remain, about *Him*.

2

Inseparable Love

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:38–39

You have probably been personally encouraged more than once by the passage above describing God's love. These power packed verses have strengthened the Church for over two thousand years. Despite life's difficulties, we can cling to the truth of God's unwavering love. Nothing, *but nothing*, can separate us from it. Why? Triumphant mercy and grace.

Divine mercy and grace crescendo in God's overcoming, unending love for us.¹ Chapter 8 in the book of Romans details the dazzling reality. Significantly, it is in this context that we begin reading, in the very first sentence of the following chapter, about Israel:

I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience con-

firms it through the Holy Spirit—I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, the people of Israel.

Romans 9:1–4

This flow of Scripture is strategic by the Spirit. Just as we are assured of YHWH's love for the Church in Romans 8, we are reminded of the unquenchable flame in His heart for the Jewish people in Romans 9. As you may know, the original letter to the Roman church contained no chapter breaks; they were added later for our convenience. *The New Covenant's keynote message on Israel is rooted in the revelation of God's merciful, gracious love.* So let's briefly visit it.

God's Love for the Gentiles

Before believers in Rome could embrace the reality of God's love for Israel in Chapters 9-11, they would first need to embrace the reality of His love for *them* expressed in Chapter 8. Roman Christians secure in God's love and blessing, personally and experientially—not just as abstract theology—would have no reason to fret because He still loves and blesses the Jews. They would understand He has more than enough mercy and grace, flowing from limitless love, for us all. They would, or at least should, respond rightly to Paul's teaching about Israel.

For the same reason, to the extent Gentile Christians today personally embrace and engage with the realities of Romans 8, they will be less likely to stumble over the truths of Romans 9-11. Any temptation toward offense, resentment or unconscious jealousy at God's election of Israel would (or at least should) dissipate in personal, intimate love communion with

Him. So let's take a few moments to explore the glory-truths of that pivotal chapter, historically considered a masterpiece of Scripture by scholars.

Romans 8 begins by reminding us that because of God's love for us, our sins are forgiven, *entirely*! Therefore, there is no condemnation for those in Messiah Jesus. This means you are personally set free from the condemning law of sin and death. Instead, the glory-law of the Spirit can be fulfilled in you! You are privileged with a capacity to abide in supernatural peace, whatever circumstances you face in life. (Romans 8:1-6)

Because of God's love for you personally, you are no longer obliged to your sin nature, but can thrive in the goodness of His will and ways for you. Your life is directed and led by the One who created you, who best knows you, who always desires your good, who is all-powerful, all-loving, and eternally with you. (Romans 8:9-14)

Because of God's love for you personally, you are His highly cherished, adopted son or daughter! He is your ever caring, affectionate, protective, providing and guiding Father. Adoption means you are treated the same as a child born naturally, never as second-class offspring. You are an important member of His forever family. (Romans 8:15)

Because of God's love for you personally, you are co-heir with Yeshua of His riches in glory! That Messiah-King would share His inheritance with you might boggle your mind, but cause your spirit to soar with delight.

Because of God's love for you personally, you are royalty! You have been delegated and stewarded nothing less than kingly authority. As you identify with the sufferings of Messiah, you are honored to identify with His resurrection glory. Magnificent splendor awaits you, infinite joy upon joy, far outweighing the temporary sufferings of this life. (Romans 8:16-

18)

Because of God's love for you personally, He delights to help you in your times of need. By His Spirit, He Himself intercedes for you, and perfectly so. Not only is YHVH your Holy Helper, but as you surrender to Love, day by day He empowers you by His same Spirit. (Romans 8:26-27, 34)

Because of God's love for you personally, everything in your life can work for, and result in, ultimate good as you trust in Him. The most devilishly cruel assault against you can be turned into cherished blessing. He Himself defends you and fights for you. Therefore, despite the trials of this life, you can't not be ultimately victorious! (Romans 8:28, 31, 33)

Because of God's love for you personally, He will be faithful to complete His work in you as you trust in Him. You need not worry or fret over your innate weakness, immature mistakes, or anything else. God Himself takes responsibility for your spiritual growth as you surrender to His majesty. (Romans 8:29-30)

Because of God's love for you personally, you lack nothing! He commits to give you everything you truly need as you trust in Him. No reason, ever, for jealousy or envy. For God did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for you. How will He not, then, in addition, freely give you all things genuinely necessary for your life in Him? (Romans 8:31-32)

Because of God's love for you personally, nothing can separate you from the eternal passions of His heart! Nothing, but nothing, in this universe has power to ever diminish or distance His wraparound, all-encompassing love for you. (Romans 8:35-39)

Now, for all these undeserved and magnificent blessings, Romans 8:12 says you have an obligation. You are obliged to surrender to God's Spirit and put to death the deeds of the

flesh. Such deeds include jealousy, offense, resentment, offense or disdain toward His other covenant children, those whom He also passionately loves: Israel and the Jews. Why He loves them so very much, we are now ready to see.

Why God Loves Israel

The first time Scripture speaks explicitly of God's love is not at Creation or to Adam and Eve, or Noah, or the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac or Jacob. It is in the book of Deuteronomy, to the children of Israel. Try to picture the scene: A throng in the desert gathers expectantly before Moses, its honored leader for over forty years. The great lawgiver, prophet and friend of God is saying good-bye to the Israelites as they stand at the precipice of the Promised Land. Moses is about to die, and so (I imagine) the hushed crowd clings to his every word. Nobody pays heed to the punishing desert sun, crying babies or unending demands of life-on-the-go. Here and now, for the first time, Moses tells the Israelites that God loves them:

The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, *but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers.*

Deuteronomy 7:6–8 NASB (EMPHASIS MINE)

Why does God love Israel? The Scripture simply says He loves Israel simply because He loved Israel. ("The Lord . . . set His love on you . . . because the Lord loved you . . .") YHVH

does not say Israel is lovable. He does not even say her forefathers with whom He covenanted were lovable. He offers no explanation conforming to human logic for His love for the Jewish people. This does not mean His love for them is irrational or misplaced. It does mean His love is according to perfect, divine reasoning, sovereign purpose and most of all, mercy and grace.

God hints that His love for a people He has chosen exists ultimately for His own sake. Peer into the chambers of His heart; He loves because He *is* love (see 1 John 4:8, 16). He loves because love is His essential nature and character.^a In the same manner, He loves *you* for His own sake. He cannot *not* love you. "Thou art Thyself the reason for the love wherewith we are loved," said the famed 20th century theologian, A. W. Tozer.²

God ties His love for the Jewish people to the oath He swore to them. He binds Himself, unconditionally, by His word to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It has been said that love is spelled c-o-m-m-i-t-m-e-n-t. Sovereign God loves Israel because of His covenant commitment to her. At the same time, His commitment flows from His love. In other words, God loves Israel because He loved Israel, because He committed to love Israel. And for the same reasons, He loves you.

We have seen that to understand God's love for the Jewish people, we must understand His love for us, personally. But the converse is also true. To understand His love for us, we must understand His love for the Jews. It is only by understanding His love for both covenant peoples that we can fully understand, and engage with, the magnanimous love of God. In these last days, as the love of many grows cold, is that something we can afford *not* to do?

God's unshakeable covenant love for the Jews ought to encourage and comfort every follower of Yeshua, Jewish or Gentile. As we have seen, if you are His New Covenant son or

daughter, by mercy and grace He also loves *you*, unshakably. In fact, we could say God loves Israel because He mercifully loves *you*. The Sovereign One saw fit to create and set apart one little nation, namely Israel, to bless all other nations. He entrusted her with His words of truth. Through her, He birthed a Messiah to serve as Savior of humankind. From her, He raised up apostles to spread the knowledge and glory of His Kingdom. There's still more.

Israel's destiny to bless and minister the life of God to others is not over and done. The Scriptures allow us to glimpse into the prophetic future, when she will humbly serve the Gentile nations in a loving, beautiful manner we cannot yet fully comprehend. But it will be "life from the dead" (Romans 11:15)

Now, to be sure, God's love is not the same as His approval. He does not advocate sloppy agape. He does not approve of sin on the part of His covenant children, Jewish or Christian, and neither should we. But at the same time, sin does not extinguish unconditional covenant love, flowing from mercy and grace.

A highly respected Bible scholar shares how he came to realize that despite Israel's sin, God's love and purposes for her have not changed. For much of his life he'd believed God no longer cared much for Israel and had replaced her with the Church. But in studying Romans 9–11, he was given a revelation of mercy and grace that radically changed his view. He writes:

It is only where the Church . . . secretly—perhaps quite unconsciously!—believes that its own existence is based on human achievement, and so fails to understand God's mercy to itself, that it is unable to believe in God's mercy for still unbelieving Israel, and so entertains the ugly and unscriptural notion that God has cast off His people Israel and simply replaced it by the

Loving in Hebrew: *Ahav*

If you go to church, you have probably heard more than one sermon about the different Greek words used in the New Covenant for *love*. But have you ever studied the fascinating Hebrew concept? It is in Hebrew that God gives us the foundational knowledge of His love, and solid foundations are key to good constructs of any kind. So let us revisit Deuteronomy 7:7–8 (NASB), where we first hear, straight-out and plain, about God’s love for His people: “The Lord . . . set His love [in Hebrew, *khashaq*] on you . . . because the Lord loved [*ahav*] you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers.”

The Hebrew Scriptures use three different words to convey love. *Ahav*, a primary root, appears most frequently. *Ahav* means “to love, have affection, be attached to, delight in.” *Ahav* also connotes “to lust” and “to breathe” or “pant after.”⁴ *Ahav* is used where Moses explains that the Lord set His love on Israel “because the Lord *loved*” them.

The second word for love, *khashaq*, appears where Moses says the Lord “set His *love* on you.” *Khashaq* means “to love, long for, desire and delight in.” It also implies “clinging.”⁵ (A third word for love, *keenah*, is not found in this passage but is used elsewhere to denote YHVH’s ardor, zeal or jealousy.^{6 b)}

Based on the Hebrew, Deuteronomy 7:7–8 could be accurately interpreted or paraphrased: “The Lord set His longing, clinging desire, delight and love on you because of His affectionate attachment, desirous delight and love for you.”

Why take so much time with definitions? The point is the

passion! God is fervently amorous and affectionate toward Israel. Her story is that of Heaven's holy love affair, the longest romance on record.

Hear God's heartbeat for His ancient covenant people, not only in the words of Scripture but in the very letters that comprise them. According to some rabbinic schools of thought, each letter of the Hebrew alphabet carries with it a deposit of the divine. Since God is the Author of language and Hebrew is the original tongue in which He communicates to His people, some say that not only every word, but every letter of every word bespeaks something of His nature.⁷

In the word *ahav*, the first letter is *alef*, said to designate sacrifice, strength and servant leadership. *Hey*, the second letter, connotes an opening or open window. It is also used as a substitute for writing God's name. The third letter is a modification of *bet*, meaning "house" or "family." *Bet* implies covenantal, affectionate, familial relationship.⁸ Through its component letters, *ahav* is thought to suggest sacrifice, strength, communion and close kinship with God.

I do not suggest we treat rabbinic musings about Hebrew letter associations the same as Bible doctrine. This particular tradition, however, can be revealing. In it we catch nuances of the all-powerful One sacrificing of Himself so His people can relate openly and freely to Him as members of His family. J. I. Packer, in his classic *Knowing God*, describes the exquisite intimacy implicit in the word *ahav*: God's "love reaches its highest form in personal fellowship in which each lives in the life of the other, imparting to the other, and receiving back the outflow of that other's affection."⁹

Love Synergized: The Church and Israel

As Paul trumpets the triumph of God's love in Romans Chapter 8, it is not surprising the Spirit would turn his thoughts to Israel in Chapter 9. Birthed from YHVH's love for all humanity, Israel was created the object of His holy affections and recipient of His ardor. She was to freely return His love and mediate it to others. Yet for the most part, she does not. Like other nations, Israel is lost in her sin apart from her Savior. So the anointed apostle spills before us his unshakeable grief. The same Paul who exhorts us to rejoice always (see Philippians 4:4) says that he carries "great sorrow and unceasing anguish" over Israel. Why does his pain never end?

Paul is gripped by the Spirit's unending burden of love for the Jews. Not once or twice, but three times, he affirms the veracity of His passion:

I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit—I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart . . . for the sake of . . . those of my own race, the people of Israel.

Romans 9:1–4

Paul's lament echoes that of Moses, who pleaded with God on Israel's behalf: "Please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written" (Exodus 32:32). Paul, like Moses, carries the unchanging heart cry of YHVH.

Do you want to know the burden of the Lord and His Kingdom purposes for today? Think *Israel*.

Does this mean others are excluded from a special place in

our Father's heart? Much to the contrary, God's burden for Israel is central to His redemptive plans for all peoples. Every nation, tribe, and individual occupies a special place, with a special destiny, in His heart. But that place and destiny is tied to Israel. Therefore, not for her sake but for His and yours, the destiny He designed for Israel must and will be fulfilled. At the same time, and as we will later see, attaining to your blessed destiny means blessing that of the Jews.

To be sure, some believers with little grasp of God's heart for the Jewish people love Him deeply. For over two thousand years, countless numbers of such saints have laid down their lives for Jesus. In no way do I impugn their integrity or spirituality. But in these last days, the world is different. Today, Israel has been placed center stage before a global audience. God's love story is on divine display as humanity locks in on the tiny Jewish state. As they do, the Creator King is noting their response. Will it be one of mercy and love, "the most excellent way" (1 Corinthians 12:31)?

According to 1 Corinthians 13, without love we are nothing. Without love, even the priceless gifts of the Spirit and His mandates for ministry add zero to our worth. If we speak in tongues or prophesy without love, we make only noise. Lacking love, our faith may move mountains but not bless a single soul. If we give all we possess to the poor or become martyrs for Messiah, we gain nothing without love. Love is the supreme gift and most excellent way. It never fails; it lasts forever. Love is the most valued substance of the universe.

Yeshua cautioned that in the last days, Kingdom conflict between good and evil would greatly increase. Natural human sensibilities would be offended, embittered or hardened by an unprecedented onslaught of iniquity. As a result, the love of many (or most) would grow cold (see Matthew 24:12–13).

Messiah's true followers, however, will stand firm to the end. They will not just endure the times, but vibrantly engage with His sacrificial strength in intimate communion with His *ahav*.

Refining Love

Pure, Messiah-like love flows through a sanctified human heart without condition, solely to bless the beloved. Free of ulterior motive, such love is the ultimate substance and test of our faith. It is that which the Lord has always desired, even radically required, of those who dare follow Him fully. And today, He is using Israel to help us attain to it. Take, for example, the story of an Arab Christian I know, a former Muslim terrorist I will call Malik (not his real name).

Malik used to train Palestinian children to kill Israelis and took pride in personally snuffing out more than one Jewish life. But then he had a dramatic encounter with God. Now he loves and serves Jesus, the Arabs—and Jews. How was Malik's heart transformed from one of hate to love? Someone told him that to know and serve the true God of the universe, he would have to love a Jew (Jesus). That person gave him a Bible, which he did not want to read. He knew the book was about Israel, his sworn enemy. Malik says that when he eventually read the Scriptures, and through them came to understand God's love for Israel, he felt love for the first time in his life. "I grew up hating—and especially hating Jews. I did not know what love was or felt like. But when I was willing to love the Jews, God filled me with His love for *me*."

Not too unlike He did with Malik, God used Israel to transform the heart and life of my friend Emily. For years Emily was fascinated with end times prophecy. Ever since she learned

that Israel serves as God's "prophetic timepiece," she claimed to love the Jewish state. But whenever I'd meet up with Emily, she was intrigued with just one thing. The woman had question upon question about how the latest news events from the Holy Land could signal the Second Coming of Christ. Finally, I shared with Emily that God had another way for her to relate to the Jewish people she claimed to love.

Many believers, like Emily, view Israel as an exciting prophetic timepiece. Indeed, that is an aspect—albeit a secondary one—of her existence. As a people through whom God uniquely speaks, Israel not only reflects the hour of world history, she prophetically heralds that which is to come. But Jesus did not die for prophetic timepieces. Neither is the Father's heart ravished over some cosmic hourglass. Israel is His nation of highly treasured souls, most of whom desperately need salvation.

To be sure, God wants us understanding and cooperating with His prophetic Word and plans. But genuine, Messiah-like love does not depend on the unfolding of prophecy. If that is our primary concern with Israel, God wants to mature our love by taking us deeper into His heart. This He tenderly did with Emily, who began visiting Israel to minister in compassion to Holocaust survivors and terror victims. Instead of living for the news, she *became* good news to Israel. In embracing God's heart for the Jews, she came to know His heart for *her* as never before. Emily has changed and so have the Israelis with whom she's shared Yeshua's love.

Will you, like Malik or Emily, choose the most excellent way in loving God's ancient covenant people—not because her land is holy, not because prophecy gets fulfilled there, not because you seek primarily to convert Jews and not just because you yourself want to get blessed? The Father asks you to love

Israel because He loves Israel, unconditionally, uncompromisingly. The prophet Ezekiel shows us how.

Mercy and Grace^c

Ezekiel tells us a rapturous tale of love, inviting us to explore the inner and intimate chambers of God's heart for His Jewish people. The story starts in Chapter 16 with YHVH recounting His adoring, doting care for Israel. On the day she was born, He says, she was despised. She was thrown into a field, unbathed, unwanted, naked and alone. Not a soul had pity or compassion on her. But He passed by and saw her kicking in her blood. As she lay there helpless, He said, "Live!"

God grew her like "a plant of the field." Years later, He saw that she was "old enough for love." So He spread the corner of His garment over her, covering her nakedness. He gave her His "solemn oath" and she became His. He dressed her in fine linen and costly embroidery, fitting leather sandals onto her feet. He adorned her with jewels, silver and gold. He placed a crown on her head. He nourished her with fine flour, honey and olive oil. "You became very beautiful and rose to be a queen," God said. "And your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty, because the splendor I had given you made your beauty perfect" (Ezekiel 16:13–14).

In return, Israel took her beauty and fame and ran off to become a whore:

You lavished your favors on anyone who passed by and your beauty became his. You took some of your garments to make gaudy high places, where you carried on your prostitution. . . . You also took the fine jewelry I gave you . . . and you made for yourself male idols and engaged in prostitution with them. And

you took your embroidered clothes to put on them, and you offered my oil and incense before them. Also the food I provided for you—the flour, olive oil and honey I gave you to eat—you offered as fragrant incense before them. That is what happened, declares the Sovereign LORD.

Ezekiel 16:15–19

How does God respond to Israel now that she has spurned His attention and affection only to disgrace herself? He declares: “Yet I will remember the covenant I made with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you” (Ezekiel 16:60).

Do you hear the longsuffering ache despite the anger in His voice? His heart is ravaged yet forever faithful. "I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved Me and followed Me. ... Return, faithless people," declares the Lord, for I am your husband." (Isaiah 2:2; 3:14)

In spite of her sin—for which severe chastening follows—God loves Israel unconditionally. He will not quit or give up on her. He will save Israel by mercy and grace, and she will love Him back. The same message is repeated over and over again by nearly all the Hebrew prophets, New Covenant apostles and Yeshua Himself.

One biblical portrayal of YHVH as Israel’s husband can seem downright scandalous: the story of Hosea and Gomer.

Tough Love

In extraordinary fashion, the prophet Hosea dramatically plays out God’s covenant love for all to see. Here it is more than mere story; it is flesh-and-blood reality. God startles us, and no doubt Hosea, by telling him to marry a harlot, a sex addict who

will repeatedly prove unfaithful. Despite his wife's rebellion, Hosea must love and keep covenant with her. So the prophet finds and marries a prostitute named Gomer, and their marriage depicts Israel's adulterous relationship with God (see Hosea 3:1).

From this reality show of infidelity comes the word of the Lord to His people. Israel, like Gomer, has deplorably prostituted herself to sin. Her jealous God, however, will not stand for it. He will do whatever it takes to win her back—if not the easy way, then the hard. Therefore, YHVH “will be like a lion” to the Jewish nation. He will “tear her to pieces,” then hide Himself and make sure nobody comes to her rescue. Meanwhile, He will wait patiently for her to admit her guilt, turn back and earnestly seek Him (see Hosea 5:14–15).

The story bespeaks the tough love of our ineffably gracious God. In wrath, He remembers mercy. His own love constrains Him. Hear His heart pounding with anticipation for the hour of His beloved's return:

“In that day,” declares the LORD, “you will call me ‘my husband’; you will no longer call me ‘my master.’ . . . I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the LORD.”

Hosea 2:16, 19–20

The book of Hosea closes with some of the most beautiful, romantic poetry in the Bible. On Israel our longsuffering Creator, knowing the end from the beginning, stoutly refuses to give up. Rest assured, says Hosea, the Jewish nation will be transformed by mercy and grace:

“I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them. I will be like the dew to Israel; he will blossom like a lily. . . . His splendor will be like an olive tree, his fragrance like a cedar of Lebanon. People will dwell again in his shade; they will flourish like the grain, they will blossom like the vine—Israel’s fame will be like the wine from Lebanon.”

Hosea 14:4–7

A New Covenant

Not only in Hosea, but throughout the Old Covenant, it is in the context of Israel’s failure and sin—and God’s judgment—that He shockingly interjects, “I love you.” Just when it seems He is about to disown His people (and rightly so), He declares instead His undying love, affirming His covenant still stands. When it appears all fair and legal grounds for dissolution of the relationship exist, He renews His vows instead. Amid deserved chastisement, God dispenses compassion. Israel spurns the Creator with impunity, yet receives an engraved invitation to repent. His mercy and grace are appalling; His kisses, outrageous. Discipline Israel He must, but destroy or disown her completely? Never!

Eventually there came a time when sin so screamed for justice that God exiled the Jews from their land. Captive Israelites lay broken and bleeding, defeated and displaced on foreign soil. Surely they wondered if YHVH would ever favor them again.

In this unlikely context of misery and despair came a dizzying word from the Lord. Like a windfall, hope from heaven descended on the Jews. Never before had He spoken explicitly of it—this future “new covenant”:

“Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. . . . I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. . . . For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

Jeremiah 31:31, 33–34 NKJV

Notice the New Covenant was not made here with the Church; it was originally made with the Jews. Holy God is wholly in love with Israel; therefore, she must and will be made holy. By mercy and grace, the New Covenant guarantees it. That same mercy and grace extends to all nations—but keeps His covenant with Israel intact.

Next, as if this all-surpassing promise were not enough, God reaffirms His commitment to sustain Israel as a nation forever:

This is what the Lord says, he who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the Lord Almighty is his name: “Only if these decrees vanish from my sight,” declares the Lord, “will Israel ever cease being a nation before me.” This is what the Lord says: “Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done,” declares the Lord.

Jeremiah 31:35–37

Have the sun, moon and stars stopped shining? Have the waves of the sea stopped roaring? If not, then the descendants of Jacob have not ceased being a nation before God. Have men measured the heavens or plumbed the deepest bowels of the earth? Then neither has God rejected Israel because of her sin. Assured He will never reject His Old Covenant people, we can

trust He will never reject His New Covenant people, either.

If you are a Christian, God's love, mercy and grace for you are no less than they are for Israel. Her story is very much yours. This is because YHVH is a covenant keeping God. In these last days, however, much of the meaning and importance of covenant has been lost. In the next chapter, we rediscover its value, glory and immutable significance in eternal, spiritual realms.

3

The Sanctity of Covenant

Theirs is . . . the covenants . . . and the promises.

Romans 9:4

In the ancient world of the Bible, covenant defined and sealed relationship. A solemn covenant making ceremony resulted in an agreement that was sacred in nature. But it was a bloody affair, involving the cutting of flesh.¹ Symbolically, the parties created a recognizable entity having, in a sense, a life of its own. A covenant was, and still should be, an oath scrupulously honored and protected by all.

Romans 9:4–5 describes the riches of God’s mercy and grace in His covenant with the Jewish people. In this passage the apostle Paul outlines Israel’s inheritance and prophetic calling. Invested in her is blessing for all humankind, guaranteed by a blood-mediated covenant with Yahweh.

The Abrahamic Covenant

As we unpack God’s covenant with Israel, please note at the outset one little word in Romans 9:4: "*is*." Israel’s “*is*” the

“adoption as sons,” “the covenants,” “the promises” and much more. Now, as it *is* in English, so it *is* in Greek,² in which *is* refers to something that currently exists. When Paul writes that Israel’s “is” something, he means it *is* in an ongoing, continuing sense. God’s covenants and promises with her *are still* Israel’s.

The apostle makes the same point later in his letter: “They are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable” (Romans 11:28–29).³ Israel’s destiny has not expired. It has not been transferred to the Church or anyone else. To be sure, the Church partakes of all the blessings of salvation and is in no way inferior to Israel. But she does not replace or supersede Israel in God’s heart or plans for humankind. His blessings and irrevocable callings are by mercy and grace, and He has enough of both to make good on His promises for everyone.

Not long after the Church in Rome was established, however, a question arose as to whether Christians had replaced Israel in the purposes of God. Many Jewish leaders had rejected Jesus as Messiah. To the Romans this posed a double dilemma. First, were they Yahweh’s new, reinvented “Israel”? Second, if they were, and His Word had failed the Jews, how could they trust His promises now for *them*?³ Paul’s response is based on the concept of covenant. He explains as clearly as possible, in the language and culture of the day, that God’s covenant with Israel *is* still hers. It *is* still in effect. It cannot be revoked; it is *unconditional*.

In the Bible, a covenant can be either conditional or unconditional in nature. If conditional, that covenant’s fulfillment depends on certain prerequisite conditions being met. If God makes a conditional covenant, the person(s) with whom He makes it must do something first before He fulfills His end of the deal. But if the covenant is unconditional, then God binds

only Himself to do anything. His fulfillment of an unconditional covenant is not conditioned on, or affected by, human response. In other words, sin cannot void or cancel God's unconditional covenant. Amazing grace, is it not?

The Covenant Is Unconditional

Yahweh's foundational covenant with Israel traces to Abraham:

The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Genesis 12:1-3

The covenant explodes with the hope of redemption and blessing for all humankind. Moreover, the covenant is unconditionally guaranteed in the context of a Promised Land. In Genesis 15:7, Yahweh reminds his friend, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it."

Abraham asks, "How can I know that I will gain possession of it?" (verse 8). God's answer leaves no room for doubt. He instructs the patriarch-to-be to slaughter and sacrifice various animals, placing pieces of their cut-up bodies on the ground. Then, with Abraham in a Spirit induced sleep, God passes as holy fire between the pieces. He declares, "To your descendants I give this land" (verse 18).

The ritual enacted in Genesis 15 was the precise procedure used in Abraham's day to formalize a legal covenant. Animals

were cut, then covenanting parties walked between the pieces in a solemn oath to perform their duties. If only one party passed through the bodies, however, only that one party undertook to perform covenant duties. Fulfillment of the covenant would not depend on the actions of any other party to the covenant.⁴

The fact that Yahweh alone passed between the animals, and Abraham did not, cannot be overemphasized. It establishes that God's covenant with Abraham, which later passed to Isaac and Jacob, is radically, graciously unconditional.^b The esteemed J. Dwight Pentecost wrote that it was "impossible for God to make any clearer that what was promised to Abraham was given him without any conditions, to be fulfilled by the integrity of God alone."⁵

Inheritors of the Covenant

Time goes by and Ishmael is born. With no son by Sarah, the patriarch asks God if Ishmael can inherit the covenant. But his request is unequivocally denied: "No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him" (Genesis 17:19 NKJV).

Many years later, Isaac fathers Esau and Jacob. Between them, Sovereign God chooses Jacob and decrees, "In you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 28:14 NKJV). Eventually Jacob's name is changed to Israel, the name his descendants have been called ever since. His children become the flesh and blood inheritors of the unconditional Abrahamic covenant.

And so, Paul reminds the Church the covenant "is" still Israel's, despite her collective and lamentable decision not to

embrace Yeshua. Hebrews 6:13–14, 17 affirms: “When God made His promise to Abraham . . . he swore by himself . . . because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear.”

God followed the Abrahamic covenant with three subsequent, main covenants. In chronological order, these are known as the Mosaic or Sinai covenant (the Law); the Davidic covenant (pertaining to the Messianic Kingdom); and the New Covenant. Each builds upon all previous covenants—but does not cancel any of them out (see Matthew 5:17–20; Luke 1:68–73). The Covenant Creator himself declares, “My covenant I will not break, nor alter the word issued from My lips” (Psalm 89:34).

“Correctly Handle the Word of Truth”⁶

Why does heated controversy swirl over God’s covenant with Abraham? For Christians, confusion often traces back to how we have learned to interpret the Bible. God does not want our understanding of Scripture be influenced by undue emotion, flawed discernment or faulty assumptions about His nature. *An incorrect handling of His Word will usually result, among other things, in an incorrect understanding of God’s covenant with Israel.* So the question must be asked: To know our God in Spirit and truth, to walk intimately with Him and avoid error, how are we to interpret His Holy Word?

A full study on Bible interpretation is beyond the scope of this book.^c It is important, however, that we highlight the basics to settle in our minds, as well as our hearts, why God still wants us caring about Israel. Those basics are simple. Sadly,

some theologians have developed complex and contorted arguments leading to fanciful interpretations of the biblical text. Many times these arguments and novel interpretative methods seek, consciously or unconsciously, to exclude any hope or justification for Israel's restoration. They may be driven by political views founded on ideologies which are outright contrary to God's Word and character. Christians who are not familiar with sound principles of Bible interpretation can be easily ensnared by them.

I trust you want to “do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). So please join me for the remainder of this chapter in a brief study on how to interpret the Scriptures according to a proper Hebraic-Christian approach. Such a study is foundational to understanding God's plans for Israel -- and for you!

Traditional Bible scholars agree that the best interpreter of Scripture is Scripture itself. Writer and teacher of the first five books of the Bible, Moses was the premier interpreter of God's Word. His inspired understandings laid the foundation for all subsequent Old and New Covenant writings. The prophets all followed Moses' approach, and Yeshua's teachings reflect, amplify and authenticate what we can call a Hebraic-based method of interpretation.^d (Messiah criticized hypocritical Pharisaic applications of the Scriptures, but not the Hebraic interpretive principles themselves.) Following Yeshua's example, all the Messianic Jewish apostles and New Covenant authors adhered to the same broad approach.⁷

Before delving into their approach, it is important to understand that any method of Bible interpretation (or “hermeneutic”) reflects certain underlying presuppositions about the na-

ture of God. A traditional, Hebraic hermeneutic draws its presuppositions from the biblical text itself. The most foundational of these presuppositions is that God is relational. He sincerely desires to communicate with humankind and is quite able to do so in His Word.

A Hebraic Approach to Bible Interpretation

Because God delights to reveal Himself to those He loves, He generally speaks to us in a plain, straightforward manner that we can readily understand. The Master Communicator, He means what He says and says what He means. His Word “is not too mysterious . . . nor is it far off. . . . But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it” (Deuteronomy 30:11, 14 NKJV).

Traditional Hebraic approaches to Bible interpretation, therefore, teach that words of Scripture are fundamentally—but not exclusively—understood according to their plain, ordinary meaning, in consideration of the literary and historical context in which they were originally written.⁸ Simply put, biblical text should be understood in context. Words should first be given their literal, plain sense or straightforward meaning before any deeper meanings are sought out and assigned to them.

A traditional Hebraic hermeneutic used since the third century BC is known as *Pardes*.^e The *Pardes* approach to understanding and communicating Scripture is reflected throughout the New Covenant as well as the Old. Consisting of four main principles, *Pardes* offers us today a solid introduction to Hebraic based Bible interpretation sufficient for our purposes in this book. Although we will refer to the principles of *Pardes* by their traditional Hebrew names, the concepts and techniques

they describe are what is more important. We will look at them in the same order they should be applied to any passage of Scripture.

According to *Pardes*, the first and fundamental meaning of a biblical text is called *p'shat* (meaning, plain or straight). *P'shat* refers to the ordinary, plain sense and straightforward, literal meaning of the words of Scripture. This is determined in consideration of the literary (grammatical) and historical-cultural context in which the words were originally communicated.

The purpose of the *p'shat* principle is to understand what the text said to its *original* readers or hearers—without reading anything else, including later biblical text, into it. Other layers of meaning in a passage may exist, but they are ascertained only after the *p'shat* is first properly determined. This is because additional layers build upon, but do not replace, the fundamental or *p'shat* level.

So where Scripture uses the word "land," for example, we should interpret that word to refer primarily to actual, physical, literal land. We would not assume the word applies primarily to the land of heaven, or the land of a human heart, or some other intangible, unusual place --- unless the context makes it abundantly clear that regular, ordinary, literal land is not involved.

To be sure, God's Word is interspersed with beautiful allegory, metaphor, symbolism and deep meanings. So a Hebraic-based hermeneutic is not rigidly literal. The second *Pardes* category is known as *remez* (hints). *Remez* refers to the more allegorical or symbolic meaning of Scripture at which a passage hints, but does not explicitly state. Many times there is both a plain sense and symbolic interpretation of a passage.

Occasionally, a biblical text makes no sense according to its

literal meaning. In that case—and *only* in that case—are we to interpret the text fundamentally as symbolic or allegorical. An example would be Yeshua's use of the idiom, eye of a needle: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Matthew 19:24).

Next, the *d'rash* (inquiry or association) level of meaning is determined by comparing a scripture with other scripture. For example, passages on a certain topic are interpreted in association with other passages on the same topic. Writings from a certain biblical author or time period are studied in association with other writings from the same author or time period. Like the *remez*, a *d'rash* inquiry is done only after a *p'shat* analysis.

Lastly, *sod* (secret) levels of esoteric, mystical or uniquely personal meanings may also be found in God's Word. But again, like the *remez* level, *d'rash* and *sod* interpretations do not dismiss, cancel out or exclude the fundamental *p'shat* interpretation. Examples of Scripture containing all four levels of interpretation exist throughout the Song of Solomon and Revelation.

Interpreting the New Covenant is not much different from interpreting the Old. The New Covenant is a Jewish book written by Jewish authors, expounding on Jewish concepts, using traditional Jewish hermeneutics. It extends God's gracious blessings to new dimensions centered in Messiah. But like the Old Covenant, whenever possible, the fundamental interpretation and application of New Covenant text is according to the *p'shat* principle. Words should be understood according to their plain or literal meaning, given the context in which they were originally communicated. After the *p'shat* is established, additional levels of understanding and application may then be found.

Symbolizing the Scriptures

Pardes, along with more intricate Hebrew hermeneutical techniques, fell into disuse by much of the Church shortly after the first century. By the third century, most believers were Gentile rather than Jewish, and naturally so; there have always been many more Gentiles in the world than Jews. Gentile Church leaders concluded that a different approach to Bible interpretation would better suit their own traditions and prove more user friendly to pagan society. So they developed an approach that reflected the Greco-Roman, rather than biblically Jewish, worldview.

Not surprisingly, soon our esteemed Church fathers started to think of God as unrelational, aloof and distant from humanity. Contrary to the Messianic Jewish apostles, they concluded He spoke only in language that was necessarily difficult, if not impossible, for humans to understand.⁹

By the fourth and fifth centuries, they adopted a new hermeneutic based on whole new presuppositions about God. Their fundamental approach to Bible interpretation became symbolic, metaphoric or allegorical, instead of plain sense or literal. In essence, they jettisoned the *p'shat* principle and went a bit wild with *remez*, *d'rash* and *sod*.

As a result, God's words were understood as mostly referring to the ethereal rather than earthly realm. Words such as *scroll*, *house* or *land*, for instance, did not mean a literal scroll, house or piece of land. Rather, they were understood as referring exclusively to realities and mysteries that were spiritual and intangible. By this reasoning, terms like *Israel* and *Jew* no longer applied to the physical, tangible or literal descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Instead they symbolized Chris-

tians or the Church. References to the Promised Land were re-interpreted as referring exclusively to intangible blessings in spiritual realms such as heaven or inside the heart of a believer.

At times, the whole Old Covenant was treated as merely a spiritual type or metaphoric foreshadow of the New. Now, the Old Covenant does contain symbolic types and foreshadows of the New—but never at the expense of the fundamental, straightforward meaning of the passages in which those types and shadows appear.

What fruit has the allegorical method borne? “Fantasy unlimited,” according to one theologian.¹⁰ Take, for example, the teaching from a third century Church father named Origen, based on Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Dispelling any literal reference to Jerusalem, Origen reasoned the donkey represents the Old Covenant, while its colt depicts the New. The two apostles, he concluded, picture the moral and mystical meanings of Scripture. According to Origen, any literal city, donkey, colt or even apostle, is irrelevant. Jesus never meant for anyone to fetch an actual animal for Him and did not ride one into Jerusalem—even though Zechariah had prophesied, as a recognizable sign to Israel, that her Messiah King would come to her on a donkey's colt (Zechariah 9:9).^f

In overemphasizing symbolism, an allegorical hermeneutic does not explain or account for the many hundreds of past literal fulfillments of Old or New Covenant prophecy. As you might expect, it does not allow for literal *future* fulfillments of prophecy either. Therefore, Christians who interpret God’s Word according to this approach rarely regard modern Israel as a fulfillment of prophecy. Some of them strongly oppose her existence today as a restored Jewish state.

Supersessionism: Replacement Theology

Following the Great Reformation, some Protestant evangelicals gradually recouped the essence of the *p'shat* principle of *Pardes*. This gave rise to the widely used "literal-grammatical-historical" approach to Bible interpretation that became the evangelical mainstay for hundreds of years. In overemphasizing the fundamental *p'shat* level, however, the symbolic *remez*, *d'rash* and *sod* levels ("hints," "association" and "secret") were sometimes minimized or ignored.

The literary-historical hermeneutic provides a solid foundation for correctly handling the Word of truth. But God wants us accessing the full, rich treasure of His Word, with all its layers of meaning. This we can do by restoring the breadth and depth of *all* the categories reflected in a Hebraic-based approach such as *Pardes*.

In recent decades, different streams of Christianity have sought to recover aspects of Hebraic-based hermeneutics.⁶ But most traditional denominations and seminaries still rely heavily on the allegorical approach. As a result, we still regularly hear teachings that take prophetic Scriptures about Israel and interpret them as mere metaphors of the inner, spiritual life -- or as references only to heaven. No regard at all is given to literal, physical Israel.

To illustrate, look with me at Isaiah 60:1: "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you." In context, this prophetic verse refers fundamentally, at the level of *p'shat*, to Israel. Applying principles of *remez*, *derash* and *sod*, there is personal and corporate blessing in the verse for Christians, too. But the original meaning pertaining to original Israel is still the original meaning. The prophecy has a future, tangible fulfillment for the Jewish nation. If we regularly

ignore such fundamental meanings, and apply Scriptures like Isaiah 60:1 exclusively to the Church, we can easily fall prey to the serious error of supersessionism; and in particular, replacement theology.

Supersessionism mistakenly teaches that God's prophetic promises and Kingdom purposes for the Jews have been superseded by, or transferred to, by others. Usually the recipients are said to be the Church. Through history, supersessionist theologies have inevitably brought about tragic, even murderous expressions of Christian antisemitism. As we will see, the apostle Paul denounces all forms of supersessionism in Romans 9–11. A respected Bible scholar notes that faulty hermeneutics, especially regarding prophecy, paved way for the Church's serious error of historical supersessionism:

In the history of the Church . . . the prophetic portions of Scripture have suffered more from inadequate interpretation than any other major theological subject [because] the Church turned aside from a normal and grammatical/literal interpretation of prophecy to one that is . . . subject to the caprice of the interpreter.¹¹

Classic supersessionism is known as replacement theology. Replacement theology wrongly teaches that Israel has been replaced by the Church in God's heart and plans. All the blessings He ever gave to the Jews are said to now belong exclusively to the Church. Left to Israel, however, are all God's curses and judgments. Similar in practical effect to replacement theology is preterism, which teaches that biblical prophecies about Israel have already been fulfilled.

As we will see in chapter 12, a new supersessionism has developed out of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict called Pales-

tinian fulfillment or liberation theology; Christian Palestinianism; or simply, fulfillment theology. This new supersessionism is being used by some as a theological justification and political tool for anti-Zionism and anti-Israelism. It is fast gaining popularity, though many respected scholars regard it as outright antisemitic. Sadly, like the old supersessionism, the new is marked by misguided hermeneutics and mistaken presuppositions about God, such as that described below.

Valuing the Physical Realm

Our approach to Scripture study is often impacted by conscious or unconscious presuppositions about the material realm of existence. Whether we realize it or not, most of us attach different values of importance to the spiritual versus physical world. If we believe the physical realm that God created is essentially good, we have little trouble understanding the significance of that realm—including physical Israel—to His redemptive plans.¹² A Hebraic-based hermeneutic assumes that material reality is highly valued by the Creator, who declared all that He had made to be “very good” (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 31). To be sure, the world has fallen into sin. Yet, because of God’s loving esteem for humankind and the entire physical, earth realm, He purposed to do what was necessary to redeem it (see Romans 8:19–21).

In contrast, Greco-Roman thought held to a different, more gnostic view. It regarded the intangible spirit realm as intrinsically good and tangible matter as inherently evil.^h New Covenant apostolic authors regularly denounced the influence of this pagan perspective (see 1 Timothy 6:1-21; Colossians 2:8, 20-23; 1 John 4:2-3; 1 John 2:22; 1 John 1:1-2; 2 John 1:7). Nevertheless, subsequent Church leaders soon began to embrace

gnosticism and other philosophical leanings of their culture and day.

In the fifth century, the beloved Church father known as Augustine wrote his classic treatise, *City of God*.¹³ Though replete with inspiring insight, the book sharply polarizes spiritual from material reality. Unequivocally rejecting Hebraic hermeneutics, Augustine viewed the earth realm as irredeemably bad. Accordingly, he saw no future or hope of restoration for physical, literal Israel or the Jewish people. Augustine's profound impact on the development and institutionalization of supersessionism, and sadly resulting Christian antisemitism, cannot be overstated.¹⁴

If, like Augustine, we consciously or unconsciously regard the material realm as evil or insignificant, we may be quick to spiritualize away biblical references to physical persons, places or things. We will unwittingly hinder the expression of God's creative and redemptive character through material reality. We will stifle His love to and through us as physical beings created in His image from the substance (dust) of earth. We will neglect the desire of His heart to restore all "things" (Acts 3:21). In the process, we will likely dismiss important passages referring to the prophetic destiny of flesh and blood Israel.

Interpreting the Old Covenant in Light of the New?

Sometimes Christians over-spiritualize the Old Covenant because they do not understand how to interpret it in light of the New. Augustine and other Church fathers correctly pointed out for us that Jesus came to fulfill the Hebrew Scriptures. But Jesus did not *abolish* those Scriptures or the covenants they contain. (Matthew 5:17-19) Their truths and prophetic promises have not expired or vanished from the earth realm. The New

Covenant could not have stated this more plainly: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Because the only Scripture in existence when Paul penned his letter to Timothy was the Tanach, that is the "all Scripture" to which he necessarily refers.

How, then, are Christians to interpret Old Covenant text in light of realities affected by Yeshua in the New?

First, we must keep in mind that to correctly handle the Word of truth, we are not to read later text into previously written passages. In order to understand the fundamental or *p'shat* meaning of Scripture, we must discern how its original authors, hearers or readers would have understood the text. This relates to discernment of context. Obviously, Old Covenant writers and readers did not have access to New Covenant writings. Therefore, they would not have understood Old Covenant teachings from the perspective of New Covenant text. And therefore, neither should we--in determining the *p'shat* level of interpretation and application.

Second, the Bible itself shows us how to interpret fresh or expanded, amplified truths. When new prophetic revelation was given to Old Covenant authors, they never reinterpreted preexisting Scriptures in light of their subsequent insights. Rather, new revelation was accepted as divine truth based on what had been previously acknowledged to be true.¹⁵

To qualify as part of the holy canon, new text had to be consistent with what had already been determined to be true. This means no new text could ever refute or replace preexisting text.¹⁶ An important measure for judging the inspiration of proposed, new writing was its consistency with all prior biblical writings. The Jewish authors of the New Covenant were very

strongly influenced by this sacred principle. So, when apostolic writers give fresh meaning to Old Covenant passages or principles, they expand, not extinguish, the original meaning of the passage or principle—as that passage would have been understood by its original hearers or readers. Recall the principles of *Pardes* in which levels build upon levels.

Therefore, while the New Covenant amplifies aspects of the Old Covenant’s narrower, obscure, or more literal meaning, it cannot and does not abolish or abrogate that original meaning. Where certain spiritual realities have dramatically changed, such as atonement for sin, animal sacrifice, and Jewish-Gentile relationships in Christ, the New Covenant is specific and straightforward, not ambiguous or muddled. The apostolic writers try to show as clearly as possible, in the language of the day, how new realities have resulted from prophetic fulfillments of promises in the Tanach.

This does not mean that we cannot see Yeshua in the Old Covenant. Messiah is the crowning centerpiece of the Hebrew Scriptures. But He is not there at the expense of the content of those Scriptures as they were originally written and understood. As the saying goes, the Old Covenant is the New concealed; the New Covenant is the Old revealed.

How, then, should we interpret Old Covenant passages about Israel in light of the New? Where the Scriptures deal with the Jewish people and their destiny, it is most accurate and aligned with God’s intent to apply these passages to Israel first and with fundamental priority. Then, having honored His original intentions, we may apply those passages to other situations in light of the New Covenant. In this manner, believers can benefit from a solid biblical foundation, keep Yeshua at the center, navigate issues on Israel with integrity, and receive rich blessing by the Spirit’s personal application

to us of them.

Romans 9 and the Promised Land

God's promises are as life itself. They sustain and nourish us, they offer us hope, they strengthen our faith. All believers are invited to engage in and enjoy God's universal promises. At the same time, in Romans 9:4–5 Paul reminds us that God's promises to Israel, about Israel, are still Israel's. Among them is the promise of land, a core component of the Abrahamic covenant:

“Go . . . to the land I will show you. . . . To your offspring I will give this land. . . . Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.”

Genesis 12:1, 7; 17:19

Paul does not explicitly mention the promise of land in Romans 9:4–5. This does not mean, however, that he meant to convey it is no longer valid. If Paul had intended to teach that under the New Covenant, God's land promise to the Jews had expired, he would have clearly done so.¹⁷ A self-described “Hebrew of Hebrews” (Philippians 3:5), the apostle would have certainly meant to include, in his broad reference to “promises,” God's seminal, covenant promise of land to Israel.¹⁸ There was simply no need for him to repeat all the specific promises to Israel already revealed in the Scriptures. The word *promises* would succinctly encompass them.

Paul's original readers in Rome would have naturally assumed he was including the land when writing about covenants and promises. They would read, just two chapters later, his implicit reference to the land promise in connection with

Israel's national salvation (see Romans 11:26–27). To think the apostle no longer recognized this unconditional and everlasting promise is to impose on him a later, non-Jewish perspective that he probably never even considered.¹⁹

The Mosaic Covenant and the Land Promise

Sometimes Christians wonder if Israel's land promise has expired not due to the New Covenant, but for her failure under the Mosaic covenant. Unlike the unconditional Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant is conditional. Blessings and curses depend on and follow obedience or disobedience to the law.

The Mosaic Law places clear conditions on Israel's ability to inhabit or physically possess the land. It does not, however, nullify the land promise itself or cancel its future fulfillment. As we have seen, the Abrahamic covenant that contains the land promise is unconditional and everlasting.²⁰

The Hebrew prophets help clarify the relationship of the law to the unconditional promise of land. At times they speak of territorial exile, but they also promise a return—based on grace, not good works. They describe how, when Israel disobeyed God, she temporarily lost physical *possession* of the land. Her *inhabitation* of it was disrupted; her full enjoyment of covenant blessing was suspended. But she never lost promised *steward-ownership* of the land. The New Covenant explains it like this:

The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.

Galatians 3:17–18

To be sure, God ultimately owns the land—just as He owns all the earth. We could say that He has given Israel irrevocable title deed to the property. Whether or not she lives on the ground, she alone holds title to it. If she is exiled temporarily due to disobedience, she takes that title deed along with her. Israel’s irrevocable land promise is no cause or excuse for sin on her part pertaining to the land. Nevertheless, it remains a holy covenant reality that cannot be extinguished.

The New Covenant Upholds the Land Promise

The New Covenant never explicitly repeals the land promise to Israel. But to be fair, we must note that it does not explicitly repeat the promise, either. Does this suggest the New Covenant does not support the existence of a modern Jewish state? Not at all.

We have seen that a proper hermeneutic assumes ongoing relevance for every promise that is not specifically canceled in subsequent Scripture. If the New Covenant is silent about a specific promise, that promise is still in effect. Logically and linguistically, when silence surrounds an important matter that has been previously addressed, the presumption lies in favor of continued applicability of that matter.²¹ (How many of us have experienced seasons of not hearing from God, and then discovered He wanted us, in such times, trusting and obeying what He had previously said?)

Because the New Covenant does not directly and clearly restate the land promise, some believers are perplexed by scattered, isolated verses that, *superficially and out of context*, seem to spiritualize it away.ⁱ When these verses are interpreted carefully and correctly, however, they are readily seen to uphold rather than upend the promise.^j They are consistent

with other New Covenant teachings that reflect Israel would, at least in the distant future, be physically restored and living in the Promised Land.

Yeshua said, “Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:24). This refers to the period in God’s plan in which the Gentiles are prominent and trample the land (see Matthew 24:15–20; 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4). As the times change, however, Jerusalem—and the land—will be returned to the Jews, those to whom it was promised.

Yeshua also said that Jerusalem would not see Him again until the holy city, which rejected His first coming, blessed and welcomed Him back (see Matthew 23:39). For this to occur, Israel’s religious leaders would necessarily have to be in Jerusalem. The Jews would have to be living in the land.

Like Yeshua, Paul implicitly affirms the land promise in Romans 11:25–27. In context, he is writing about Israel’s future national salvation.²² He states that Israel’s deliverer will come out of Zion and turn godlessness away from Jacob. The apostle foresees the Jews living in the Promised Land when Messiah (Israel’s deliverer) comes again.²³

When Yeshua was asked about the tangible aspects of the Kingdom, His teachings reflect and implicitly affirm Israel’s future presence in the land. In Acts 1:6–7, for example, the disciples ask if He would restore the Kingdom to Israel “at this time.” The Kingdom to which they refer—after forty days of intense teaching by the resurrected King—is physical as well as spiritual. Therefore, they give Yeshua an ideal opportunity to correct them, and us, if in fact no such Kingdom is going to be restored physically to Israel. But Messiah does not correct them. Instead He replies, “It is not for you to know the times

or dates the Father has set by his own authority.” Then He redirects their focus to taking the Gospel to the Gentiles. Shortly thereafter, Peter teaches about the literal and future restoration of Israel in God’s Kingdom on earth: “Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets” (Acts 3:21).

Lastly, bear in mind that reaffirming the Jewish homeland did not have the importance in New Covenant times that it has now. The Jews had returned from exile hundreds of years earlier.^k Their inhabitation of the land was an accepted fact. That being the case, Messiah’s focus was not on the land promise as such, but on more intangible or spiritual aspects of the Kingdom.

Both Old and New Covenants promise that a time will come when God’s focus shifts back to national Israel, both physically and spiritually. Her restoration will reflect the same mercy and grace that extended the Kingdom to the Gentiles. Virtually every prophet was shown a glimpse of this covenant-based restoration. Collectively, they describe a gradual process of a literal return by the Jews to the land, followed by a spiritual return to the Lord. Then, when Israel’s return reaches its consummate fulfillment, heaven breaks gloriously onto earth, as we next see.

4

Israel's Destiny

Theirs is the adoption as sons, theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

Romans 9:4–5

Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor, Nobel Prize laureate and prominent author, once compared the Jewish people to a messenger who sustained a head injury and became unconscious. When the messenger woke up, he could not remember the message, who had sent him, to whom he had been sent or the fact he was a messenger.

In these last days, Israel is spiritually awakening and beginning to remember the Messenger, the message she's been given, and those to whom she's been sent. Gifts and callings still resident in her are being revived for the sake of the nations.

Israel on Purpose

Paul's words in Romans 9:4-5 succinctly disclose for us Israel's destined purpose for service in the New as well as Old Covenants. Here he pours out his heart for Israel, giving us one reason after another why he cannot shake his "unceasing anguish" for the Jews. For many years I read this passage largely as a lamentation. It sounded much like a gut-wrenching sigh, as if the apostle were mourning the colossal tragedy of the Jews---who were given so much---missing their Messiah in the day of their visitation.

But that is not Paul's main point in these often overlooked verses. Paul is not bemoaning anything here as much as he is splendidly detailing Israel's treasured heritage and prophetic destiny. He is enumerating blessings still resident in her, profiling Israel's identity and purpose for service.

The apostle is not in fanciful of the Jewish people. Rather, he is burdened both for their national loss and for the fulfillment of their role in world redemption. God's investment in Israel and His irrevocable call on her is for the benefit of others (see Romans 11:29; Isaiah 49:6). He has purposed that Israel's covenant based inheritance unleash past, present and future blessings throughout the earth.

Please notice that Romans 9:4 uses the word "is." This very little word *is* of very big significance. Under the New Covenant, and despite Israel's national spurning of Yeshua, Israel's inheritance and destiny *is* still in force. As it *is* in English, so it *is* in the original Greek. The present tense verb "is," with its plural form "are," refer to something that currently exists. So if God says in Scripture that Israel's "is" something in particular, He means it *is* an ongoing state of being, or continuing reality, even today.

Adoption as Sons

It may surprise you to learn that even though most Jewish people do not believe in Yesha, Father God still regards them as His firstborn, adopted son. "Theirs *is* the adoption as sons," says Roman 9:4 (emphasis mine). Paul is affirming to the church in Rome, and to us, the permanent nature of His family described in Exodus 4:22, "Israel is My firstborn son." Israel may at times behave like a prodigal son or worse, but the nation remains His firstborn. The relationship is irrevocable (see Romans 11:29; Deuteronomy 32:6).

In the ancient Middle East, a firstborn son was not loved more than his younger siblings, but he did have a distinct role in the family. He was uniquely consecrated to God^a and respected as family leader.¹ He was entrusted with a type of priestly function concerning his family.² Certain authority, responsibility, accountability, and rights of inheritance rested with him.³

Even today, various privileges—and problems—often fall to the firstborn. In most families, they are often the first child to be blessed for good choices, and the first to suffer for bad ones. They are their parents' first love—which is not the same as most loved. In healthy families, parents do not love one child more than another. They do, however, relate to each child differently, simply because each child *is* different.

As YHVH's firstborn, the Jewish nation is typically the first to get whatever He has in store for the rest of us. Accordingly, Israel serves as an example and prophetic microcosm of His larger dealings with humanity. All who do good receive a blessing, "first for the Jew, then for the Gentile." Likewise, tribulation and distress come to all who do evil, "first for the Jew, then for the Gentile" (Romans 2:9–10). When spiritual shifts occur

on earth, Israel typically reverberates first. She is generally first to be blessed, but also first to be distressed. Because she is the firstborn, she may sometimes get a double portion, whether of blessing or cursing (see Deuteronomy 21:15-17; Isaiah 40:2; 61:7; Jeremiah 16:18). She is given a certain priority, which is definitively *not* to suggest superiority. As we will see, Israel is also allotted a type of priestly function in the broad family of humanity.

To be sure, Gentiles who believe in and follow Jesus are also adopted as beloved, full sons and daughters into God's family of faith (see Romans 8:15-16). Bear in mind that many of His specially selected ones, including Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joseph and David, were not born first in their families. No need for sibling rivalry; birth order is God's gift to every child. Father loves each one of us best.

Divine Glory

Upon explaining that Israel's "*is* the adoption as sons," Paul goes on to say that Israel's "*is*" the divine glory. Of course, God does not share the full nature of His personal glory with anyone (see Isaiah 42:8). But to His ancient covenant people, certain dimensions of His radiant character have been graciously dispensed (2 Thessalonians 2:14). To Israel appeared the theophanies, His visitations in human or angelic form. His personal glory-presence led her through forty years of wandering in the wilderness. After Israel settled in the Promised Land, His manifest glory rested in her Holy Temple. Throughout Israel's history, God gloriously intervened on her behalf, parting bodies of water, crumbling city walls, engraving laws on stone, impregnating a virgin, and more. The Holy Scriptures themselves,

God's Word with which Israel has been entrusted, reflect His ineffable glory (see 2 Corinthians 3:7–11).

In the twenty-first century, unique dimensions of divine glory still remain with Israel.⁴ In her miraculous survival and progressive restoration, her growing Messianic remnant ablaze with faith, her archeological discoveries confirming ancient Scriptures, her armies resurrected from dry bones, her guardianship of family values—and much more—she offers the world an unparalleled view of its Creator.

On a more subjective and personal level, many, including me, experience an almost tangible sense of God's weighty presence in Israel. Natural and supernatural realms seem to intersect uniquely in this place called the Holy Land. For God is preparing Israel to humbly serve the nations in a future, far greater glory that will climactically converge heaven with earth. Someday soon, Yeshua will return to rule and reign in Jerusalem, from where His majestic glory will cover the globe as waters cover the seas (see Habakkuk 2:14; Isaiah 60:1–2; Ezekiel 43:1–5).

Receiving of the Law

Old Testament "law!" For some believers the term conjures up images of servitude and bondage, something to cower under if they are going to relate to it at all. Better not, they conclude. We've been set free, they reason, from law's oppressive yoke and condemnation. Yet, as we read in Romans 9:4-5, Paul writes that Israel is outright blessed for having received the law. The precious Scriptures are her heritage; her call to minister the oracles of God is irrevocable.

Because "theirs *is* ... the receiving of the law" (Romans 9:4), a certain anointing or grace "is" on Israel to cherish, comprehend, keep and administer the Word of God. To the Jewish people He assigned the sacred task of writing and preserving both Old and New Covenants. Through the millennia, faithful Jews have scrupulously guarded the integrity of God's Word, at times paying for it with their lives.

For such reasons Paul asks and answers, "What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew . . . ? Much in every way! First of all, the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God" (Romans 3:1–2).

You've probably noticed the "much in every way" of chapter 3 does not get explained until chapter 9. Perhaps Paul was nudged by the Spirit to remind his readers first of other key truths. Perhaps Roman believers first needed to fully understand that forgiveness of sins and right standing with God is solely by grace through faith---for all peoples. They, as Gentiles, had been given every spiritual blessing in and through Messiah. Reminded of these truths, they might more easily understand that while Israel "is" uniquely blessed as a nation, she is saved and sanctified the same as other nations. Her "advantage" does not suggest superiority or inherent entitlement in God's Kingdom.

In Romans 9, Paul returns to the "advantage" of having been entrusted with the "very words of God." He teaches that even in the New Covenant, Israel's receiving of the law *is* still counted as a blessing. (The Greek word often translated "advantage" actually means "superabundance.") Considered together with Romans 3:1-2, that super-blessing is primary and foundational. Why, then, do some Christians assume God's "very words," reflected in His law, are not applicable today?

Sometimes, a few isolated verses taken out of context,

translated imprecisely, can prove challenging. Let's look very briefly at one important example, below.

Fulfilling the Law

“Christ is the *end* of the law,” Paul writes, “for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Romans 10:4 NKJV). From this little sentence, two questions arise. First, what exactly is the “law”? And second, what is the “end” of it?

The word translated “law” is the Greek word *nomos*. But—and this is critical—*nomos* is also the same word used throughout the New Covenant for *Torah*. The Hebrew word *Torah* means “instruction” or “teaching.” The Torah technically constitutes the first five books of the Bible, but can also refer to *all* the Hebrew Scriptures. When the Jewish writers of the New Covenant speak of Torah, they often refer to the whole body of Old Covenant teaching. In using the term *nomos*, they usually do not speak strictly of the commands and statutes, or lists of do's and don'ts. They speak of the Spirit-empowered means by which believers grow in grace by appropriating God's instructions in love. They refer to His Word engraved on our hearts. So in many New Covenant verses, a more accurate and precise translation of *nomos* would not be “law,” but “Hebrew Scriptures,” “Tanach,” “Old Testament,” or “Torah.”

That is why Paul writes, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16–17). Bear in mind the New Covenant did not exist as canonized Scripture in Paul's day. The “all Scripture” to which he refers—and the importance of which he affirms—is the entire Old Covenant.

Now, if “the law” generally refers to Old Covenant teaching

as a whole, what is meant by the “end” of it? Yeshua Himself clarifies that He did not repeal or revoke the Old Covenant: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law [meaning, Torah] until everything is accomplished” (Matthew 5:17-18).

Messiah forthrightly encourages Torah teaching for New Covenant believers: “Every teacher of the law [*nomos*] who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures *as well as old*” (Matthew 13:52, emphasis mine). Building on Yeshua's words, Paul writes: “Do we then nullify the law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the law” (Romans 3:31 NASB 1995).

There's still more. In Romans 10:4, the Greek word *telos*, traditionally translated “end,” does not mean the cessation or termination of a thing's existence or relevance. God's teachings are not over and they have not come to an end. The more correct meaning of *telos* here refers to goal attainment or maturity. An accurate translation of the verse, reflecting the Hebraic concepts underlying it, is found in the *Complete Jewish Bible*: “For the goal at which the Torah aims is the Messiah, who offers righteousness to everyone who trusts [believes].”

Rejecting the Law

The world in which we live is screaming for a cure for lawlessness. Collectively, we have rejected and rebelled against God's laws under a pretense of living free, reaping devastation and death. The rotten fruits of lawlessness—deep deceptions,

perversities, murders, corruptions, and much more—threaten to shred civilized society, including the institutional Church. Extreme distinctions have been created between God's law and grace, never intended by writers of the New Covenant. As a result, most Christians shirk at the prospect of the law and “coming under” it, as if His Word were a thing of bondage rather than beauty.

Would you allow the Lord to dispel a myth about the Torah? Some have nurtured the notion that any New Covenant believer embracing the Old has lapsed into legalism. But nowhere does Yeshua, or any of the apostolic authors, tell us to throw off or discard God's law. Quite the opposite, the New Covenant cautions that lawlessness is sin, and sin is lawlessness (see 1 John 3:4).

To be sure, our relationship to the law has dramatically changed since the Crucifixion, Resurrection and outpouring of the Spirit. We are not to follow the dictates of Torah in the same way ancient Israel did in the Old Covenant. We are to avoid unbalanced, excessive or self-righteous applications of the law—but not the law itself. Where it is clear that certain aspects of the law do not apply to us today, we search out God's principles for living reflected in those particular laws.^b We then apply to our lives the principles, all of which reflect Messiah's character and ways. For New Covenant believers, the Yeshua-centered law is means by which we express and live out our love for Him. As the Master Himself said, “If you love me, keep my commands” (John 14:15).

Freedom in God's grace and in the Spirit is not the ability to do what you or I want to do. Freedom in God's grace and in the Spirit is the ability to do what you and I know is right. So in contrast to shouldering a load of legalism, hear how one Hebrew psalmist exults in God's law. The fervid worshiper is not

bound up in statutory restriction; I hear free and intimate, high praise:

“I delight in your law. . . . The law from your mouth is more precious to me than . . . silver and gold. . . . Oh, how I love your law! . . . I stand in awe of your laws. . . . Blessed is the one . . . whose delight is in the law of the LORD.”

Psalm 119:70, 72, 97, 120; 1:1–2

How much higher praise ought we, as New Covenant believers, have for God’s laws!

Law of Prophetic Destiny

There is coming a glorious day in which "the law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" to all nations (Isaiah 2:3). The Hebrew word translated "law" in this verse is "Torah." Under global administration of Torah and its principles, humankind will enjoy an era of unprecedented, much longed-for peace. Lambs will snuggle up to wolves and calves will cuddle with lions. Weapons of war will till and farm the soil. Christians call this resplendent period the Millennium, based on the reference to 1,000 years in Revelation 20:3–6. Jews have traditionally understood it as the Messianic Age, or Kingdom of heaven on earth.

How does this future epoch affect us now? When Yeshua came to earth, He announced the Kingdom of heaven was at hand. The Jews of His day quite naturally expected the Messianic Kingdom to, at that time, manifest in fullness. Based on the prophetic Scriptures, most anticipated immediate liberation from Roman occupation by military means. They did not understand the Kingdom of heaven which was "at hand" would only gradually and progressively come to fullness.

Lest we criticize first century Jews for their collective mistake, recall that Christians have often similarly erred. At times, some believers have taught that any absence of Kingdom fullness in the life of a Jesus follower is necessarily due to personal sin, lack of faith, or other fault of that follower. They too expected immediate liberation from evil, often by militant means in the form of spiritual warfare and swift victory.

But Yeshua never taught the Kingdom of God would manifest in absolute fullness in this present age (see Matthew 4:17; Luke 12:51–53). The Kingdom has, we could say, broken into present reality, but it is not yet here in consummate totality.⁵ The earth has not been completely restored to its pre-Fall condition. That is why, for example, some believers are divinely healed of disease but others are not. Some Christians are delivered from evil; others are delivered through it. In short, this present, transitional age is one of overlapping kingdoms, an “in-between” era. You and I live in between the time Yeshua first came—the Kingdom of heaven breaking dynamically into the earth realm—and the time He will come again, climactically restoring everything (Acts 3:21). On one hand, His glory abounds; on the other hand, dark gory impacts us, too.

What does this have to do with the law and Jesus’ fulfillment of it? God ensures that in the future His laws will be followed and honored by all nations. Far from proving irrelevant, the law will mediate supreme justice and peace, truth and righteousness. Don’t you suppose, therefore, we ought to give it some prayerful attention *now*?

The Promises

The promises of God are of greater value than the purest of gold. They sustain and nourish us, offering us hope and

strengthening our faith. How we cherish our Father's blessed assurances of love, mercy, grace, faithfulness, guidance, peace and more!

All believers are entitled to claim and enjoy God's bountiful, personal promises. But as we do, we must remember there remains a future, literal fulfillment of many of those same promises to ethnic Israel. Romans 9:4 forthrightly reminds us the promises still "belong" to the Jewish people (NASB). We are to "rightly handle the Word of truth," rightly understand the promises, and rightly apply them to Israel (2 Timothy 2:15).

One example of such a promise is found in Isaiah 62:2a, where, in its immediate context, God speaks directly to literal Jerusalem/Zion (here the two are synonymous): "The nations will see your righteousness and all kings your glory." Romans 9:4 assures us this beautiful, prophetic promise, among many others, *is* still Israel's. It *is* to be literally fulfilled in the future, in and through Jerusalem (also known as Zion).

Like many other promises in God's Word, Isaiah 62:2a can find a secondary application to the life of any faithful follower of Jesus. From the broader context of the verse, and in consideration of the overall teaching of both Old and New Covenants, we know that God wants nations and kings to see His righteousness and glory through His Church now, not just through Israel in the future.

The secondary application builds upon or extends the fundamental application of the prophetic promise to literal Jerusalem, but does not diminish or replace the fundamental application. It does not suggest that Christians replace or supersede Jerusalem as the recipient of God's promise. And that should be very good news, giving Gentile believers no reason to suspect God's promises to them will get replaced or superseded by any other, supposedly more worthy, future recipient.

The Temple Worship

Israel's "*is*" also "the temple worship," according to Romans 9:4–5. Yet the Temple in Jerusalem is no more; perched in its place sits the Dome of the Rock and Al Aqsa Mosque. Maybe you wonder if that matters: Isn't worship in spirit and truth the pinnacle of praise on earth? Doesn't the "tabernacle of David" movement (see Amos 9:11), the growing global phenomenon of 24/7 worship and prayer, replace Israel's Temple worship?

In a real sense, Christian worship and praise brings heaven's kiss down to earth. But an even greater expression of prophetic, Kingdom homage is contained in the Davidic tabernacle of Amos 9:11. The prophecy is given in the specific context of Israel's national restoration in the Messianic Age. In that day, the flesh and blood descendants of ancient Levites and priests will join, and perhaps at times lead, us in worshiping Messiah in spirit and truth. Together we will bow before His holy throne, in His literal holy Temple, in His literal holy city (see Ezekiel 40–47). Under His physical rule and reign, there will be an overlap with Messiah's governmental, ruling authority. The reality will be gloriously out of (yet in) this world.

Religious Jews have never ceased their longing to rebuild Jerusalem's Holy Temple. They have forged elaborate plans for its reconstruction, along with means for reinstituting animal sacrifice for the (putative) forgiveness of sins. It could be said that temple ministry *is* still in Israel's spiritual DNA. Indeed, the Scriptures prophesy a third temple will be erected before Yeshua returns, and then a fourth. Both will be associated with governmental rule (see chapter 13).

To convey the whole concept of temple worship referenced in Romans 9:4, some Bible translations use English

terms such as the “service of God” (Romans 9:4 NKJV) or “temple service” (NASB). The Hebrew word combines acts of service with worship.⁶ Because the two functions are inseparable, the same Greek word used for worship is also used in reference to the temple ritual of animal sacrifice. Taken together, temple worship and service reflect a priestly ministry involving intercessory acts, in addition to praise and governmental function. Indeed, God destined Israel to be a nation of priests: “You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6).

Priestly Nation

Israel’s destiny as a nation of priests can be seen as beginning with Abraham, when God tells him to sacrifice Isaac, the son of promise. Some Bible scholars say the patriarch performs a type of intercessory act by willingly offering up his beloved child.⁷ Abraham’s response is regarded as a priestly oblation on behalf of all humanity, foreshadowing Yeshua’s ultimate sacrifice. Although YHVH prevents the actual slaying of Isaac, Abraham’s faith-filled, priestly obedience releases the next phase of redemption history.

Hundreds of years later, God expands the priestly function, assigning it to Aaron and the lineage of Levi, his son. Under the Mosaic covenant, they perform rites of animal sacrifice which serve as intercessory acts not just for Israel, but all nations. Their priestly service points to Yeshua and provides an essential role in His first coming.

Ancient Israel’s ministry of combined intercession, sacrifice, and worship—offered on the basis of a future Messianic atonement that God would someday provide—reconciled heaven to earth not only for her sake, but for the Gentiles as well.

Through history, faithful Jews have recognized that an important aspect of their service to God has been specifically for the blessing of other nations.⁸ Whenever Israel failed in her calling to humbly serve the Gentiles, it was not so much because of ingrown exclusivity, but on account of her larger failure to follow and obey God.

From a biblical perspective, Israel's priestly function and destiny did not entirely cease with the New Covenant. To be sure, animal sacrifices are no longer mandated for the forgiveness of sins. But together with the Church (see 1 Peter 2:9), she has been assigned a somewhat mysterious but irrevocable, intercessory-priestly role to play in Yeshua's return. This is reflected, for example, in the fact her future, national turning to Messiah brings great riches to the world, even "life from the dead":

But if [Israel's] transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring! . . . For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

Romans 11:12, 15

At its zenith, life from the dead refers to Jesus' Second Coming. But it also relates to the revival of nations *now*. A direct correlation exists historically: As God restores Israel, fullness of life is released through her to the Gentiles. To the extent Gentile individuals, groups or nations posture themselves to receive and embrace blessing through Israel, then bless her in return, we see them prosper.

God's Servant

An underlying aspect of priestly ministry is servanthood. Of Israel, God has declared, "You are My servant, Israel, in whom I will show My glory" (Isaiah 49:3 NASB). As a result, Israel serves God's purposes whether she knows it or not. She serves Him when she loves and obeys Him—and she serves Him when she does not. Though at times she may be spiritually dull, God still calls her His servant: "Who is blind but my servant, and deaf like the messenger I send?" (Isaiah 42:19).

How does Israel serve the Lord in disobedience? First, since much of the Bible is a record of her failure to serve in obedience, Israel's history provides an example from which we are to benefit and learn (see 2 Timothy 3:16). Second, on account of Israel's corporate rejection of Messiah, the Gospel has gone to the Gentiles (see Romans 11:11). Third, God uses Israel to refine or purify the Church by testing our heart attitude toward His Jewish people (see Zechariah 8:2, 2:8; Romans 11:31). Fourth, Israel's existence reminds the world of the existence and sovereignty of a Creator—and by implication, of the world's sin. Of a sovereign Creator and human sin, however, the world rarely wishes to be reminded. As a result, Israel has suffered much.

Jewish and Christian theologians agree that the Scriptures teach about a God appointed "suffering servant." The concept is based on Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12, which describes YHVH's "servant" who is "despised and rejected by men ... acquainted with grief" and undergoes great, undue hardship. To be sure, Messiah Yeshua stands apart as *the* quintessential Suffering Servant and High Priest of humankind. He alone atoned for our sin, once for all, in the agony of His Crucifixion. But could the Scriptures hint secondarily at yet another suffering servant of God

on yet another level; namely, the Jews?⁹

Basilea Schlink, a Nazi-era survivor and German nun, wrote about Israel's Messiah-like, painfully sacrificial service in her book *Israel, My Chosen People*:

Israel, unintentionally and unwittingly, has become a spectacle before heaven and mankind, because she bears the features of the Servant of God. The sight of her should continually remind Christians of Jesus, despised, destitute, covered with bruises, afflicted, hated, persecuted, tormented, and hounded to death . . . We as Christians are to hold in high esteem this people who bears such a close resemblance to Jesus.¹⁰

Taking a macro view of Scripture and Jewish history, could it not be that Israel's suffering at the hands of the nations might somehow still ultimately work in service to those nations? As a nation of priests, might Israel, in an admittedly mysterious manner, absorb dimensions of the world's evil—and then, not unlike Yeshua, get blamed for it? If so, the One who appointed and anointed her to serve would carefully watch and weigh our responses. He would seek out and reward those who lovingly honor the sacrifice of this ransom nation with which He still personally identifies.

The Scapegoat

I suspect that since you are reading this book, you have given at least some thought to the complex issue of Jewish suffering. The historical enormity of my people's pain is staggering and perplexing. Tomes have been written about it from countless perspectives.¹¹ The anguish of the Jews over four thousand years appears a mystery, an ongoing puzzle, and highly dispro-

portionate to our mistakes and sins. Antisemitism, or prejudicial animosity toward Jews, is said to be the world's longest hatred, demonstrably illogical and irrepressible. Allow me to illustrate, personally.

Decades ago I was part of a Messianic team ministering in Russia shortly after the Soviet Union collapsed. During the course of an outreach in Moscow, I received countless irate scoldings---from dedicated churchgoers---for sharing the Gospel with Russian Jews. The rebuke was always the same: "You Jews are the reason for our country's troubles!" With intriguing logic, one self-identified Christian would chastise me because so many Jews had left Russia and emigrated with their "skills and money-making abilities." The next self-identified Christian would reprimand me because the Jews had *stayed* and caused problems with their "skills and money-making abilities." Notwithstanding their lack of logic, let alone disregard for the Gospel, the rage and hate aimed at me, a Jew, by so-called *Christians*, was shockingly undeniable.

As I update this book during Israel's wars with Hamas, Hezbollah and other terror proxies of Iran, I can't help but feel a similar rage and hate aimed at me and my people. Once again, we Jews seem to be the proverbial scapegoat. This time, however, we are not despised merely by an organization, nation or empire. This time, we are the scapegoat of the world.

The term *scapegoat* refers to one who is blamed, with irrational hostility, for the wrongdoing of others.¹² The concept originates in the Bible, based on the Day of Atonement (see Leviticus 16). On that most solemn occasion, Israel's high priest followed prescribed steps to secure atonement for the nation. He confessed and vicariously laid the people's sins on two different goats. One goat would be killed as Israel's sin-bearer; the other---called the scapegoat---went free. The scapegoat

served as a sign of God's forgiveness. But it was also a visible and uncomfortable reminder of His holy demand for obedience.

It is said that like an ancient scapegoat, the Jewish nation serves to remind the world, often unconsciously, of her God and His holy demands. But this is a message the world loves to hate. True to the adage, for thousands of years, it has sought to kill the messenger.

Why Antisemitism?

At this writing, global hatred toward Jews is at an all-time, historical high. It exceeds in reach and scope that which preceded the Nazi Holocaust. Much of the hate is currently directed at Israel. But world animus against Israel has as much or more to do with the Jewish people as with the Jewish state. Regarding Israel's defense against Palestinians, Iranians and others seeking to annihilate her, an award-winning British journalist insightfully notes:

There is no other world conflict that is so obsessively falsified. Where Israel is involved, truth and reason are totally suspended. Irrationality and hysteria rule instead. . . . No other conflict in the world attracts such a frenzy of falsification, distortion . . . moral inversion . . . viciousness and imputation of bad faith. And there is an adamant refusal to acknowledge that this is the latest manifestation of the unique prejudice of antisemitism.¹³

The mystery of Israel's suffering, though comprehensible this side of eternity only in part, points ultimately to the existence of evil and Satan himself. The devil despises who God loves and ferociously opposes what God does. This is not to say

Israel is entirely fault-free; she certainly is not. But the nations' perception of her wrongdoing is so profoundly exaggerated, and the reaction to her sin so inordinately harsh, as to reflect demonic inspiration behind both. How and why, you may ask, did the hate begin?

The seedbed of antisemitism traces all the way back to the Garden of Eden. There Satan tempts the woman Eve with a lie. She succumbs, her husband Adam follows, and humankind tragically falls. Only the Creator Himself can redeem what has happened. Stunningly, this is precisely what He sets out to do. In mercy and grace, Deity decrees, "I will put enmity between you [Satan/the serpent] and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel" (Genesis 3:15 NKJV). From then on, Satan fumes with fury over his impending ruin.

Millennia go by and redemption history unfolds. God promises Abraham, then Isaac and Jacob, to bless all nations through them. As a result, satanic rage is directed at Israel and her Messiah. He is the Seed of the woman (Israel) whose Crucifixion and Resurrection redeem humankind.

Demonic schemes to destroy Israel, and thereby prevent Yeshua from coming as a babe in a manger, fail. But there is more. Yeshua is coming again, this time as conquering King, to establish His physical rule and reign over the planet. His return is sovereignly linked to Israel's restoration, and specifically, Jerusalem's reception of His messiahship. The Jewish people and Holy City (along with the ekklesia) are assigned key roles in the final and climactic phase of human redemption. God is not finished with Israel; therefore, neither is Satan (see Matthew 23:39; Acts 3:17–21; Revelation 12:1–5, 13).

In chapter 6 we will see that if the devil could totally upend Israel, he could also upend the Second Coming—and therefore,

his own dreaded demise. Though doomed to fail, he will not cease to oppose God’s covenant plans for the Jews. Aiming to annihilate them with a vengeance, he will, so to speak, turn the world upside down. When that happens, you and I will very much need to know why we should care about Israel.

The Patriarchs

In Romans 9:5, Paul brings to a close his summary of Israel’s ongoing inheritance and irrevocable calling: “Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah.” Out of this people, from a promise made millennia ago, comes the God-Man Redeemer of Humankind. Could any greater honor—and responsibility—be given any nation?

The Savior of humankind was birthed from a Jewish womb with Jewish DNA, grew up in a Jewish home with a Jewish family and observed Jewish traditions. I suppose Yeshua played Jewish games, ate kosher food, and had a Jewish sense of humor. Moreover, He is coming back to earth as a self-identifying Jew, bearing the title, “The Root and Offspring of David” (Revelation 22:16).

According to the Scriptures Yeshua had half-siblings, who presumably had children of their own. Some of their children’s children may still be around—perhaps even your Jewish neighbor, co-worker, doctor or friend. Recall that in the parable of sheep and goats, Messiah referred to ethnic Jews of the end times as His brothers, his beloved flesh and blood family.

Ethnic Distinctions and Racism

Sometimes, any mention of ethnicity stirs rancor and brings

charges of racism. Some believe the nations comprise one autologous, globalist community. National distinctions, they say, create artificial barriers, causing wars and injustice. In a world where many individuals are of combined racial bloodlines and mixed national heritage--not to mention purportedly mixed gender identity--biological ethnicity can seem irrelevant, outmoded, and politically incorrect. Because such thinking is used today in efforts to invalidate Israel's existence, we must address it.

Let us remember, however, that God created the nations for our own good. Long ago, humankind spoke one language and acted as one. Collectively pooling our pride, we erected a tower called Babel for our supposed, eternal renown. Responding in mercy and grace, YHVH confused our communications, devising different languages (see Genesis 11:1–9). Presumably based on who could understand whom, people gathered in separate tribes or groups. From that gathering, followed by scattering, the nations evolved. Though the world's first globalization project did not fare well, God redeemed the results.

I believe the Creator intends different nations, like the many facets of a diamond, to reflect different aspects of His beautifully resplendent character. Every nation has received special blessings and a diversity of gifts that testify of Him. Their unique endowments are for the sake of serving Him and others (see Genesis 49:3–27; Deuteronomy 33:6–25; Isaiah 19:25). But the Sovereign of the Universe is no racist (see Ephesians 2:14–16). Absolutely no nation is inherently better or worse, no ethnic group intrinsically superior or inferior to any other.

The Scriptures indicate that national and ethnic distinctions are maintained through the end times and into the Messianic

Age.^c Referring to this period the Creator declares, for example, “Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance” (Isaiah 19:25).

At His return, Yeshua deals with the nations---as nations. “The survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, and to celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles” (Zechariah 14:16). Nations that refuse to do this, He says, will receive no rain (see Zechariah 14:17). God created nations, each is special to His heart and He loves them all. He does not plan to blend them into one homogenized glob on the face of the earth.

Sadly, apart from Yeshua, men have historically formed hostilities and hatreds based on bloodlines. A consequence is racism, the devilish perversion of God’s designs. Racism is defined as the false belief that race is the chief determinant of human traits and abilities, giving inherent superiority or inferiority to individuals.¹⁴ This, the Bible emphatically does *not* promote.

The Holy Scriptures teach we are all created in God’s image with equal human dignity and inherent worth. They promote a framework for human freedoms and rights. At the same time, the Scriptures do not teach that individuals or nations all have the same or equal gifts, identities, destinies, and functions (see 1 Corinthians 12:14–31). We are not universally alike in every trait and ability. We should not, therefore, always be treated exactly the same in every respect. To do so would prove unjust. Equality does not necessarily mean equity.

Nevertheless, more and more people oppose the ongoing existence of a Jewish state because they believe it to be inherently racist. Jewish people, they argue, are or should be no different from anyone else. At the same time, and quite ironically, it is also argued that Jewish people are indeed very different

from everyone else, inherently evil and a threat to humankind. In any case, accusations of racism aimed at Israel ignore the fact that a large minority of Israelis are not actually Jewish. As we will see in chapter 11, Arab and other citizens of Israel enjoy the same civil rights and opportunities as those who are Jewish.

God Forever Praised

After profiling Israel's inheritance and explaining what her destiny still *is* today, Paul exults: "Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised!" (Romans 9:5). The apostle revels in the Creator's plan to make Himself known to the ends of the earth. He rejoices in God's sovereign choice to use Israel, despite herself, for the sake of His glory. Like Paul, I eagerly look forward to the day when Israel's gifts and callings are fully revived to bless humankind. A Messianic colleague and friend of mine puts it like this:

There is a people on earth for whom the Bible is their own history, and not merely spiritual allegories; there is a nation who tasted real freedom as they crossed the Red Sea, who knew the flavor of the original manna in the wilderness, and who let out a loud shout and saw Jericho's walls collapse before them in a heap of rubble. There is a people who . . . slew real giants, who claimed and possessed a tangible land, and who beheld the glory come down upon and fill the temple of their God. There is a nation on earth today which carries deep within its blood and bosom a purpose and a call which must be rediscovered, cultivated and perfected, yet one last time! What will it be like when such a people come alive unto God? What hidden treasure will then explode within the Church . . . as these ancient brethren are quickened again and revived into their true identity, "Hebrew" and "Israelite"?¹⁵

Pray for Israel, including Messianic Jewish believers, to embrace their identity and prophetic destiny. In the face of rising global antisemitism, ask God to give fresh revelation of His mercy for the Jews and their state. May His New Covenant people honor, even celebrate, Israel's irrevocable calling "in order that [His] purpose in election might stand" (Romans 9:11). More than you may think, the future depends on it.

5

The Contention of Election

“It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned” . . . in order that God’s purpose in election might stand. . . . What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! . . . It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.

Romans 9:7, 11, 14–16

At the perimeter of Israel's sun-broiled Negev Desert, I stood on tiptoes and leaned precipitously over a dusty stone ledge. Squinting, I peered into an obscure, yawning hole in the ground. My prayer partners and I had climbed a remote sand dune where, what is now called Abraham's Well, would be excavated in years to come. Meanwhile, this extraordinary reservoir at the outskirts of Beersheba, presumably constructed over a hundred generations ago by my great-great, etc., grandfather, was still faithfully pooling rainwater.

The purpose of a well is to provide water to sustain life. My prayer team and I had gathered around Abraham's presumed well to "re-dig" it in the Spirit realm. We were asking and believing for a fresh outflow of living water, so to speak, of the

patriarch's faith, love, and benevolence for all his living, biological descendant---Jews, Arabs, and others. In identificational confession and repentance, we asked for and released forgiveness for the sins of Abraham's extended, ethnic family, one toward another.

I could not have anticipated my reaction. At that tangible point of connection with history, I was cut to the core by overwhelming grief (was it mine, Abraham's or God's?) at the seemingly unresolvable, ancient family feud. My prayer partners and I asked Holy Spirit to add our intercession to the tears Abraham must have himself shed over the years for the rapprochement of his beloved sons.

We prayerfully proclaimed reconciliation among the present-day children of Isaac, Ishmael, and the sons of Keturah (Abraham's second wife). The Holy Spirit-infused encounter proved transformative to each of us. Even more life altering, decades later, I would be blessed to participate in genuine reconciliation ministry with Arabic speaking Christians of the Middle East. The deep-down love and forgiveness that flows in such gatherings is a foretaste of heaven.

A One Vote Election

Through history, Israel's election has been hotly debated and widely disputed. The notion of her "chosenness" by God can offend natural human sensibilities. Even Bible-believing Christians sometimes struggle with the concept. The contention of election which begins in the Scriptures, brews in the Church, and boils over in the Palestinian/Islamist-Israeli conflict, is about YHVH choosing a people to redeem and restore all others to Himself, for the sake of His own glory. Is it possible, then, that much of the fuss is actually about *Him*?

The saga starts when the Creator makes a promise to Abraham laden with hope for humanity. But it depends on the apparently impossible: an heir. Years pass, until Abraham's barren wife, Sarah, conceives a scheme, if not a son. She directs her husband to deposit his seed with a surrogate, her Egyptian servant Hagar: "Perhaps I can build a family through her" (Genesis 16:2).

Hagar becomes pregnant and immediately sparks fly. Soon she despises her mistress, who in turn treats her roughly. Hagar runs away from home—but not from the presence of God. Lovingly, He sees her plight and pities her in the desert of her distress. He tells her to go back home and submit to Sarah, for she is carrying the child of His chosen one. Then He prophesies over this woman of destiny:

"I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count. . . . You will give birth to a son. You shall name him Ishmael ["God hears"], for the LORD has heard of your misery. He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers."

Genesis 16:10–12

Many years later, still no son by Sarah, Abraham has another talk with his Friend. The patriarch pleads, "If only Ishmael might live under your blessing" (Genesis 17:18). Not only he, but Sarah, Hagar and consequently Ishmael himself, have assumed this boy is the child of promise. But God has another plan, and His response sets the course of history.

YHVH promises bountiful blessing to Ishmael, for he is Abraham's beloved son: "As for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers and I

will make him into a great nation. But,” the Sovereign One reiterates, “my covenant I will establish with Isaac” (Genesis 17:20-21). In divine election, nobody, not even Abraham, gets a vote.

Abraham’s Family Feud

Finally, at one hundred years of age, Abraham cradles baby Isaac in his arms. Now Ishmael is in an understandably tough place. Suddenly the family spotlight is off him, shining instead on his brother. In the culture of the day, Isaac has just usurped Ishmael’s birthright. I imagine the boy’s whole being wracks with pain. His plight is unprecedented.

We can infer that Ishmael knows God is the One who chose Isaac. Nevertheless, the boy and his mother resent it. According to the Scripture, Ishmael starts mocking Isaac to such an extent that Sarah detects her son’s inheritance is at risk. The connotation is that Ishmael’s taunting and deriding is intended to belittle or diminish—actually, curse—Isaac. Galatians 4:29 says he “persecuted” his brother.

From God’s perspective, Ishmael sneers not so much at human favoritism, but sovereign election. In effect Ishmael demands of Deity, “What You gave me is not enough; I want it all!” Some say the cry still echoes in parts of the Arabic speaking world, stoking flames of rage at Israel.

To resolve the family feud, God tells Abraham to send both Hagar and Ishmael away—for relative good (see Genesis 21:9–12). His seemingly harsh directive would achieve good (under the circumstances) for both Isaac and Ishmael. How good could it have been for the older son to live with the constant reminder of the younger’s inheritance? Could either boy grow

into his destiny under daily offense, unrelenting taunt, and matriarchal rivalry?

Long after their separation, the two brothers reunite at Abraham's death to bury their father. By that time they stand shoulder to shoulder, each the head of a family and nation. Abraham, however, "left everything he owned to Isaac" (Genesis 25:5). Normally, the law of primogeniture would have delegated at least a double portion of the patriarch's property to Ishmael. Whether Ishmael accepted this loss graciously or felt further slighted, we do not know.

We do know that many of those who identify as his descendants today brood over stacks of perceived dishonor or injustice at the hands of the Jews—particularly related to land. Interestingly, a millennia-old rabbinic insight foresaw that in the last days, Ishmael's descendants would assail the Jewish people with unparalleled ferocity. Reading the Genesis account alongside prophetic Scriptures, some rabbis predicted a type of symbiotic alliance between Ishmael's descendants and the rest of the world. In any case, the result, they said, would be an end times, cataclysmic war against Israel. They believed only the Messiah would overcome this assault, His victory inaugurating the Messianic Age.¹

Lacking a New Covenant perspective, the rabbis did not perceive how deeply God yearns to save Ishmael's beloved children. He wants you and me to uphold them in prayer, reach out to them with the Gospel and help them fulfill their Kingdom destiny. Their inheritance, like Israel's through Isaac, is a question of sovereign election. The Creator need justify His choice to no one: "Who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? 'Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" (Romans 9:20–21; see Job 40:2).

We are to balance the biblical reality of election with another, equally important truth: God does not show favoritism (see Romans 1:9-11).

Ishmael in Prophecy

Ishmael prospered under God's blessing and multiplied quickly, spawning twelve rulers (see Genesis 25:13-18). Today, hundreds of millions of Arabs live in over twenty sovereign states in North Africa and the Middle East, encompassing vast areas of oil-rich land. Many of them self-identify by tradition, culture or religion as descendants of Ishmael, though documentation of such genealogy has not been found. Still, the existence of these mighty nations, capable of generating tremendous wealth, is evidence of God's blessing.

At the same time, history recounts how many Arabic speaking peoples were noted, as God Himself said, for "hostility toward all their brothers" (Genesis 16:12).^a Tribal grudges, based on ubiquitous legends of plunder and murder, have gone back for generations, screaming for revenge. To be sure, God did not curse Ishmael or cause his descendants to live at odds with each other. But He did know in advance the choices they would make. He alone knows the extent to which those choices reflect, or trace back to, resentment of election.

The Scriptures describe Ishmael as "a wild donkey of a man." In the culture of the ancient Middle East, a wild donkey was often highly admired.² The Bible portrays it as a fierce and sturdy animal, capable of thriving in a barren wasteland (see Job 39:5-8). Independent and untamable, it spurns the approval and confines of man for the sake of boundless freedom.

Someday, Ishmael's "hostility" and wild donkey disposition

will be transformed in Messiah. Arab and other Middle East nations will redirect their passions to please only Him. Ishmael's descendants, who may be known only to God, will reflect the humble yet honorable, servant character of the donkey Jesus once rode into Jerusalem (see Matthew 21:2–29). Collectively, they will carry the presence and glory of the King in a uniquely intimate way, tapping into their Abrahamic legacy as never before. They will discover the power and accord of their ancient familial connection to Israel. Hints of conciliatory revival between the children of Ishmael and Isaac glimmer at us from the Scriptures:

In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria [modern-day Iraq]. The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together. In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance."

Isaiah 19:23–25

The world has yet to behold the beauty and blessing that will flow from Ishmael's fulfilled redemptive destiny (see Isaiah 60:4–7). In the prophetic future, these beloved children of Abraham will metaphorically roll out a red carpet of hospitality for Messiah and the Jews—drenched not with the blood of man, but the blood of the Lamb. They will bring to the international Body restored concepts of honor, community, hospitality and sacrificial zeal. I've caught glimpses of it in relationships and gatherings with a forerunning remnant of them. The children of Ishmael will uniquely reveal to the world that "God hears," in prophetic fulfillment of their beloved forebear's name.³

Abraham's Other Sons

The descendants of Ishmael represent but one demographic slice of the Middle East and North Africa. Other people groups and nations presently comprise this vast company the Creator desires to captivate, not with the saber but with His Spirit. Among them are Egypt and Persia, known now as Iran. Certain other, smaller tribal groups in the region were also spawned by Abraham's extended family, or by Abraham himself. Because there is no documented and historical trace of them, their intermixed descendants have been generally known, collectively, as Arabs.

In Genesis 25, after the death of Sarah and marriage of Isaac to Rebekah, Abraham takes another wife, named Keturah. By Keturah, the rejuvenated patriarch fathers six more sons: Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak and Shuah. He sends them to live in the region east of the Promised Land that Isaac inhabits, toward the area where Ishmael dwells. There in the Arabian Peninsula, the clans intermingle and intermarry (see Genesis 25:1–6).

We can assume that Abraham teaches all his sons to worship YHVH before they leave home. Very few, however, follow in their father's faith. Their children and grandchildren turn to idolatry and enmity against Israel, for which they are all eventually judged.

By New Covenant times, Arabs dwell from the Euphrates River to the Red Sea. By the twenty-first century, and together with Egypt and Iran, they possessed nearly 5.5 million square miles,⁴ or 12 percent, of the earth's surface. These lands total 650 times the size of the state of Israel. For a fast visual comparison, picture two and a half copies of this book physically stacked one atop another. If you were to remove just one page

from one book, that page would represent the approximate size of Israel's land mass relative to that of the Arabs.

Esau and Jacob: War in the Womb

The contention of election resumes in Bible history with Isaac's pregnant wife, Rebekah. The matriarch-to-be finds herself enduring a veritable fetal feud. I imagine her mopping a sweaty brow as she puzzles before God: "Why is this happening to me?" (Genesis 25:22).

The Sovereign of the Universe replies, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger" (verse 23). Rebekah's womb war is a question of election.

When the twins are born, the baby delivered first is named Esau ("Red" or "Hairy"). The second is called Jacob ("Heel Grabber"). The boys grow up, with Isaac favoring Esau the elder and Rebekah relating with preference to Jacob.

One day, Jacob is home cooking stew when Esau arrives, tired and hungry, after working hard outdoors. He prevails upon his brother, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!" Jacob replies, "First sell me your birthright." Esau mutters, "Look, I am about to die. What good is the birthright to me?" The story concludes:

So he [Esau] swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left. So Esau despised his birthright.

Genesis 25:33–34

Might Esau have inherited the birthright if he had not despised it? Weaving human free will together with sovereign election, God is not unjust. In despising his birthright, Esau has shown a woeful disregard for the One who might have given it to him. God foreknew his heart and choices he would make. Therefore He says, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated” (Romans 9:13).

Years go by. Knowing the end of his life is near, Isaac prepares to give his final, covenant birthright blessing to Esau. But Rebekah intervenes. At her behest, Jacob deceives his father in order to “steal,” and this time seal, the birthright. And so, thinking he is blessing Esau, Isaac lays hands on the younger son. By the Spirit, he pronounces a powerful prophetic word over Jacob:

May God give you heaven’s dew and earth’s richness. . . . May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you. May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed.

Genesis 27:28–29

Jacob irrevocably inherits the covenant promise, and Esau is enraged. He begs Isaac to retract the blessing, but this his father cannot do: “I have made him lord over you and have made all his relatives his servants. . . . So what can I possibly do for you, my son?” (Genesis 27:37). Esau weeps at Isaac’s feet—over his personal loss—until Isaac prophesies over him, too. But the “blessing” proves unenviable:

Your dwelling will be away from the earth’s richness, away from the dew of heaven above. You will live by the sword and you will serve your brother. But when you grow restless, you

will throw his yoke from off your neck.

Genesis 27:39–40

Esau is devastated, embittered, and bent on revenge: “I will kill my brother Jacob” (verse 41). The Scriptures tell us to learn from his example:

See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. See that no one . . . is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Afterward . . . he was rejected. Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done.

Hebrews 12:15–17

To escape Esau’s wrath, Jacob is forced to flee for his life. While he is on the run, God visits him through a dream in the desert. YHWH sovereignly and unequivocally passes His covenant with Abraham and Isaac down to Jacob. Though seemingly obtained by trickery, the inheritance was destined for him all along:

“I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land.”

Genesis 28:13–15

Many years later, Jacob is involved in a dramatic struggle with the Angel of the Lord. Contending for blessing, he secures it—but only after he is forcibly weakened to the point of surrender. At that moment, Jacob's core nature is so transformed

that his name is changed to Israel. The meaning of *Israel* is two-fold: “Striving with God” and “Prince with God” (see Genesis 32:28). Today, as with Jacob long ago, the Jewish nation's striving with God is drawing her people toward humble surrender to Him. As she yields to her Father and King, she will emerge in her full inheritance and identity as Israel, prince with God.

Esau's Descendants at Enmity

Meanwhile, when YHVH changed Jacob's heart and name, He also changed Esau's heart to one of love for his long lost brother. The two men reconcile and seem to live peaceably side by side. But Esau spawns a nation known as Edom, which throughout its existence harbors enmity against the children of Israel. They refuse to let the Israelites pass through their land after the exodus from Egypt (see Numbers 20:21). The Edomite ruler Amalek viciously attacks them. As a result, God swears He will war against Amalek from generation to generation (see Exodus 17:8, 14). Centuries later, a descendant of Amalek named Haman attempts to annihilate all the Jews of Persia (see Esther 3:1, 6). The royal Herods in the New Covenant are descendants of Edomites⁵ who continue to oppose the ways and people of God.

For their unrepentant and persistent, anti-Israel and anti-God hatred, the Edomites are sternly judged (see Ezekiel 36:5; Joel 3:19; Obadiah 1–15). God is particularly displeased because He regards them as Israel's brother:

“For three sins of Edom, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. Because he pursued his brother [Israel] with a sword, stifling all compassion, because his anger raged continually and his fury flamed unchecked, I will send fire upon [Edom].”

"This is what the Sovereign Lord says: In my burning zeal I have ... spoken against all Edom, for with glee and with malice in their hearts they made my land [Israel] their own possession..."

Ezekiel 36:5

Throughout Scripture, Edom typifies the nations' contention against Israel's election. Based broadly on geography, history, and current spiritual realities, some Bible scholars connect the Palestinian people of today to the Edomites. Despite the lack of established genealogy, some scholars view them as inheritors of the Edomites' unrelenting opposition to Israel.⁶

The Offense of Election

In the New Covenant, the question of election carries over to the nascent Body of Christ. In Rome and elsewhere, some believers struggled with the idea of a chosen people, most of whom did not believe in Jesus. How could such a people or nation exist, they wondered, apart from the Church? Paul addresses the issue forthrightly in Romans 9:6–29.

The apostle uses Bible history to illustrate that only a small remnant within Israel had ever stayed faithful to God. Through the millennia, only this remnant has enjoyed personal relationship with YHVH in full covenant obedience, blessing and destiny. In mind-boggling mercy and grace, this remnant serves to maintain the election of the nation as a whole. Paul reminds

us, "Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, 'Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant shall be saved'" (Romans 9:27).

Israel's collective disobedience through history never canceled God's unconditional covenant with her, and does not cancel it now. "So too, at the present time there is a remnant [presumably, faithful Messianic Jews] chosen by grace" (Romans 11:5).

Ironically, while Romans 9 is dedicated to *affirming* Israel's continued election, scattered verses in that chapter are sometimes taken out of context, read superficially, and then used to argue *against* her election. For example, verses 6–8 are sometimes misunderstood to mean the exact opposite of what the passage is actually teaching:

For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. . . . In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.

Read carefully in context, it is clear that Paul is not denying the Jews' ongoing election here—or anywhere else.^{7 b} Rather, he is referring specifically to the Messianic Jewish remnant as the "Israel" that is spiritually *as well as physically* "descended from Israel." A spiritual separation in Yeshua exists between unbelieving ethnic Israel and believing ethnic Israel. The latter are the "children of the promise" who are *fully* "Abraham's children" and "offspring."

It is abundantly clear from the context of Paul's broader teaching in Romans 9–11 that he believes all Jewish people are in fact biologically descended from Abraham. All Jewish people, regardless of their personal level of faith, are still part of

Israel, the nation of the Jews. But they are not all part of the Israel that is “descended from Israel” in the sense of *personally* surrendering to, following, and serving God’s full calling on Israel, as did Abraham. Paul teaches that only by personal faith in Messiah can Jews personally experience the full reality of their identity and destiny as Israel. Jewish DNA is not a guarantee of salvation or a place in God’s family.

To understand Paul's use of speech, consider how some believers with mature faith are sometimes called "fathers" or "mothers" in the Body of Christ. They may or may not have flesh-and-blood children of their own. At the same time, others who do have physical children may never be called mothers and fathers of faith. That does not mean they are not in fact literal and physical, flesh-and-blood parents. It does mean they are not behaving as authentic, "spiritual" mothers or fathers in and to the Body of Christ.

Does election still seem unfair? “Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says . . . ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion’” (Romans 9:14–15). Our Father does not show favoritism (see Romans 1:9-11)! The reality of election should bring us all to our knees before YHVH. It is designed to extravagantly bless the Gentiles just as much as the Jews. Unless we deliberately choose otherwise.

“I Will Bless Those Who Bless You”

Try to picture the scene: In a scorching breeze of Chaldean antiquity, God speaks to His friend Abraham: "I will make you into a great nation. ... I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse, and all peoples on earth will

be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:2-3).

Angels, I imagine, dance. Man's redemption rolls into motion; over sands and cities of the Middle East, glimmers of the Gospel appear. Time goes by and Abraham's grandson Jacob inherits the promise. Hundreds of years later, his descendants become "a great nation." From that nation comes salvation leading to "the restoration of all things" (Acts 3:21) Has God's promise-blessing to and through Abraham, therefore, been entirely fulfilled? We have already seen in this book that it has not.

Because YHVH still has covenant-based, prophetic purposes for Israel, He still blesses those who bless her---and curses those who curse her. What could that mean for us today?

It may surprise you to learn the typical twenty-first century notion of a blessing differs much from the biblical concept. In Genesis 12:3, the word God uses for "bless" is the Hebrew *ba-rekh*, which denotes spiritual and physical enrichment.⁸ It stems from the root *barekh*, meaning "to kneel."⁹

Kneeling, as you know, is an outward sign of lowering oneself to esteem another. The biblical-Hebraic concept of a blessing, therefore, suggests a humbled posture of heart, if not outward body. The word picture conveys that blessing someone involves a lowering of oneself in order to enrich them. Consider that when God blesses, He kneels, so to speak, to enrich His creation. Quite a mind-numbing and heart-humbling construct!

Consider too that Yeshua emptied Himself of glory to dwell among us, embodied in mere dust. At the near pinnacle of His career, He stoops to wash His disciples' dirty feet. Then He hangs to His death, agonizing and bleeding on a tree. In humil-

ity, He kneels to eternally enrich you and me---calling us to follow Him and do likewise. If we desire to walk with Messiah, we, too, must kneel in humility to enrich others. But that's not always easy. Sacrificial love is involved.

In God's Kingdom, if we're to bless others, we ourselves decrease in stature, so to speak. Yet as we do, we find that Yeshua in us graciously increases (see John 3:30). We discover that in exchange for the sacrifice of self, God gives to us more of Himself. And so in the end, we increase. We get more, to give more. A prominent theologian wrote, "The blessing God promises [in His Word] is not, cannot be, any external thing apart from Himself. All that He has to give or can give is ultimately more of Himself."¹⁰

What does this have to do with Israel? When God makes good on His promise, "I will bless those who bless you," He "kneels to enrich" all those who "kneel to enrich" the Jews.

I have been deeply privileged to meet countless Christians from the nations who have sacrificially blessed Israel. Their blessing may have been expressed in dedication to intercessory prayer, financial giving, personal volunteering, friendship, Israel advocacy, or other acts of Messiah-like love. I sometimes ask these dear saints if they can honestly say they have been blessed as a result of having blessed Israel or the Jews. Never have I met a Christian who answered, No. And never have I met one who did *not* say the greatest blessing they received for having blessed Israel, was more of Jesus in their life. They speak of deeper fellowship with God's heart, and greater engagement with His Word and Spirit. *In its highest expression, those who bless Israel are blessed with more of the Blesser Himself.*

Now, metaphorically kneeling before Jewish people (or anyone else) to enrich them does not suggest we literally bow

down or worship them! It does not imply Jews are superior to others. It merely reflects alignment with God's sovereign choosing, flowing from loving surrender to Him, not to them. At the same time, this same humility is also required of Israel. She is destined by Deity to kneel to enrich all other peoples on earth.

“Whoever Curses You I Will Curse”

In everyday talk, the word "curse" usually refers either to occult activity or to certain expletives not appropriate to print in this book. The Hebrew Scriptures, however, give us a different perspective and a much broader definition. The biblical meaning of curse is threefold: (1) to stop or impose a barrier, ban or paralysis; (2) to treat lightly, make light of, belittle, or make little; or (3) to despise, disdain or regard with contempt.¹¹ To curse is to render a type of judgment.

In Genesis 12:3, God uses a particularly strong form of the word "curse" in His covenant promise to Abraham. Based on its sentence structure, the verse could be accurately paraphrased, “The one who stops you from fulfilling your calling, belittles and despises you, I must severely curse.”¹²

That God *must severely* curse is a sobering, almost chilling thought. If it is true that He must still curse those cursing Israel—or those stopping her from fulfilling her calling or belittling or despising her—the implications are immense. Is there any evidence this principle might still play out? Four thousand years of history shows that indeed, it does.

Soon after God promises blessing or cursing through Abraham, King Abimelech unwittingly mishandles the patriarch's wife. As a result, he becomes infertile and almost loses his life

(see Genesis 20:1–18). Years later, Joseph is favored and blessed by an Egyptian pharaoh; consequently, Egypt prospers in difficult times. Another pharaoh enslaves the Hebrews, kills their babies and imprisons them; Egypt is then laid waste. Soon thereafter, the Moabites hire a soothsayer named Balaam to curse the Israelites on their way to Canaan. Instead, God curses the Moabites and Balaam is killed (see Nehemiah 13:1–2; Numbers 31:8). Centuries later, after their exile, Jews in Persia are threatened with annihilation by an evil ruler named Haman. But his sinister plot backfires. Haman is the one to hang on gallows he had built for a Jewish neck (see Esther 3; 5:14; 7:9–10).

Throughout the Old Covenant, when Israel strays from God, He uses other nations to assail her. Through them He disciplines His beloved, that in her distress she might turn back to Him. Invariably, however, the nations go too far and viciously harm the Jews. YHVH then turns to judge those nations—without the same mercy He extends to Israel. Those cursing Israel—Amalekites, Amorites, Assyrians, Hittites, Moabites, Perizzites, Gibeonites, Midianites, Edomites, Babylonians, Philistines and others—only force God’s hand against themselves. As nations, they no longer exist.

With its focus shifted to the Gospel of the Kingdom, the New Covenant does not record specific instances of Gentiles cursing Israel. There are indirect references to Roman cruelty—including the Crucifixion—and Paul’s admonitions to the Church not to mistreat the Jews. But post-biblical history shows the curse pattern of the Old Covenant did not change after the New.

The Pattern Persists

When the New Covenant was written, the Roman Empire

loomed over a large portion of the world and continued to flourish for hundreds of years. Then Constantine came to power and made Christianity the official religion of his expansive state. He adopted and enforced virulently anti-Jewish laws, embedding replacement theology in the institutional Church. Soon thereafter, the great Roman Empire collapsed. The Church as a whole sank into a spiritual abyss known historically as the Dark Ages, during which time Islam rose to the fore. (From its inception, Islam aimed to replace the Church in much the same way the Church had tried to replace Israel.)

The eleventh and twelfth centuries ushered in the so-called Holy Crusades. Dispatched by popes and kings, Christian soldiers marched from England and France down through the Middle East, seeking to liberate Jerusalem. But liberation meant, in effect, liquidation. Along their way, Crusaders needlessly slaughtered tens of thousands of unarmed Jews (and Muslims) in the name of Jesus Christ. What happened next? The bubonic plague decimated much of Europe. Meanwhile, England and France re-aimed their weapons against each other in the Hundred Years' War.

A few centuries later, large numbers of Jews migrated to Spain. There they rose to prominent positions and helped transform the nation into a world power. The Golden Age of Spain ended, however, with its nefarious Inquisitions forcing Jews either to convert to Christianity or leave the country. Shortly after most of them left, the Spanish empire plunged into a period of political, military, economic and societal decline, never to reclaim its position or prestige.¹³

Approximately five hundred years ago, Jews migrated to and established vibrant communities in Great Britain. There they enjoyed favor and eventually support from a small but vocal

Christian minority. With revived insight, these prescient believers understood that covenant promises and blessings to Israel still applied to the literal sons and daughters of Jacob.¹⁴ (Christian Zionism, a faith-based expression of God's love for Israel, is at least four hundred years old.¹⁵) By the late 1800s, British believers were offering strategic vision and practical help to European Jews in the return and restoration of their ancestral home.¹⁶

As long as Great Britain treated the Jewish people kindly, things went well for her. Her global empire thrived. "The sun never sets on the British Empire," it was said, for her kingdom spanned the earth. But a turning point came in the aftermath of World War I, when the international community delegated to her a weighty honor and prophetic responsibility. She was to supervise the reestablishment of a sovereign Jewish state in the Middle East.

Britain, however, took 78 percent of the land given her to hold in legal trust reserved for the Jews, and handed it to the Arabs instead. Then, during and after the Holocaust, she blockaded the remaining 22 percent to reduce Jewish immigration to a trickle. Why? With vast oil reserves in the Middle East at stake, Britain felt it best to appease Palestinians who staunchly objected to the Jews' return.¹⁷ As a result, millions of Nazi-hunted Jews across Europe found no place of escape. As you know, the once great British Empire is no more.

World War II, with its Gestapo-driven, draconian Jewish genocide, left Germany in shambles: defeated, divided and humiliated. But in years following the Holocaust, Germany shifted. A strong remnant of Christian believers repented for their nation's horrific misdeeds. For decades to follow, Germany blessed Israel with war reparations, strategic aid, and loyal friendship. In large measure, Germany was restored.

A grand-scale drama of the late twentieth century played out in the once formidable Soviet Union. Throughout Soviet history, reports of widespread, murderous antisemitism made their way to Jewish communities abroad. Demand was made for decades, inside the Soviet Empire and out: "Let my people go!" But Communists refused—until suddenly and surprisingly, the fearsome USSR imploded. An exodus of more than a million Jews followed, most of them immigrating to Israel.

Keep in mind that God has declared, unconditionally, that Israel is the "apple of My eye" (see Zechariah 2:8, Deuteronomy 32:10,). The Hebrew word picture suggests someone daring to poke a finger into the pupil of our Creator King's eye. The brazen individual cannot succeed; his own eye is injured in the process. Accordingly, history shows that people cursing the Jews suffer from loss of visual clarity. They lose sight of truth and the grace to discern right from wrong. Upon such persons and places, dark deception descends. Before long, they crumble under the curse of their own antisemitism.

Twenty-first Century Implications

Since I am an American citizen, I would like to share a bit about that country's unique relationship with Israel. I pray regularly for the United States and am deeply grateful to have been born there. The ideals, values and principles on which the nation was founded, though imperfect, reflect a once-solid commitment to God and His Word. Sadly, in the twenty-first century, those values and principles are under severe attack. America's future as a free and prosperous nation is at stake.

Sobering parallels seem to exist between America's treatment of Israel and her present-day problems. To a very important degree, she has been Israel's best friend. But a best

friend is not always a good or forever friend. Recently, some American Christians have recounted widespread devastations, natural disasters and political-economic upheavals in their nation, showing how those events do not seem to randomly occur. The documented, traumatic events transpire on the heels of specific actions taken by America to stop or impose a barrier or ban on Israel.

Beginning in the 1990's, many of those calamities transpired within hours or days of US negotiators forcing Israel to implement policies or relinquish lands to appease enemies bent on her destruction.¹⁸ Coincidence or curse?

I cannot draw a definitive cause-and-effect relationship from these phenomena, but I cannot deny the portentous parallels, either. At best, these calamities can be seen as evil-induced events which God did not prevent in order to graciously waken and warn His beloved United States.

As I update this book, America is providing Israel with critically important military aid and intelligence information. Together they have formed an alliance to defend against Iran and its terror proxies. America's support, however, has come at great cost, and sometimes, even hindrance to Israel. Unraveling the complexities and international intrigue is beyond the scope of this book. But of this we can be sure: God will bless or curse as is right and just. Weighing in the balance will be America's response to the escalating, murderous antisemitism raging within her. Whether or not you live in the US, I encourage you to pray for that globally strategic nation.

Turning now to the Middle East and North Africa, for over a century, most nations in that region have vehemently or violently opposed the Jewish state. Those few who do not (at least officially) have found themselves, to varying degrees, enriched and peaceful. Others, still cursing the day of Israel's rebirth,

languish in repressive spiritual darkness, poverty and social injustice at the hands of their own leaders. Sadly, it should come as no surprise that nearly one year after Hamas's brutal attack on Israel of October 7, 2023, dubbed Operation "al-Aqsa Flood," many Gazans decry the Flood drowned only themselves.

In an increasingly anti-Israel, anti-Jewish and anti-Zionist world, I assume that you, like me, would rather be blessed than cursed. The days and years ahead will offer tangible opportunities for us to make that choice. We will choose, consciously or unconsciously:

Each time we meet someone who is Jewish ...

Each time we learn---or could learn---honest facts and real truth about Israel ...

Each time we speak---or could speak out---about Israel, antisemitism or the Jews ...

Each time we pray---or could pray---for Israel or the Jews ...

Each time we expend---or could expend---tangible resources to a cause or ministry ...

And each time we render a heart judgment about Zionism, Israel, Jews, antisemitism, or the covenant promises of God.

History presents a recurring pattern. Those who bless Israel get blessed; those who curse her get cursed. In the next chapter, we will discover the greatest blessing any Christian can release over Israel, from any nation.

6

The Salvation of Israel

Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.

Romans 10:1

Back when I was in my 30's, I was joyfully serving the Lord in a fast-growing, Spirit-filled church in California birthed from the Jesus movement of the 1960's. I was not involved in Jewish ministry and had no plans to be. But one surprising day, as I quietly worshipped God at home, He encountered me. A life-altering experience followed. Suddenly and sovereignly, He opened up to me His passionate heart—His immense love and longing—for Israel's salvation. Undone by His undying burden, I have not been able to cease praying and caring for the Jewish people ever since. I am convinced, as Paul wrote millennia ago, God wants our “heart's desire and prayer ... for Israel [to be] for their salvation” (Romans 10:1 TLV).

Certainly it is important to pray for Israel's peace and protection, security and safety, healing of her wounds, wisdom for her leaders, justice in her policies, and much more. These are

issues for which I encourage you to petition heaven wholeheartedly. But the stated biblical priority for Israel is that she be saved.

The Greek noun translated "saved" in Romans 10:1 (and elsewhere) derives from the word *sozo*, meaning "saved, delivered, protected, healed, preserved, and whole." The concept is similar to the Hebrew word *shalom*. Readers who are Jewish but do not believe in Jesus can think of "saved" as referring to assured forgiveness of personal sins, love-driven and surrendered obedience to God, righteousness in His sight, intimate relationship with Him, and eternal life. All by His mercy and grace.

At this writing, formal and informal surveys indicate approximately 25,000 Israeli Jews believe in Yeshua.¹ For many reasons, exact numbers are impossible to obtain. Worldwide, an estimated 250,000 to 500,000 Jews identify as followers of Messiah.²^a Not since the days of the book of Acts have the sons and daughters of Jacob responded so positively to the Gospel.^b

How Are Jews Saved?

Sometimes Christians are surprised to learn that according to Scripture, Jews are saved the same as everyone else—by grace through faith in Jesus the Messiah. I realize that statement may offend some readers, especially those who are Jewish and who do not believe in Jesus. If that includes you, please understand that no ill will, disrespect or personal judgment is harbored or intended. I merely state the teachings of Tanach as they are incorporated into, and expanded by, the New Covenant text. Though you are free to disagree, I hope you'll read on.

In the New Covenant, it was to a roomful of Jewish disciples

that Yeshua said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. *No one* comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6, emphasis mine). Likewise, the apostle Peter, himself a Jew, declared to a gathering of Jewish leaders, "Salvation is found in *no one* else, for there is *no other* name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12, emphases mine). Paul, a consummate religious Jew, wrote that God will declare *nobody* righteous solely by observing the law, but by confessed faith in Yeshua (see Romans 3:20, 10:9-10, 1:5).

In the Old Covenant, YHVH graciously provided for forgiveness of sins through the shedding of blood by animal sacrifice. In the New Covenant, the sacrificial system is fulfilled through the shedding of blood by Yeshua's once-for-all atonement for sins. The book of Hebrew explains in detail why animal sacrifice is no longer required for the remission of sin and why that particular function of Jerusalem's Holy Temple is now obsolete.

Forgiven of sins by grace through faith, Jews and Gentiles step into the new covenant promised to Israel by her prophets of old. In this new covenant, God's Spirit circumcises our hearts supernaturally (see Deuteronomy 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4; Romans 2:29, 1:15). Jeremiah foresaw the spectacular reality:

"I will make a new covenant with ... Israel ... I will put my law within them, and on their heart I will write it ... I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more"

Jeremiah 31:31-34 NASB 1995

Only Messiah Jesus fulfills Israel's hope for personal, as well as national, salvation and reconciliation to God. Chapter 10 of Romans is dedicated to making the point. In it, Paul writes there is no distinction in the way Jews and Gentiles

are saved:

There is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Romans 10:12–13

Please do not misunderstand the verse. The apostle is not teaching here that there is no distinction *at all* between Jews and Gentiles. If that were his intent, he would not distinguish between Jews and Gentiles throughout the same chapter, and throughout his letter to the Roman church. What Paul is simply saying is there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles *concerning the manner of salvation*.³

Whether you are Jewish or Gentile or a combination of both, God loves you so much that He gave us His only Messiah and Son, that if you believe in Him, you may have abundant, everlasting life. But Yeshua is the only One through whom your sins are forgiven and your relationship with the Creator made right (see John 3:16; Romans 3:21-30, 4:24-25).

To many of you I am stating the obvious. But some Christians and many Jews would not agree. They would say something like this: “The Jews are God’s chosen people. They have a special covenant with Him and do not need Jesus.” To this and other common hindrances to sharing the Gospel with Jewish people, we now turn.

Dual Covenant Deception

A doctrine known as dual covenant theology teaches there are two ways to get saved: one for the Jews, and another for everybody else. To simplify, the Jews get saved via the Old Cov-

enant, while the Gentiles get saved through the New. Dual covenant theology grew in popularity in the twentieth century, mainly as an effort to compensate for past theological errors about the Jews.

For nearly two thousand years, institutional Christianity had taught that God's heart toward Israel was one of so-called divine contempt or disdain. Seriously misinterpreting Scripture, Gentile Church fathers wrongly concluded that God despises the Jews for having "killed His Son." They urged Christians to relate to Jewish people with the same, allegedly deserved scorn and disdain they erroneously thought God held in His heart toward them. (See chapter 7.) Tragically, institutionalized Christian antisemitism gave way to outright hate, murderous crusades, tortuous inquisitions, terror pogroms and eventually, heretical justification for the Holocaust. And there's more.

Extremist and so-called "Christian" supremacy groups still advocate openly for death to Jews and Israel. Some of them align with anti-Jewish doctrines espoused by jihadi Islam. Sadly, history has taught most Jews that Christianity is a religion intrinsically, or at best potentially, dangerous to them. Embedded in the collective Jewish conscience is a persistent anti-Christian stronghold: To survive, Jews cannot and must not believe in Jesus.

After the Holocaust, God moved on the hearts of some church leaders in the West in a spirit of repentant self-examination. Courageously facing their indirect role in the slaughter of European Jews, Christian ministers began reaching out to Jewish clergy and community leaders. Before long a Jewish-Christian movement arose, known as interfaith dialogue and fellowship. (Decades later, Muslims would be included.)

As the name implies, dialogue involved Jews and Christians

talking together in formal settings, usually a church, synagogue or educational institution, in a spirit of mutual respect for each other's faith. (Bear in mind, however, the dialogue had little or nothing to do with actual Jewish Christians, who were never allowed to participate in the meetings.) In interfaith dialogue, everyone agreed that everyone's else's faith was good and acceptable to God. The aim was communication, warm fellowship and mutual understanding. Jewish leaders did most of the talking and Christian leaders felt no need to share the Gospel with them.

In the 1990's, interfaith dialogue grew to interfaith doing. Worthy initiatives and cooperative projects developed, usually focused on humanitarian aid, support for Israel, celebration of the biblical feasts, or political alliances. God was inspiring new relationships and a new thing. A new path was being forged between His beloved covenant peoples. Unfortunately, however, with the Great Commission left behind, a great omission arose.

In search of a more sensitive and compassionate way to relate to the Jews, more than a few Christian leaders traded divine contempt for dual covenant. For fear of offending the Jews, they purposed not to preach Jesus to them. They distanced themselves from Messianic Jews, whose mere presence would have threatened or angered the other Jews. Then, without the perspective Messianic Jews would have offered, mainstream Jewish leaders persuaded many of their Christian friends that salvation for Israel's is by God's covenants with Abraham and Moses, not through faith in Yeshua.

Eventually, more and more well-meaning Gentile believers determined to align with, support and bless only Jewish people who did *not* believe in Yeshua. The global Jewish community interpreted this---and still does---as Christian confirmation

that Jews do not in fact need Jesus.

More than a few mainline church denominations went even further. Many issued formal manifestos, still in effect, exempting Jews from evangelism. One such statement was signed by representatives of over twenty different Christian, including evangelical, denominations. It concludes, "In view of our conviction that Jews are in an eternal covenant with God, we renounce missionary efforts directed at [them]. . . . Christians need new ways of understanding the universal significance of Christ."⁴

Now, I am very grateful for Christian sensitivity and compassion toward the Jews. I sincerely appreciate the acceptance and respect, affection and genuine friendship that believers demonstrate toward my people who do not—and may never—believe in Yeshua. But in the process of trying to rectify the past, is it possible we have moved from one extreme to the other? Has the Church gone from condemning Israel for her rejection of Messiah to condoning it?

To be sure, sincere respect and genuine friendship are essential components of the Great Commission. But they do not substitute for it. Far better to share the truth in gentle love and humility with Jewish people, if we are sincerely their friends, than to deliberately withhold it from them. Would a real friend do anything less?

Closely related to dual covenant theology is the misconception that all Israel, meaning all Jews who ever lived, will get saved—whether or not they hear the Gospel or believe in Yeshua. Usually this stems from a well-intended but mistaken interpretation of Romans 11:26: "In this way *all Israel will be saved*. As it is written: 'The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.'" A promising phrase indeed! But it cannot be given a meaning that is inconsistent

with the overall teaching of Scripture.

As we saw in chapter 5 of this book, the New Covenant teaches that Jewish DNA does *not* guarantee salvation. In view of this apparent (but not actual) contradiction, please recall that context is critical. When we read all of Romans 11:26, and not just the first part of it, we easily see that it speaks specifically and prophetically of a future time when "the deliverer will come from Zion." In context, the reference is to Yeshua's Second Coming. The "all Israel" that gets saved are those Jewish people in Israel who are alive when He returns to Zion.^c

Even at that future time, we should not assume every Jewish person on earth, or in Israel, will be saved. The use of the word "all" in Scripture is similar to its use today. "All" can have a hyperbolic or somewhat exaggerated, rather than strictly literal, meaning. It can refer to most all, or describe a widespread, collective condition. Paul, for example, uses "all" in hyperbolic form in Romans 16:19: "The report of your obedience has reached all." The point is this: Jewish people alive today need to hear the Gospel from believers like you and me.

Times of the Gentiles

Some Christians say they have another reason for not sharing Jesus with the Jews: It's not time. But the Jewish authors of Scripture tell us that "today" or "now" "is the day of salvation" and "God wants all men [and women] to be saved" (2 Corinthians 6:2, 1 Timothy 2:4, see 2 Peter 3:9). Nobody is excluded, especially not the Jews.

Confusion sometimes results on account of a concept commonly called the "times of the Gentiles." The phrase occurs but one place in Scripture, where Jesus says, "Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are

fulfilled" (Luke 21:24). In the passage, Messiah is teaching about end times events. He is not discussing Israel's readiness for salvation. By itself, Luke 21:24 does not intimate that Jews should not, cannot, or will not be saved during the times of the Gentiles.

The popular association of times of the Gentiles with Jewish resistance to the Gospel is usually due to a recent and widespread, imprecise translation of Romans 11:25. Most modern Bibles interpret Romans 11:25 similar to this: "I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the *full number* of the Gentiles has come in." Reading Luke 21:24 alongside most translations of Romans 11:25, referring to a *full number* of Gentiles, many believers conclude that the times of the Gentiles will end when the full number of Gentiles comes into the Kingdom. Then—and only then—will Israel stop being spiritually hardened or blinded to the Gospel.

Other Bible versions offer a very different view: "Blindness in part has happened to Israel, until the *fullness* of the Gentiles has come in" (NKJV, emphasis mine; see also KJV, NASB). The *Complete Jewish Bible* puts it like this: "Stoniness, to a degree, has come upon Israel, until the Gentile world enters its *fullness*" (emphasis mine). According to a recent translation by a team of Messianic scholars, "A partial hardening has come upon Israel until the *fullness* of the Gentiles has come in" (TLV, emphasis mine). The difference between "full number" and "fullness," as we will see, can be monumental.

The words "fullness" or "full number" are translated from the Greek word *pleroma*.⁵ *Pleroma* appears seventeen times in the New Covenant. Most contemporary Bibles translate it "fullness" all seventeen times—except in Romans 11:25. Only there does *pleroma* become "full number," without explaining why.

Especially odd about this sole exception is that just a few verses earlier, in the same letter by the same author on the same topic, *pleroma* is translated “fullness,” or a close variant thereof. With all due respect to the full number of Bible translators, I join the ranks of those who believe the singular interpretation of *pleroma* in verse 25 reflects an unfounded, and perhaps unconscious, theological bias. As one Bible scholar remarks, “There is no linguistic reason why ‘fullness’ [*pleroma*] should take on a numeric quality, as it has to do with ‘that which is brought to fullness or completion.’”⁶

The practical difference between the full number of Gentiles and their fullness is critical. Here is why: If Israel is Gospel resistant until the *full number* of Gentiles comes to faith, there is little point to sharing Yeshua with her today, or tomorrow, or the day or week after that. Not until the last Gentile destined and numbered for the Kingdom, in the remotest region on earth, finally gets saved will it then be time to turn to the Jews. But if Israel’s hardness or blindness is removed when the *fullness* of the Gentiles comes in, our approach to Jewish outreach should be much different.

Fullness of the Gentiles

To what, then, does “fullness” of the Gentiles refer? Romans 11:11 unfolds a mystery: “Salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious.” We can think of fullness, quite simply, as fullness of the Holy Spirit. From a practical perspective, fullness is that quality of mature Christlikeness that provokes Jewish people to godly envy for their Messiah. It is another way to describe the regenerate and Spirit-filled life of holy love to which you and I are called as followers of Yeshua.

God's will for every believer has always been the attaining of this fullness. Indeed, right after Romans 11:25 tells us the Jewish people will be hardened or blinded "until the fullness of the Gentiles" comes in, the very next verse states, "and in this way all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26). The way Israel turns to Yeshua, between now and the Second Coming, is by the fullness or spiritual maturity of the Gentiles reaching out to them. "In this way," the fullness of the Gentiles reflects the maturation of Messiah's Bride. It directly impacts the timing of the Second Coming (see Revelation 19:7-8).^d

It is the *quality* of Gentile Christianity encountered by Jewish people that leads to their salvation, not the *quantity* of Gentile Christians they encounter. I myself came to Yeshua mostly out of "godly envy" for the relationship a Gentile Christian friend had with Him. She was obviously full of God's Spirit, bubbling with joy and exuding love, light, peace and righteousness. I puzzled, *What is she doing with my God—and having such a good time with Him?!* I was not only envious, I was indignant. I absolutely had to have a relationship with God like she did!

Sharing the Gospel with Jewish people should not be intimidating. The majority are not highly religious and have less familiarity with the Scriptures than you do. Many harbor an interest in spiritual matters and have unresolved questions about Jesus. If you know and love the Lord, you have no reason not to prayerfully follow His leading in forthrightly but gently and respectfully telling others, including Jews, the truth about Him. If you feel you need guidance with Jewish sensitivities, Messianic outreach ministries are glad to help.^e

Jewish "Hardness" and "Blindness"

Perhaps you want to see Jewish people come to faith in Yeshua, but feel they are too spiritually hardened or blinded to believe. At times I was tempted to think that way about my own father. Dad was raised Orthodox and his father, my grandfather, was a leader in the local Jewish community of his day. When Dad learned that I professed faith in Messiah, he hung his head low and went to his father's grave to apologize. For sixteen years I prayed for him, during which time he would not even speak the name *Yeshua* or *Jesus*. But then my father got sick.

As he lay on his deathbed, Dad remembered the conversations we'd had over the years. Weeks went by until one day he told me the good news: He'd finally come to believe in Yeshua as his Messiah. His voice was weak but his intention was clear. The next day Dad lost consciousness, and the day after that he woke up in heaven. From then on, I purposed never to resign any Jewish man, woman, or child as too hardened or blinded to believe.

Bear in mind that nowhere does the New Covenant attribute Gospel resistance to all of Israel. A degree of spiritual hardening or blindness to the Gospel is on part—but certainly but not all—of the Jewish people. Romans 11:7 informs us that while Israel's chosen or elect ones obtained salvation by grace through faith, "the *others* were hardened."

Part of Israel responds to the Gospel, while part of Israel, namely, "the others," do not. The reality is comparable to how some Gentiles respond to the Gospel, while others do not. If we mistakenly assume that all Israel—or all but a miniscule fraction—is hopelessly hardened or blinded to Yeshua, will we make any effort at all to reach them with the Gospel? For most

Christians for most of two millennia, the answer has been, No.

Even those Jewish people who are hardened or blinded usually are not *totally* hardened: “A *partial* hardening has come upon Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (Romans 11:25 TLV, emphasis mine). There are varying degrees of openness and resistance, not too unlike varying degrees of openness or resistance among the Gentiles.

Place Is Not a Problem

The Bible teaches that in these last days, Jewish people will be miraculously restored physically to their land, then spiritually to their Lord (see Romans 11:25–27; Matthew 23:39; Ezekiel 36:24–37:14; Zechariah 12:2–12). Does this mean, therefore, that Jews must first immigrate to Israel before they can come to Yeshua? The answer is yes---and no.

Jewish people can come to faith in Messiah anywhere, especially where they encounter the magnetic-like fullness of Gentiles' faith. But there is a difference between individual salvation and national salvation. On a collective, national level, God has been restoring Israel physically to the land for more than one hundred years. Miraculously, after nearly two millennia, most Jewish people live in Israel. And now, on a collective or national level, her spiritual restoration (salvation) is underway.

At this writing, steadily growing numbers of individual Israelis are coming to faith. For the first time in nearly two millennia, Messianic Jewish groups exist throughout the land, a trend destined to continue. The Scriptures suggest that more and more Israelis will turn to Messiah, albeit individually, as we approach the end of this age. Then, at the end of the age, the

Jews will collectively be saved, as a nation. Israel's national salvation occurs in connection with Yeshua's return.

For these and other important reasons, *aliyah* (Jewish immigration to Israel) is to be encouraged. But regardless of time or place or anything else, God's mercy and grace are unlimited. The Gospel can be shared with Jewish people wherever they happen to be.

Consider the facts: Thousands of Israelis still pass into eternity each year without knowing Messiah. Meanwhile, significant numbers of Jewish people living outside their ancestral home, in what is called the diaspora, have been turning to Him. At this writing, more Jews have come to faith while not living in Israel, than while living in Israel. Through history, God has preserved a remnant of Jewish believers in Yeshua in nations all around the world. Place is not a problem for Him. Jews can and are being saved in more than one location at a time:

"If they [Israel] have a change of heart in the land where they are held captive and repent and ... turn back to [you] with all their heart and soul ... and obey him ... forgive your people who have sinned against you."

1 Kings 8:47-50

"Wherever the Lord your God disperses you among the nations, and when you and your children return to the Lord your God and obey him ... then the Lord your God will ... gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you. ... He will bring you to the land that belonged to your fathers and you will take possession of it."

Deuteronomy 30:1-5

Opposing the Salvation of the Jewish People

The devil fights hard against Jewish people coming to faith. When a Jew turns to Yeshua, it can seem that spiritual havoc is wreaked all around him or her. Jewish family, friends and colleagues may feel betrayed, even outraged. Messianic Jews may be ostracized or expelled from their community. But our real enemy is *the* enemy, not our loved ones or religious associates.

We have seen that Satan is uniquely threatened by Israel's restoration because it precipitates his personal ruin. This is because Yeshua explicitly connects His return to the day Jewish Jerusalem welcomes Him back:

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

Matthew 23:37–39

Over two thousand years ago, religious leaders in Jerusalem formally rejected Jesus as their Messiah. But someday in the not too distant future, they will wholeheartedly bless His return. This pinnacle event will inaugurate the Second Coming—and the devil's eviction from earth (see Acts 3:17–21; Revelation 20:2). Meanwhile, like a trapped and frenzied beast, Satan is scrambling to prevent the scenario from materializing (see Revelation 12:13, 17). I imagine him terror-stricken at the growing remnant of Israeli Messianic Jews prophetically heralding, “*Barukh haba b'shem Adonai!*” (“Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”)

Satanic terror manifests when Israeli believers face opposition from other Jews. Organized, systemic opposition against sharing the Gospel comes mainly through what is known as the Jewish counter-missionary (or anti-missionary) movement. Counter-missionaries are usually ultra-Orthodox Jewish extremists whose *raison d'être* is to prevent other Jews from believing in Yeshua. In their opinion, faith in Messiah is tantamount to excommunication from true Judaism. We're far more dangerous, they say, than Nazis or jihadi Islamists. Very much "anti" missions and "anti" the Christ, they resemble those Pharisees who opposed Yeshua and His early followers.^f

Counter-missionaries tail Jewish evangelists around the globe, steadfastly working to undermine their efforts. Daily they invoke ritual curses against Messianic Jews and their faith. Paul describes the counter-missionaries of his day as beloved enemies:

They are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. . . . As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs.

Romans 10:2; 11:28

Israeli Messianic Jews

Israel is presently the only country in the Middle East where Christianity is freely and openly growing without persecution. Nowhere else in the region may Christians, most of whom are Arab, worship with as much liberty as in the Jewish state. Despite minor restrictions on evangelism, Israel tries hard to protect the religious rights of believers in Jesus—so long as those believers are not Jewish.

For Messianic Jews the situation is different.^g Reflecting Judaism's traditional consensus, Israel's Supreme Court has ruled that Jews who believe in Jesus are no longer Jewish. As a result, Messianic Jews in the nations are generally not eligible for *aliyah*. For those living in the land, discrimination, ostracism from mainstream community life, and harassment for our faith can be facts of life. (Thankfully, there are recent and notable exceptions.)

For decades, Israeli counter-missionaries have sporadically firebombed Messianic congregations and homes, physically assaulted, beat up and injured believers, vandalized their personal property, shut down their businesses, issued death threats, and attempted murder. At a global prayer gathering in Jerusalem on Pentecost 2023, an anti-missionary mob physically assaulted Messianic worshipers, sending at least one woman to a hospital. The attack was broadcast internationally, but without criminal consequence to the perpetrators. Israeli police are notoriously slow to respond to counter-missionary crime. If there is an arrest, judicial prosecution rarely follows.⁷ If it does, a verdict is rarely enforced and even more rarely, brings justice.^h

Government discrimination against Jewish believers is not formally written into or authorized by Israeli law. It occurs mostly because ultra-Orthodox Jews, though a minority in Israel, have historically held disproportionately great political power.^j Ultra-Orthodox politicians and bureaucrats are easily influenced by counter-missionaries, who pressure them to selectively enforce the law when Messianics are involved. Because Messianic Jews represent less than half of one percent of Israel's population, they do not carry political clout. As a result, discrimination against them trickles down into much of mainstream society.

Please understand that despite the harassment, Israel remains a freedom loving and democratic society, not a repressive regime. Messianic believers do not at this time suffer systematic, violent persecution.ⁱ Nearly always, Gentile Christians visiting from abroad are welcomed with hospitality and treated respectfully.

We are not to begrudge Israel for her treatment of Jewish followers of Jesus. 2 Timothy 3:12 tells us that all who would live godly in Messiah suffer persecution. The Father's heart is big enough to love Israel unconditionally despite her flaws, and ours must be, too. I make you aware of the matter so you can wisely discern strategies from heaven to stand with your brothers and sisters in Messiah. We know our battle is not against flesh and blood; our enemy is *the* enemy.

Pray with us for counter-missionaries who are "enemies" toward us, "but . . . loved on account of the patriarchs" (Romans 11:28). At the same time, pray for us, Israel's Yeshua following remnant.

Blessing Israel's Remnant

Speaking as but one member of Israel's growing body of believers, may I say we are more needy than you might think. Mostly, like believers everywhere, we need more of God's Spirit. We need to be conformed more and more to the likeness of Yeshua. We need more of His Kingdom reality manifest in our lives. We need Holy Spirit's empowering to embrace our biblical destiny, to be and to share the Good News. For all these things, we need your friendship and ongoing prayer support.

There is more. Due to counter-missionary pressures, Israeli believers can sometimes lose jobs, homes or other "normal" financial opportunities when our faith is made known. Those

of us who emigrate from other countries are typically hardest hit. For the neediest among us, the situation is made worse by the fact that Christian and Jewish relief funds rarely, if ever, get into Messianic hands.

The Israeli government, which regulates and disperses most charitable aid from abroad, precludes Messianic organizations (or known individuals) from receiving money which they themselves have not raised.^k As a result, huge sums donated by evangelicals often end up in the pockets of groups that actively support counter-missionaries, giving them more resources with which to intentionally harm Israeli believers.^l Christians are usually unaware of these behind-the-scenes realities.

One highly renowned, international fellowship of Christians and Jews has raised over 200 million US dollars for Israel, for each of the past several years. Countless sincere Christians have generously given to this organization on the basis of Romans 15:27: “For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews’ spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings” (see also Galatians 2:10). But the founder-director of the group set a firm policy of refusing to aid or deal with Messianic Jews:

I have always had one red line: that I would never work with any group involved in missionary activity targeting the Jewish community. [Practically speaking, this means any group that does not intentionally *exclude* Jews from Gospel outreach.] . . . I will never work with groups like Jews for Jesus or the Messianic community.⁸

To “never work with” Messianic groups is a diplomatic way to say he would never dispense funds to us, either.

Despite the obstacles, the Body of Messiah thrives. No Israeli city is without at least one Messianic congregation in

which Yeshua is exalted. More and more, indigenous Israeli believers are penetrating society around them. Few among us are wealthy but few are impoverished. Some large Messianic ministries are quite financially blessed, ministering to churches around the world. God provides for His people.

One New Humanity

The Messianic Jewish remnant of Israel is an integral part of the universal Body of Christ. We are your brothers and sisters in the “household of faith” (Galatians 6:10 NKJV). Ephesians 2 describes us as one new humanity:

You who are Gentiles by birth . . . now in Christ Jesus . . . have been brought near. . . . His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two. . . . Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household. . . . This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body.

Ephesians 2:11, 13, 15, 19; 3:6

Christian friend, you and I need each other. The Body of Christ is incomplete without both Jews and Gentiles, each loving, celebrating and blessing the other. Yeshua likely had this glory-goal in mind and heart when He prayed that His followers would be one (see John 17:20-22). In the next chapter, we’ll learn why the prayer was needed---and how we’re beginning to see it answered in these last days.

Rejected Roots and Broken Branches

Do not be arrogant, but be afraid [tremble]. For if God did not spare the natural [Jewish] branches, he will not spare you either. . . . I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited [about] Israel.

Romans 11:20, 25

Flash back with me, if you would, to an early childhood experience that seared my soul about Christianity: I stare in puzzled horror at a parade of living skeletons, sunken cheeks and bulging eyes, the victims of macabre Nazi “medical” experiments. Seconds later, Jewish corpses—countless piles of them—are bulldozed and dumped into a gargantuan pit, like refuse heaped in a junkyard. Then the film stops.

Our rabbi fumbles with the movie projector, an old reel-to-reel, and switches on the lights. He shuffles slowly to the front of the room. Everyone is very quiet. We can tell he has something important to say. “This is what Christians will do to you, if you let them,” he warns. “You must never again let them;

never again!"

No . . . never again, I vow silently. I am five years old.

From then on, I determine to fight for my people to survive. When I am jeered a "Christ killer" by Christian schoolmates, I land in more than a few schoolyard scuffs. I must resist them and their "God;" for whoever this "Christ" is, I am certain he hates me and wants me dead. His people keep telling me so.

I am ignorant, and so are they.

Ignorance of the Word Is No Excuse

At certain times the Word of God explicitly cautions us not to be "ignorant" or "arrogant." These warnings flash and beep like red alerts—meant to be read, alert. When I come to these passages I sense the Lord saying in a tender but firm voice, *Listen up; this is important. You need to hear what follows, and for your own good, you need to remember it. You'll be tested, and I want you to pass the test.*

Such a test and such a warning is written to New Covenant believers about Israel.

In this book we have listened to Paul speak to the Roman church about God's love, election and prophetic destiny for the Jews. Now he turns to the linchpin issue of their heart toward it all. The apostle reminds us (again) that God has not rejected, replaced or rescinded His gifts or calling on Israel. Instead, He is using her temporary, national spurning of Messiah to bless other nations.

Recall that believers in Rome were starting to think that God was finished with the Jews. Paul knew this misunderstanding would undermine the work of the Spirit not only with the Jewish people, but with the Gentiles, too. We sense his passion for

both peoples as he instructs, cautions, even pleads: "*I do not want you to be ignorant* of this mystery [about Israel], brothers and sisters, so that you may *not be conceited*. *Do not be arrogant but tremble*," or God "will not spare you." Here's how serious the stakes are: "Continue in his kindness" toward them [Israel]; "*otherwise, you will also be cut off*" (Romans 11:20-25, emphases mine.)

Paul teaches that our right standing with God is linked to our treatment of Israel. If we love Him, we will care about the nation with which He has made an everlasting covenant of love. We will relate to that nation in a spirit of kindness.

An opposite spirit, one of arrogance or conceit toward His elect, would reflect a potentially dangerous degree of hardness of heart. This is because hardness of heart toward God's people could easily lead to a hardness of heart toward God Himself. God does "not spare" those with hardened hearts toward Him; they can eventually "be cut off." The implication is that our disposition toward the Jewish people can ultimately affect our salvation. Recall Yeshua's parable about sheep and goats.

Unfortunately, despite the gracious warnings of Scripture, much of the Church knows little about the very issue of which we are explicitly cautioned *not* to be ignorant. Paul's teachings about Israel have gone largely unheeded for nearly two thousand years. The results, I'm sincerely sad to say, have been tragic.

Now, ignorance in and of itself is not sin. But concerning Israel, history demonstrates that ignorance easily breeds arrogance, and arrogance fuels more ignorance. In other words, if I know nothing about Jewish people, I am simply ignorant about them. But if I read the Bible with a humble spirit, or am even vaguely aware of current events, I must know *something*

about them. If not, I dare say I am arrogant. And if I am arrogant, I will likely stay ignorant. (“I already know everything about those ‘troublesome’ Jews that I need to know.”) But if I love the Lord and His Word, that is not what I want.

Severing Jewish Roots

Much of our ignorance about Israel has been handed to us historically. Our lack of knowledge stems mainly from a long-ago, institutionalized severance of the Old Covenant roots of Christianity. Church fathers of the second, third and fourth centuries wanted a non-Jewish way to interpret the Bible that would prove more adaptable to the pagan culture of their day. (See chapter 3.)

God, meanwhile, wanted His New Covenant people to be one new man in Messiah. He wanted Gentiles to "share in the nourishing sap from the ... root." He did not want the early Church uprooting itself from the grounding of Scripture. Nor did He want it excluding Messianic Jews.

When Christianity disconnected from the Old Covenant, however, it tapped headlong into anti-Jewish theology. Soon a false notion of “spiritual Israel” evolved,¹ along with supersessionism. The result is Christian antisemitism—something that should be an oxymoron, but sadly is not. One Gentile Christian scholar summarizes what went awry:

Paul’s warning to Gentile believers about pride went unheeded. The Church had become overwhelmingly Gentile, so it reasoned that there was no more need for the support of the root (Israel). What presumption! . . . Gentiles claimed to have replaced Israel. . . . Church fathers taught that the unfaithfulness of the Jewish people resulted in a collective guilt which

made them subject to the permanent curse of God.²

A respected Church historian describes what happened next:

The so-called “parting of the ways” between Christians and Jews would take place gradually over two or three centuries. . . . Church fathers, well into the fourth century, warn against Christian participation in Jewish observances . . . [and] carried the idea of supersessionist “fulfillment” to its logical conclusion, arguing that the Jewish Scriptures no longer had validity as the revealed Word of God. . . . It would be impossible for a believing Jew to accept a Jesus whose meaning, by definition, involved a *demeaning* of the Jewish Scriptures. . . . A Jew could accept Jesus only by rejecting—betraying—everything Jesus himself believed.³

Through history, whenever and wherever Christians concluded that the Jewish Scriptures in their Jewish context were irrelevant, unnecessary, or harmful, they soon concluded that Jewish people were irrelevant, unnecessary, or harmful. By the second century, Gentile Church fathers formulated the theology of divine contempt or disdain regarding the Jews (see chapter 6). They reasoned that God's heart toward Israel had changed to one of permanent contempt or disdain because of her national rejection of Jesus. Accordingly, sermons inciting murderous cruelty toward the sons and daughters of Jacob were routinely preached *in mainstream Christianity*,

In just one example of many, in the fourth century, the venerated St. John Chrysostom left no margin for misinterpretation:

The synagogue is . . . the lodging place of devils. ... This is true not only of the synagogues but also of the souls of the Jews. ...

As for me, I hate the synagogue. ... I hate the Jews.

Many, I know, respect the Jews and think their present way of life is venerable. That is why I hasten to uproot and tear out this deadly opinion. ... Jews ... are fit for killing ... They are fit for slaughter. ⁴

Anti-Jewish Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire under Constantine I (Constantine the Great). Shortly thereafter, Jews were stripped of their legal rights, civil liberties, and freedom of worship, *by Christians*. They were denied financial, employment, civic and other opportunities, *by Christians*. Sadly, Paul's admonition to the Church against ignorance and arrogance was upended in less than four hundred years.

In their defense, at least some of our Church forebears presumably hoped that punitive, anti-Jewish measures would inspire the children of Israel to convert. But the opposite occurred. Jews quickly came to view Christians---and their Christ---as hate mongers in whom they could see little resemblance to a God of loving kindness. Over time, matters grew worse.

In 1543 the beloved herald of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther, instructed his followers with these words:

Wherever they [Jews] have their synagogues, nothing is found but a den of devils. . . . What shall we Christians do with this rejected and condemned people, the Jews? . . . First set fire to their synagogues or schools. . . . I advise that their houses also be razed and destroyed. . . . I advise that their rabbis be forbidden to teach henceforth on pain of loss of life. . . . I advise that safe conduct on the highways be abolished completely for the Jews. If this does not help we must drive them

out like mad dogs.⁵

Luther's words (along with those of Chrysostom) were proudly cited four hundred years later by Adolf Hitler.^a That such a man of faith as the Great Reformer could be seduced by Satan to write such monstrous fodder for the Nazi Holocaust should cause us all to tremble in the spirit of Romans 11:20. Like Luther and his predecessors, we, too, can be unwittingly ignorant of satanic schemes about God's covenant nation.

Once more, I wish to say that it is not easy for me to write about these matters. In fact, I wish I never had to address the topic. But as it's often said, those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it. Perhaps you find it hard to believe that Church history has been tainted for nearly two thousand years by Christian antisemitism. If you would like more extensive documentation of the facts, allow me to recommend two outstanding books on the subject. Both are authored by my friend and highly esteemed Bible scholar, Dr. Michael L. Brown: *Our Hands are Stained with Blood*; and *Christian Antisemitism*.⁶

Meanwhile, there's still more to address.

Outlawing Messianic Judaism

In rejecting its Old Covenant roots, Christianity took aim at one stream of faith in particular—Messianic Jews. Below is an abbreviated sample of official Church canon and decrees that renounced Messianic Jewish faith or any other Christian expression of Jewishness.⁷ Because most have not been formally revoked, these directives still carry varying degrees of spiritual weight. Please understand, I do not include this list to instill resentment but to inspire restoration. God wants the Body re-

vived with “nourishing sap” (Romans 11:17). He wants to lovingly reconcile Gentiles and Jews as one new humanity in Messiah.

Again, bear in mind this is only a partial list:

First and second century Church fathers issue various anti-Jewish statements that are binding in regions where they hold authority, mainly the Middle East, North Africa and what is now Turkey.

Pope Victor condemns using the biblical calendar for dating Christian holy days, AD 175.

Council of Elvira, Spain, forbids Christians from marrying Jews on threat of excommunication (Canon 16); forbids Christians from receiving Jewish prayers or blessings (Canon 49); and prohibits Christians from eating with Jews (Canon 50), AD 306.

Council of Nicea I rejects the biblical date for celebrating Resurrection Day for the purpose of severing any connections to Passover, AD 325.

Council of Antioch excommunicates any Christian celebrating Passover with a Jew and defrocks any cleric who communicates with such a Christian (Canon 1), AD 345.

Council of Laodicea, supported by Emperor Constantine I, forbids Christians from attending Jewish feasts (Levitical and other holy days) (Canon 37) or receiving unleavened bread from them (Canon 38); AD 360.

Council of Agde, France, prescribes strict rules for the baptism of Messianic Jews, “as it is well known that they return easily to their vomit” (Canon 34), and reinforces the prohibition against clerics taking part in Jewish feasts (Canon 40), AD 506.

Council of Toledo IV prevents Jews, and specifically Messi-

anic Jews, from holding public office and authorizes excommunication of noncomplying Gentile officials, an edict that is reissued over the centuries, AD 633.

Council of Nicea II requires Jews who fellowship with or join the Church first to reveal names of other Jews who openly or secretly follow Old Covenant practices. They are prohibited from observing the Sabbath or other biblical feasts. Baptized Messianic Jews must formally renounce and condemn all their traditional expressions of worship and then be watched to ensure “that they depart from Hebrew practices” (Canon 8), AD 787. *From this point on, Yeshua and the apostles would have been banned from the Church.*

Pope Gregory IX authorizes investigations against Messianic Jews allegedly embracing their Jewish roots, AD 1231.

Spain expels all Jews, including Messianic Jews, who do not renounce Judaism and all Old Covenant practices. Those who do not comply, including many Messianic Jews, are burned at the stake. Messianic Jews are forced to sign pledges that explicitly curse unbelieving Jews and must vow not to interact with them, AD 1492.

Congregation of the Holy Office tortures and burns at the stake Messianic Jews who follow Old Covenant practices, AD 1542.

Germany’s National Reich Church requires pastors to take oaths of allegiance to Hitler and expel from churches all Messianic Jews or Christians of Jewish descent, AD 1935.⁸

A historical review of the tender mercies and affections of Jesus Christ? No Messiah-loving Jew of integrity could have identified with this fellowship of scorn. Indeed, most Jews who joined the Church were in reality choosing forced conversion over death.

In an act of laudable reform, in 1965 the Roman Catholic Church officially repudiated the doctrines of divine contempt or disdain, as well as replacement theology. It also renounced an ancient and dangerous accusation against Israel called "deicide," the murder of God. Based specifically on the text of Romans 9:1–4, Catholics boldly reaffirmed Israel's ongoing covenant election.^{9 b}

Almost immediately thereafter, Jews started coming to faith in Yeshua in unprecedented numbers. They formed communities, established Messianic congregations, and launched outreaches to their people. During the 1990's, many evangelicals, charismatics and Pentecostals recognized Messianic Judaism as part of a broader, restorationist move of the Spirit.

In view of how God is restoring Messianic Jewish-Gentile Christian relationships, one evangelical leader wrote that the years ahead can be different from the past:

We can learn from the mistakes of the past and prevent history from repeating itself. . . . Our faithful prayers and righteous deeds must provide proof that we have recovered from our spiritual bankruptcy and now have more than enough of God's love to extend . . . to the Jews. . . . We can no longer afford to look the other way. Our Master just will not have it.¹⁰

Grafted into an Olive Tree

In recent years, more and more Gentile Christians around the world have begun embracing the Jewish roots of their faith. Many feel they are recouping lost spiritual treasure. Admittedly, there are some mistakes, imbalances and extremes, discussion of which is beyond the scope of this book. These growing pains, however, do not diminish the underlying reality the

Spirit seeks to restore.

The phrase "Jewish roots" derives from the olive tree metaphor of Romans 11:17–21. While we have already looked at select verses, the entire passage is eye opening:

If some of the [Jewish] branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.

When Paul penned his letter to the Romans, a horticultural practice in the ancient Middle East was to reinvigorate a cultivated olive tree that had stopped bearing fruit by grafting wild olive branches into it.¹¹ Often the fresh sap, or lifeblood, of the wild olive branches would revive the cultivated tree. The original branches could then begin to bear fruit again. The wild branches, formerly untended and unwieldy, would flourish because of the nourishing sap received from the roots. With both wild and cultivated branches intermingled, the whole tree yielded prized and plentiful fruit that was impossible to obtain any other way. Likewise, when Gentile branches grafted into a Jewish-rooted tree function as God intends, the fruit is spectacular.

I have seen gargantuan olive trees in Israel, some hundreds or perhaps thousands of years old. Their gnarly roots span maybe half a city block (nearly 100 meters), sturdily protruding

above ground and immovably entrenched. Breathtaking in appearance, they nevertheless grow knotty, wild and alone, bearing poor fruit compared with the carefully planted and tended olive groves dotting the land.

I can imagine the Divine Husbandman gently lopping off a few branches from one of these untamed specimens and hand carrying them to a failing tree. Next, He cuts off some of the natural, cultivated branches, protectively setting them aside for future use. I picture Him carefully linking the foreign branches to the host, bonding them with humility and love. Then He blesses the tree and waits. Will this transplant “take”?

Jewish roots support Gentile branches. Many of the original branches have been cut off (temporarily), and now engrafted branches are needed with their fresh vigor and vitality to save the tree. If it is ever to bear fruit again, the original tree must accommodate the transplant, freely sharing all the life it has left. Simultaneously, the wild branches must willingly receive what the root system offers. *The two must become one for their mutual survival.* God’s grafting agents, humility and love, make the miracle possible.

What if, however, things go wrong and grafted-in branches poison rather than preserve the life of the tree? I suppose the Master could stand idly by, watching sadly as the branches perish along with the tree they have choked. But that is not His nature. Rather than let the whole tree die, I imagine He will slice off and discard the foreign branches. Then He will try again—using other branches.

Theologians have different interpretations as to the root of the olive tree. Some say it refers to God Himself, or to Messiah Yeshua; some say the patriarchs; and others say the faithful remnant of Israel. Still others say the root of the tree is God’s Holy Word. I say, why not them all? If you are grafted into the

olive tree, God is your portion. He wants the words of the Scriptures spoken by the Jewish Messiah, patriarchs, prophets, and apostles to flow in you like nourishing sap. In the process, why not be blessed through fellowship with Messianic Jews?

New, Institutionalized Christian Antisemitism

For multitudes of believers bereft of their Jewish roots, the situation is different. Anti-Jewish theologies have helped spark smoldering embers of hate for the Jews into new, fiery forms of acceptable expression in the 21st century. The "new anti-semitism," as it is called, is directly tied to anti-Zionism, disdain or hate for Israel, or both. It is associated with support for violent Palestinianism. Accordingly, antisemitism has increased around the world at alarming rates¹² — with perpetrators consistently faulting Israel.

Israel is being blamed in our day for practically every imaginable injustice, real or perceived, from global wars and warming, to epidemic diseases and economic disasters, and much more. Fingers are pointed at Israel for being the villain, rather than victim, in the spread of Islamist terror and jihad. It is not an exaggeration to say that, among all nations, relentless castigation is reserved for Israel alone, with daily distorting of facts well beyond any fair sense of reasonableness.

Who, precisely, is this "Israel"? We might ask the thousands of European and American Jews who, in recent years, have been brutally beaten (some, to death); Jewish college students the world over subject to daily, violent harassment on campus; or the countless Jews on every inhabited continent whose synagogues, community centers, shops, homes and cemeteries

have been vandalized or singled out for mass shootings.^c I suspect they would agree the people of Israel are the sons and daughters of Jacob—the Jews—wherever they happen to be.

How has traditional, institutionalized Christianity responded to re-stoked flames of antisemitism, thinly disguised as anti-Israelism? The Roman Catholic Church is the world's largest Christian organization, with approximately 1.3 billion members. Technically, Roman Catholicism denounces antisemitism. At the same time, it says it does not endorse any theology or biblical basis for the existence of Israel. Its official policy is to abide by decisions of the international community, made under international law, concerning any right Israel may have to exist. The Church does not comment, however, on the fact the international community has consistently changed international law to accommodate its anti-Israel bias (see chapter 11).¹³

The World Council of Churches (WCC) is the largest Christian network on earth, consisting of approximately 350 denominations. Included are Baptist, Catholic, Lutheran, Orthodox, Pentecostal, Reformed, evangelical and other churches, representing 580 million Christians in over 120 nations.¹⁴ It has persistently advocated for a Jew-free Palestinian state, having concluded that Israel's presence in Judea and Samaria is “a sin against God.”¹⁵ While officially stating that antisemitism is wrong, the WCC has for decades distorted facts to denounce and demonize the Jewish state.¹⁶

Long before the United Nations declared in 2024 that Israel must withdraw from the West Bank, the WCC established two bodies, the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel, and the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum, for the singular purpose of ending so called “unjust Israeli occupation.”¹⁷ It has nothing similar, however, for ending the cold-

blooded terror by Palestinians against Israeli civilians, or the well-documented slaughter of Christians by Islamist states, including putative Palestine.¹⁸

In the United States, the National Council of Churches (NCC) is composed of over 30 million American believers in more than 100,000 Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox, Evangelical, Africa-American, and other denominational congregations. It calls itself "a leading voice of ecumenical witness to the living Christ to advocate God's love and promise of unity in our public square."¹⁹ The NCC has harshly and repeatedly condemned the Jewish state for her alleged treatment of Palestinians. But it does not explicitly denounce Palestinians for their ghoulish terror against Jews.²⁰ It pushes strenuously for a resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict based on land borders that would shrink Israel down to a size she could not possibly defend from military attack.²¹

The largest Canadian Protestant denomination, the United Church of Canada (UCC), has sanctioned Israel for many years by boycotting and divesting from the Jewish state. Not to be outdone by other Protestant groups, the UCC urges enforcement of egregiously biased and unjust rulings against Israel by the International Court of Justice and United Nations.²²

Countless other traditional denominations represent millions more Christians in North America and other Western nations. Consciously or unconsciously, most align against the Jewish state by advocating for policies that would neutralize Israel's capacity to defend against Palestinians and others sworn to its destruction. These streams of faith are usually associated with traditional Arab and Palestinian churches, all of which teach replacement or other supersessionist theologies.

Together, these churches have developed a new theological justification for what amounts to Christian antisemitism, based

on anti-Israelism (see chapter 12). They have formed organizations such as Churches for Middle East Peace, whose so-called peace initiatives all aim to create a sovereign Palestinian state. Problem is, they do not address the extensively documented Palestinian plan to annihilate Israel once that sovereign state is established.²³ Churches for Middle East Peace aims to divide Jerusalem into a capital city for Israel to share with a future Palestinian state bent on Israel's destruction.²⁴

At the core of Christian anti-Israel^d sentiment is usually a refusal to believe the Jewish state is an expression of God's everlasting, unconditional covenant. As a result, Israel is not regarded as a fulfillment of biblical prophecy or tangible reflection of His heart. As we have seen, these beliefs almost always stem from an anti-Hebraic hermeneutic of the Scriptures; misunderstanding of God's love, mercy and grace; personal offense at election; or, as the apostle Paul warned, ignorance fostering arrogance. Today's new supersessionism revives all of the above (see chapter 12). Therefore, the impact of theological positions and political policies advocated by most institutional churches of today would prove little or no different from overtly antisemitic church policies of the past.

But---thanks be to God for His remnant ekklesia embracing biblical truth!

An Alternative Christian Approach

Some clear-thinking Christian leaders of traditional, institutionalized denominations offer well-reasoned responses to the anti-Israel strategies of their peers. One example is the Protestant Consultation on Israel and the Middle East, an initiative that encourages an honest approach to both sides of the

Palestinian–Israeli conflict. The Consultation takes into account the enormity of injustice sustained by Israelis as well as Palestinians. Because it is not avowedly Christian Zionist, the organization can serve as a model for its peers. The Consultation firmly disavows new expressions of supersessionism, demonstrating love and support for Israelis, non-jihadi Palestinians and believers throughout the Middle East. Regarding the “peace strategies” of pro-Palestinian church organizations, it astutely notes:

Whether this effect is intended or not, such strategies lend encouragement to the forces that have vowed to destroy Israel— [Islamist] forces that launch rockets at Israeli civilians on a daily basis. We fear that this approach is not motivated by Christian love for anyone, but quite the opposite. We ask the zealous promoters of those strategies to examine their consciences in this matter.²⁵

In contrast to institutional or traditional denominations that embrace variants of anti-Israel supersessionism, other churches, organizations and individual believers are among Israel’s best friends. Many evangelical, charismatic and Pentecostal congregations and networks pray regularly and wholeheartedly for the Jewish state. Some are politically active and influential in their nations on her behalf. Still others extend love and support for Israel in a wide variety of other creative and practical ways.

Personally, I deeply appreciate every Christian who has sacrificed for the sake of friendship with Jewish people, Israel, or both. May their commitment to God’s heart and purposes unleash abundant blessing to them through eternity. May He be their “exceedingly great reward” (Genesis 15:1 NKJV) as they model the scriptural “fullness of the Gentiles.”

Of such believers who carry and convey God's passions for Israel, an Israeli Foreign Minister has said:

With Christians now reaching out to the Jewish people in genuine contrition and love, we are witnessing a remarkable phenomenon . . . that will, please God, usher in the final redemption of the Jewish people and of all humankind.²⁶

Final redemption is indeed coming. The Bible illustrates how ours can be the generation of Jesus' followers to pivot from the past and usher it in. Unveiling a last days' mystery, the serendipitous scroll of Ruth shows us how Spirit-filled relationships between Christians and Jews will prepare the way of our Redeemer's return.

"Your People Will Be My People"

The beautiful little book of Ruth is fundamentally and primarily a Spirit-breathed account of literal, historical events. But it is also an eye-opening, end times allegory of Israel and the Church, each blessing the other to the glory of God. In the timeless story, Naomi (meaning in Hebrew "Pleasant"), represents Israel, and Ruth ("Friend" or "Clinging One") represents faithful Gentile followers of Jesus.

When the book begins, Naomi is married with two sons. Due to a severe famine, she and her family leave Israel, seeking refuge and sustenance in Moab. There both sons marry, but not for long; they die within a few years. Naomi's husband dies, too. She is left penniless and alone, except for her Gentile daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth.

Eventually the famine in Israel ends and Naomi decides to go home. She urges Orpah and Ruth to stay behind, find new husbands and start new lives. Though at first reluctant, Orpah

departs, “going back to her people and her gods” (Ruth 1:15). But Ruth refuses. Instead she vows:

Where you go I will go, and wherever you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.

Ruth 1:16–17

Life has been so hard for Naomi that she is about to change her name from “Pleasant” to Mara (“Bitter”). Nonetheless—and this is where the story pops alive—Ruth clings to her. This Gentile, Arab believer in the God of Israel will not let go of her mother-in-law, however bitter she seems. Perhaps she knows she can go forward in God only by going forward with Naomi. It will cost her everything. But she decides life will be worth it.

Arm in arm, the two impecunious widows return to Israel. Providentially, they arrive back at harvest time, and are able to eat by gleaning leftover grain from the harvest of local crops. Ruth dutifully goes out to the fields, literally kneeling to enrich Naomi as she gleans. This sacrificial act blesses Naomi deeply. From then on, Ruth is no longer a daughter-in-law. Naomi calls her “my daughter.”

While she is gleaning, Ruth catches the admiring eye of a gentleman landowner named Boaz. He has heard of the young woman's love and commitment to Naomi, and his heart is smitten when he meets her. Unbeknown to Ruth, Boaz (a prophetic depiction of Messiah) is Naomi's near kinsman and potential redeemer. With Boaz on the scene, the hope of redemption comes into view.

Up until now in the story, Ruth has been the one kneeling to enrich, and thereby blessing, Naomi. But at this juncture eve-

rything shifts. The right of redemption through Boaz legally belongs to Naomi alone (see Deuteronomy 25:5). Despite all her good will and deeds, Ruth is merely a foreigner. Naomi, meanwhile, has every reason to regard this upstanding, wealthy man—much closer to her age than Ruth’s—as quite a good catch for herself.

But Naomi has been profoundly blessed by Ruth. Now it is her turn to humbly kneel to enrich her daughter. Stunningly and selflessly, Naomi pivots, yielding her fortunes to Ruth. She gives up her legal right of redemption and with it, any realistic hope for a better life. At this point she, representing Israel, is the one willing to sacrifice all.

Naomi details step-by-step for Ruth the protocol of redemption required of Ruth. Glamoured and perfumed, she is to approach Boaz in the middle of the night, then lie at his feet as he sleeps (see Ruth 3:4). Now, I suspect a virtuous woman like Ruth would have naturally thought, *Hey, I’ve gone along far enough with the whole “Israel thing,” but this is too much! I’m an Arab—and this isn’t how we do things in Moab!* But no; instead, she forthrightly complies.

Boaz responds to Ruth’s humbly bold gesture, eagerly claiming her as his bride. The Jews joyfully bless their marriage: “May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the family of Israel” (Ruth 4:11). Their blessing comes to pass; before long Boaz and Ruth have a baby named Obed.

Little Obed so thrills Naomi’s heart that she sheds her bitterness, together with the name “Mara.” Meanwhile, Ruth remains true to her vow to Naomi, clinging to her til the end. Through Ruth (representing the Gentile ekklesia) and the fruit of Ruth’s relationship with her redeemer, Naomi (representing Israel) is revived.

Over time, Obed fathers Jesse, who fathers David, king of Israel and progenitor of Jesus. Ruth is astoundingly blessed for her blessing of Naomi; she gains standing forever as a mother in Israel, in the direct lineage of Messiah.

Together Ruth and Naomi—Gentile and Jew, each blessing the other—prepared the way of the Lord’s first coming. So it will be, I am convinced, with His Second Coming. Yeshua’s return will be preceded by a remnant of Gentile believers who, in the spirit of Ruth, cling to the Jews til the end. They will so captivate the Lord’s heart that, like Boaz, He will come with passion---at harvest time---to claim His beloved Bride (see Revelation 22:17), redeeming Israel as well.

But first we must consider the incursion of Islam, which God may actually use to precipitate that resplendent day.

The Islamic Middle East and Antisemitism

God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all. Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

Romans 11:32–33

Fourteen hundred years ago, secluded in a cave in the Arabian Desert, a Meccan named Muhammad said he encountered the angel Gabriel. According to Islamic writings, Gabriel violently overpowered him, then commanded him to recite and record new holy verses, known as the Koran. Arab history documents that initially Muhammad, as well as some of his contemporaries, believed he had been demon possessed. Distraught, he attempted suicide but was stopped by a voice affirming his prophetic mission. Thus Islam was born.^{1 a}

The Koran claimed to replace the Bible,^b and so Muhammad's revelations were rebuffed by most Jews and Christians of his day. He did gain a wide following, however, among pagan

Arabs.² Under Muhammad's leadership, Islam spread sometimes peaceably, but at other times quite violently through terror.

Currently the fastest growing faith in the Western world, Islam claims over 90 percent of the Arab population.³ In 2013, nearly one fourth of people alive identified as Muslim.⁴ Demographers expect the global Muslim population to increase by approximately 35 percent by the year 2030.⁵

As with any religion, Islam has branched into divergent expressions, with varying interpretations of the Koran and other sacred texts.^c To be sure, most Muslims are not militant fundamentalists. But across the Middle East political realities are fueled by fundamentalist Islam.

In this chapter we will see how certain Islamist doctrines have inflamed much of the Arab world and set it on a collision course with Israel. As we do, please bear in mind that God loves even the most militant of Muslims. Many harbor deep personal pain, their lives commandeered by oppressive regimes. My purpose is not to demean or incite resentment toward human beings created in God's image but to lay informational groundwork for strategic prayer and responses to realities He wants to change—starting, perhaps, with ourselves.

A Christian Root of Islam?

Islam originated and rose to the fore during the so-called Dark Ages of history (late fifth through tenth centuries). This was a period shrouded in spiritual, with resulting political and cultural, darkness. The Church weakened, evangelism ebbed and the Gospel gained little ground. Christianity's bright light seemed to have grown dim.

Earlier we saw that not long before this sordid era, Christian leaders renounced their Old Covenant heritage, cutting off the Jewish roots of their faith. The doctrine of divine contempt or disdain led many to persecute and kill—in Jesus’ name—Jews who would not convert. Some Jewish historians are convinced Christians would have attempted to completely annihilate the Jewish people if their attention had not been diverted by the rising tide of Islam.⁶

Similar to how Christianity had lapsed into replacement theology, Islam adopted a type of replacement-of-replacement theology with a vengeance. First, the Church claimed to supersede Israel; next, Muslims asserted they superseded both Jews and Christians. A logical question therefore becomes: Could the Body of Christ have opened the door to the devil, so to speak, by ignoring the exhortation of Scripture not to be arrogant or ignorant toward Israel? Is it possible the Church sadly reaped for itself treatment by Islam similar to that which it had given the Jews? Could the Irrevocable principle of Genesis 12:3 possibly have come into play?

In the sixteenth century classic *Foxe’s Annals of Martyrs*, historian John Foxe paralleled persecution *by* the Church with persecution *of* the Church: “We fight against a persecutor, being no less persecutors ourselves. We wrestle against a bloody tyrant, and our hands be as full of blood as his.”⁷ Foxe attributed the rise of Islam to the infirm condition of the Church:⁸

Early in the seventh century a new enemy of Christianity arose. . . . The rapid success of this adventurer [Muhammad] must be classed among the mournful proofs furnished by that age of the decay into which practical Christianity had fallen. . . . It was, unquestionably, the abuses and infirmities of the Christian church that gave Muhammadanism room and leisure to mature its strength.⁹

As believers in Jesus today face revived fundamentalist Islam (in addition to persecution from secular, globalist forces), we must honestly search our hearts and purge ourselves of antisemitism. By God's grace we must learn from history so we will not have to repeat it.

Islamic Jesus and the End Times

Fundamentalist Islam in the 21st century is to a large extent apocalypse driven, with militantly messianic aspirations. But Islam's messiah is unequivocally not the Jesus of the Bible. According to the Koran, Jesus was a strictly human prophet who never died on a cross—and is definitely not God's Son.¹⁰ This is publicly declared in plain view from the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. A Koranic engraving on the ceiling of the Dome of the Rock reads, "Far be it from God to have a son. . . . It is not for God to beget a son."¹¹

Fundamental Islam teaches that Jesus was a human prophet who was supernaturally spared death, having been taken directly to heaven like Moses or Elijah. In the end times, he is expected to return—as a Muslim serving the Islamic messiah (*mahdi*). The *mahdi* appears during a period of violent global unrest. He demonstrates supernatural signs and wonders, promising peace, justice and righteousness. But to prepare for the *mahdi*'s coming, Muslims must first put into place an Islamic caliphate, or political empire adhering to totalitarian, Islamic religious law (*sharia*). The caliphate is to be established through holy wars (*jihad*). These bloody campaigns are aimed especially, but not exclusively, at Jews and Christians. In the process, Israel must be overrun and Jerusalem must be captured.

Fundamentalist Islam is obsessed with Jerusalem because

the city is to serve as Islamic holy headquarters. Now, the only time Muhammad ever entered Jerusalem was in his sleep, in a dream en route to heaven. But sacred texts assert the *mahdi* will rule from the Temple Mount, with Jesus helping him establish the Islamic kingdom of Allah. Jesus will accomplish this by abolishing Christianity, teaching *sharia* and slaughtering Jews who refuse to convert. Then Jesus will marry, father several children and die.¹² But that's not all.

Muslims expect two Jesuses to return. The personality described above (an imposter by biblical standards) will appear first. The second Jesus (the biblical Messiah) claims to be both a Jewish man and divine. He defends Israel in a major military operation against the *mahdi* and his hordes. Islamic texts describe this second Jesus as the Antichrist (*dajjal*) who gets defeated by Allah's forces.¹³

As you can see, Islamic eschatology presents an inverse parallel or mirror image of the end times outlined in Scripture.¹⁴ The *mahdi* (Islamic messiah) would fit the role of the Antichrist in the Bible. The Islamic Jesus would represent the Antichrist's false prophet (see Revelation 16:13; 19:20; 20:10). Islam's *dajjal* appears to describe the true Messiah (except for His alleged defeat by Allah). Because fundamentalist Islam presents such a strikingly opposite view of the end times described in the Bible, explicitly denying that Jesus is God's Son, some Christians say it will be part of the religious system of the Antichrist (see 1 John 4:3).

Who Is Allah and What Does He Want?

Since Muslims are monotheists and there is but one true God, could it be they actually do worship Him? Bear in mind that

Allah is the only word in Arabic meaning “God,” and Arab Christians use the name with reverence specifically for Yahweh. But by all accounts, the Islamist Allah does not resemble the divine personality of the Creator portrayed in Scripture.¹⁵ The nature and attributes of the two differ dramatically. Moved by the power of love, Father God offers the sacrifice of His Son on our behalf. In contrast, moved by the love of power, Allah orders the sacrifice of his followers’ sons on his own behalf.

Islam means “submission,” and Allah requires submission to him willingly, forcibly or by the torturous killing of those who refuse. This submission is said to be universally applicable to everyone on earth. As “people of the Book,” Christians and Jews who do not convert are sometimes allowed to live as persecuted second class citizens if they submit to *sharia* law and pay an exorbitant tax.

The Islamist’s highest duty is *jihad* and his ultimate reward, martyrdom. Jihad is not an option; it is a compelling sacrament. It is not, as some say, fundamentally limited to inner striving toward personal growth. Islamists must strive for outward, global domination at all times, not wait idly for the *mahdi* and Islamic (false) Jesus to achieve it for them.¹⁶ Recall that the establishment of an Islamic caliphate is a prerequisite for the arrival of both.

Despite claims by some to the contrary, fundamentalist Islam is not a recently invented reality to oppose the Jewish state. Muhammad himself instigated *jihad* against pagans, Christians and Jews from Africa to India and China, and up into Spain.^d Under his orders, Muslim warriors savagely slaughtered masses of believers, overrunning churches and converting them into mosques.¹⁷

Muhammad’s mandate to conquer the whole world and compel submission to *sharia* law has never been relinquished.

According to Mark Gabriel, an author on Islam, the Koran contains 114 verses about love, forgiveness and peace. All are abrogated, however, by “The Verse of the Sword,” penned later in Muhammad’s life: “Find and slay the pagans wherever you find them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them, in every stratagem of war; but if they repent [convert to Islam] . . . open up a way for them.”¹⁸

Moderate Muslims interpret the Koran more liberally, just as some Christians interpret the Bible more liberally. Most moderate Muslims are peaceful, upright citizens of goodwill. I know some personally, enjoy their friendship and admire their dedication to principled ethics and family values. They have little predilection for their radical co-religionists. But the moderates hold small sway in the overall Islamic world. The agenda of fundamentalist Islam includes overtaking and eventually forcing them to conform to extremism, too. Some moderates know this and are openly concerned; many cope by denying it; others are simply unaware. Most recognize, however, that they can rarely trust what the fundamentalists say or do.

Islam and the Truth

Sadly, Islamic sacred texts are replete with perversions of biblical truth, many of which target the Jews. The Koran teaches, for instance, that the Jewish authors of Scripture intentionally distorted both Old and New Testaments for their own selfish interests. Abraham—like Adam and Eve—is said to have really been a Muslim, and Ishmael, his rightful covenant heir. From Genesis through the New Covenant, the Jews are accused of falsifying the whole canon of Scripture—in a demonic attempt to supersede Islam!^e

With major distortions of biblical truth embedded in the Koran and related sacred texts, an element of dishonesty inevitably permeates the Islamist world. Truth does not—and cannot—carry the same value as it does in Judeo-Christian culture. *The impact of fundamentalist Islam's disposition toward dishonesty cannot be overstated.* It dramatically affects what is represented, and what you and I hear and see, about the Palestinian conflict with the Jewish state.

The fundamentalist doctrine of *taqiya* mandates lying in order to preserve Islamist goals.^{19 f} According to *taqiya*, facts may be distorted, outlandishly embellished, dismissed altogether or completely concocted. *Taqiya* explains why some Islamist leaders openly insist (in Arabic) that no matter what happens regarding a sovereign Palestinian state, Israel must be destroyed—and within days, when speaking to Western officials, those same leaders say that peace with Israel will result as soon as a sovereign Palestinian state exists. Generally, what is communicated in Arabic within Islam about Israel differs greatly from what is communicated in English or other languages for Western consumption.^g

Truthful and insightful perspectives of Islam can often be gleaned from former Muslims, some of whom now love and follow Jesus. Living in the West where they can speak more freely, they consistently describe fundamentalist Islam as highly non-peaceful, with deceptive and terrorizing aspirations for global, political-religious domination. These courageous spokespeople repeatedly warn about Islam's insidious infiltration into Western democracies, including the US, to cause their collapse.²⁰ Most are also vocal defenders of the Jewish state. While portrayed by liberal institutions as lunatics or Islamophobes, they are usually faced with death warrants from Islamist leaders abroad. I believe they deserve and need our blessing and support—as do our

Christian brothers and sisters still living in the highly tumultuous Middle East.

Islam Awakening

In 2010, Muslims across North Africa and the Middle East began rebelling against longstanding, dictatorial regimes. Much of the world reacted with optimism, hoping democratic freedoms would finally transform this oppressed region. In reality, however, most of the revolutions were hijacked by well-organized Islamist parties with radical agendas and ideologies.

What the West did not understand is that Islamist groups boast automatic advantages in any free election in the Arab Middle East. They have long held sway over the majority through the mosque and the media. Savvy and well networked, some waited for decades to step into political power vacuums.

Barring the miraculous—which we should never bar—most Middle East governments will likely replace superficial democratic reform with *sharia* law. This is because Western-style elections are part of a distinctly Western political system and culture, rooted in Judeo-Christian values, which has little relevance to the Arab Muslim world.²¹ Very sadly, innocent, common people will suffer the most.

Dr. Zuhdi Jasser is a well-known authority on Islam and human rights. He is a former US naval officer and founder-president of the respectable American Islamic Forum for Democracy. Jasser, himself a moderate Muslim, cautions that “those who say democracy and political Islam can peacefully coexist are ill-informed.”²²

As Islamic states pivot from one form of terror driven dictatorship to another, the more powerful regimes will compete

for hegemony across the entire Middle East. They make no secret of their goal to resurrect the Islamic caliphate—but this time they anticipate forcibly inaugurating, through brutal *ji-had*, a cataclysmic end times scenario along with it. Expect to see Iran and Turkey, possibly aligned with Russia or China, contending at the forefront. As we look briefly at Middle East nations below, pray with me that God’s light will shine through even the darkest Islamic veil.

Iran

Iran, known in the Bible as Elam or Persia, has a rich and varied history. In the book of Daniel, we read about the archangel Michael wrestling tenaciously more than once against the “prince of Persia” (Daniel 10:13, 20). This dark prince is a spirit of high-ranking authority. He tries hard to keep Michael from delivering prophetic revelation about the end times—in which Iran may play a key, warring role.

Persia became the birthplace of revived fundamentalist Islam in 1979 when the Ayatollah Khomeini announced the formal resumption of Allah’s rule. His declaration carried spiritual authority to stoke centuries-old smoldering flames. Iran quickly converted into a police state run on ghoulish cruelty. Terror metastasized from that country throughout the Middle East and around the world. Since 1979, Iranian oil revenues have spawned, funded, amply armed and networked militant proxy groups like Hezbollah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad and more.

Demonizing not just the Jewish state but Jewish people everywhere,ⁱ Iran vociferously broadcasts that Israel must be wiped off the map. Fearing a second Holocaust,^j Israel takes

the threat seriously in view of the country's rogue nuclear program. The Jewish state has no choice but to prepare for a preemptive, defensive military strike against an Iran.^k On the one side, Israel knows such a strike could spark a long dreaded, regional war. On the other side, if Iran delivers but one nuclear warhead to her first, there may be no Israel.

Along with its nuclear program, Iran openly seeks to establish a totalitarian caliphate throughout the Middle East, then inaugurate, as it declared in 2012, a “new world order.”²³ In the new order, America is neutralized and the *mahdi* comes to power. To garner support for its scheme, Iran sponsored an international summit in 2012 in Tehran. A surprising two thirds of the world's nations attended the conference.^l

Prophetic scriptures indicate Yahweh will “set [His] throne in Elam,” bring disaster against it, break its military might and disperse its people. But in the end—consummately, after the Second Coming—He graciously restores the nation (see Jeremiah 49:34–39).

Meanwhile, missionary organizations report that a groundswell of Iranians are coming to faith in Jesus. Pray for this fast growing, underground revival to increase and even shift the spiritual climate of that nation.

Syria and Lebanon

Aligned closely with Iran, Syria is a highly strategic nation in the Middle East. At this writing, a horrific civil war wages in Syria in which multitudes of civilians have been brutally killed or forced to flee the country. With its government in disarray, Syria harbors huge stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction, compliments of Iran. Some of these have already been un-

leashed against her own people. Many are in the hands of Iranian-backed forces and other militant groups competing for power and threatening to fire their lethal caches into Israel. Most likely, Israel will attempt to neutralize many of these WMDs. Biblical references to Syria pertain mostly to its capital city, Damascus, for which devastating judgment is prophesied—and our intercession needed.

Lebanon, for which we are also called to pray, has long served as a proxy state for both Syria and Iran. This once beautiful Christian country fell years ago to the democratically elected leadership of the terrorist group Hezbollah. In 2012, Lebanon contained most of the 200,000 missiles in the Middle East that were positioned and ready to fire against Israel.²⁴ Every tenth house in the country was serving as a weapons depot,²⁵ with the nation poised for war. Yet a remnant of faithful followers of Jesus remains in Lebanon, praying earnestly for her salvation.

Egypt

In 1979, Egypt and Israel entered into a historic peace treaty. Egypt recognized Israel's right to exist and in return, Israel gave Egypt over half its land mass, the Sinai Peninsula.^m A cold peace between the two has existed ever since. While most Egyptian leaders have recognized the advantages of peace with Israel, the people of that country remain fervidly anti-Jewish and anti-Israel.

The fragility of Egypt's government was exposed when, soon after its Arab Spring revolt, the extremist Muslim Brotherhood Party came into power. At this writing, the Brotherhood aims in no uncertain terms to end the peace with Israel.²⁶ It has been

obsessed with antisemitism, often monstrously so, since its inception.²⁷

Immediately after a Muslim Brotherhood candidate was elected president of Egypt in 2012, party leaders held huge rallies openly declaring *jihad* on Israel and calling for the conquest of Jerusalem.ⁿ One of its highest-ranking clerics decreed: “We can see how the dream of the Islamic caliphate is being realized by [President] Morsi.” Morsi replied that martyrdom operations would bring it about.²⁸ Shortly thereafter, he prayed publicly for the annihilation of Israel as a Jewish state.²⁹ o p

Because the Brotherhood has not been able to act directly on its ideology, it created Hamas, a terror group whose existence is dedicated to Israel’s demise. Hamas is currently the elected government of Palestinians living in Gaza. Aligned with Iran, Hamas is actively warring against Israel (with occasional cease-fires) and aggressively aiming to gain control of the West Bank.

The Muslim Brotherhood is not likely to hold on long to formal governmental power. It seems God has other plans for the people of Egypt. The prophet Isaiah portrays a final, beautiful future for that nation, consummately fulfilled in the Messianic Age, with God declaring, “Blessed be Egypt My people.” An altar to Him will be established there, connected to Israel and other nations across the Middle East (see Isaiah 19:19-25). Already we see a remnant of Egyptian believers worshiping God in Spirit and truth, together with Israeli Messianic Jews, the beginning of a glorious and new highway of holiness.

Iraq

The same Scripture that prophesies blessing for Egypt also de-

scribes God’s gracious touch on the land of Assyria, “My handiwork.” Today, much of Assyria is known as Iraq. Ur of the Chaldees, where God first spoke to Abraham, was located in what is now Iraq. Also situated in Iraq is the ancient city of Babylon (meaning “gateway of the gods”).

Babylon was grisly ground to a host of polytheistic rites and rituals in the ancient world. Former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein rose to power as a self-declared reincarnate of Babylon’s King Nebuchadnezzar, openly drawing on its spiritual past. At his direction, the city’s ruins were excavated and restored—along with demonic hosts associated with them.

After Saddam Hussein, an Islamist government was brought to power in Iraq through democratic elections. Though some personal freedoms exist, Iraqi law cannot be inconsistent with *sharia* law. The country is very unstable and life there is quite difficult. But as with other nations in the Middle East, a remnant of dedicated followers of Jesus remains in Iraq, praying for its salvation and redemptive destiny.

Turkey and Other Middle East Nations

Turkey is not technically in the Middle East and its people are not Arabs; they are Turks. But the Turkish nation served for hundreds of years as premier power of the Ottoman Empire, encompassing most of the Middle East (see chapter 10). The nation remains a regional linchpin to this day. Turkey has never relinquished the ideal of resuming its position as head of a future, pan-Islamic empire in which a Jewish state no longer exists. Some believe that end time prophecies indicate Turkey will regain formidable power, then spearhead a calamitous war against Israel.³⁰

Other nations in the Middle East are rumbling with threatened revolution. Among them is Jordan. Jordan shares a border with Israel and many years ago, the two entered into a peace treaty. Rabidly antisemitic Islamist groups seek to overthrow Jordan, however, and terminate that peace.

At this writing, Saudi Arabia and other Arab Peninsula states are relatively stable. In the future, some could pivot and align with outside conservative forces. But in the Middle East, alliances can often be shaky. As the whole region roils, please join me in petitioning heaven for the salvation of multitudes and for the protection of God's people.

Over time and as imperialist nations—particularly Turkey and Iran—contend for regional hegemony, the map of the Middle East could change. But one thing is certain: To the extent fundamentalist Islam rages in the region, Israel will remain a target, no matter what she does or how many concessions she offers for peace. Hate for the Jews is embedded into fundamental Islam, beginning with the Koran. It forms an essential tenet of the ideology espoused by every Islamist state.

Islam and the Jews

The Koran alleges, as we have seen, that the Bible's Jewish authors intentionally falsified the Scriptures. It also teaches that Allah despises and cursed the Jews, actually turning some into apes and pigs.³¹ Accordingly, Muhammad ordered the wholesale slaughter of unarmed Jewish villages that existed in his day.³²

An integral supplement to the Koran, the *Hadith*, instructs the apocalyptic Day of Judgment cannot come until Muslims fight and vanquish the Jews.³³ At that time Jews will attempt to

hide, but even trees and rocks will cry out, "O Muslim, there is a Jew behind me; come and kill him."³⁴

Through the centuries, fundamental Islam has depicted the Jewish people as its greatest enemy. It has generated furiously antisemitic rhetoric predating modern Israel by over 1,300 years. A popular author on Islam writes:

Sacred Islamic traditions of a final slaughter of all Jews cannot be attributed to the present-day conflict with the State of Israel. Although many today try to blame Muslim enmity toward Jews solely on Zionism and its alleged . . . abuse of the victimized and oppressed Palestinians, it simply cannot be done in an honest and informed manner. The enmity of Islam toward the Jews has existed since Islam's inception.³⁵

Much of the world outside the Arab Middle East has been led to think that Islamic hate for Israel is the result of Israel's reluctance to create a Palestinian state. It is not. Islamic hate for Israel has been, however, the principal *cause* of that reluctance. Among themselves, Islamists admit (in Arabic) that their rage against Israel has little to do with anything she does, but rather with the fact she exists:

They [the Jews] are enemies not because they occupied Palestine; they would have been enemies even if they did not occupy a thing. . . . We must believe that our fighting with the Jews is eternal, and it will not end until the final battle. . . . O Allah, bring your wrath, punishment, and torment down upon them.³⁶

Islamic Holy Land?

Besides the intrinsic theological hate, fundamental Islam cannot end its conflict with Israel because, according to its holy

texts, any land that was ever conquered for Allah must be recouped. If it is not, his name is besmirched and his conquest of the world delayed.

For 1,300 years, Israeli lands were under foreign Muslim rule. To be sure, a sizeable Jewish population has lived in Israel continuously since biblical times. The Jews never voluntarily relinquished claim to their land, and Palestine never existed as a sovereign Arab domain. Nevertheless, Israel—every inch of it—absolutely must, in Islamist thought, be re-subjugated to Allah’s rule.

Reclaiming Jerusalem is a central goal. Although Jerusalem is the least referenced of all holy cities in the Koran, it is the presumed locale for the *mahdi*’s coming rule and reign on the Temple Mount. To prepare for his arrival, Jerusalem must be recaptured from the Jews and “restored” to Islamist control.

Radical religion is the primary, but not sole reason, for Islamic hostility toward the Jewish state. Because of her historic alliance with the West, Israel is perceived as an insulting, imperial or colonial outpost of Western civilization. Few Westerners realize that Israel’s friendship with them exacerbates Islamist fury against her. Even fewer realize that, positioned on the frontlines, Israel is fighting pivotal battles against fundamentalist Islam for all of Western civilization.

Inciting Hate for Israel

Through most of the Arab world, Islamist ideology pervades secular thought; there is virtually no separation.⁹ Hate-inciting sermons about Israel and the Jews are preached daily in mosques and muezzins, aired by radio and television stations and blasted through cyberspace.⁷ Multiple generations of Mus-

lims have been raised on state-sponsored, barbarously antisemitic literature and propaganda. Nazi materials have long been mainstays in schools, stores, the media and political institutions across the Middle East.⁵ Most everywhere in the region, Jews are portrayed as subhuman and evil, deserving of death.

Sometimes the hate is so absurd that one does not know whether to laugh or cry. Hapless Saudis have been warned in the daily news of Zionists on the prowl for Gentile blood with which to bake kosher delicacies.³⁷ Not long ago, Egyptian jurists planned to sue Israel to recover the value, including over three thousand years' interest, of everything "stolen" the night of the exodus.[†] Turkey has accused Israel of spying on her through seasonally migrating fish and birds.[‡] The list goes on and on.

How has the incitement impacted the Palestinian-Israeli conflict? The Palestinian Authority has squandered exorbitant sums of international aid to systematically indoctrinate its entire population, since early childhood, with egregious lies about Israel. School textbooks in subjects from history and science to grammar and math (using word problems) instruct students about the "cursed, oppressive Zionist regime."[‡] Kindergartners are trained to conduct terror operations and to welcome death in doing so.[‡] Children's camps, art and poetry contests, scouting programs and more, all focus on inciting hate for Israel and encouraging martyrdom for the sake of killing Jews.[‡] State run television programs for toddlers use Disney and Sesame Street characters to promote *jihad*.[‡]

As Palestinians move to establish a sovereign state, the anti-Israel frenzy saturates their society at seemingly every level.[‡] Public, supposedly secular events are peppered with reminders such as this: "Our war with the descendants of the apes and pigs is a war of religion and faith."³⁸ Suicide bombers are honored as new stadiums, tournaments, town squares,

schools and other building projects, funded by the West, are regularly named after them.^{aa} A salary is paid to any Palestinian imprisoned for acts of terror committed against Israel.^{bb} Publicly blasted—and internationally funded—sermons such as these inspire the murder of Jews:

Allah willing, this unjust state will be erased—Israel will be erased. . . . Blessings to whoever put a belt of explosives on his body or on his sons' and plunged into the midst of the Jews crying, "Allah akbar [Allah is great.] There is no God but Allah and Muhammed is His messenger."³⁹

The [resurrection] hour will not come until you fight the Jews. The Jews will hide behind stones or trees. Then the stones will call: "O Muslim, servant of Allah, there is a Jew behind me; come and kill him."⁴⁰

Subject to a relentless onslaught of lies, multiplied millions of people have become consumed with a demonic loathing of Israel. Meanwhile, because the propaganda campaign takes place in Arabic, it is ignored by much of the non-Islamic world.^{cc} Instead, the hate is spread to the West in a more culturally palatable package. To appeal to Western ideals of freedom and justice, a conflict based fundamentally on murderously antisemitic ideology is reinvented as rooted in social injustice.

But the reinvention turns the truth upside down. Social injustice did not *cause* the conflict; it has resulted *from* the conflict. Islamist/Palestinian hate and theology have brought about facts and realities that are genuinely unjust—for both Palestinians and Israelis. Our challenge is to forthrightly ascertain those facts and realities, then assess what we can do to change them. The remainder of this book aims to guide us, by God's grace, in that task.

To God Be the Glory

As nations rage against Israel, let us remember that Yahweh has the whole matter in hand. The apostle Paul concludes his grand sermon on Israel with a resplendent doxology—one that can help steer us in faith through difficult, perplexing times. He explains that Israel’s calling, her election and even her troubles culminate in God’s incomparable glory. The Spirit catapults the apostle, and us, into sweeping adoration of the Almighty. None but He could mastermind this dazzling display of redemption, this triumph of mercy and grace:

God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all. Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! . . . To him be the glory forever! Amen.

Romans 11:32–33, 36

Our spirits soar as we peer into the telescopic lens of God’s ways. The picture is bigger than Israel or her conflict with extremist Islam; it is bigger than the Church. The picture displays God’s sovereign splendor, forever.

The Jewish people and their story or, more accurately, their role in His story, are all about *Him*. How important then, as we see next, to get the story straight—and understand what is at stake if we don’t.

Discerning Truth about Israel Today

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what Is God's will---His good, pleasing and perfect will.

Romans 12:2-3

It Is my hope and prayer that as we have looked at God's Word and will for Israel and the Church, you have worshiped along with me--and the apostle Paul---at the splendor of His ways. Next, as we transition into Romans Chapter 12, Paul tells us what to do with the information he has just unpacked. We are not to conform to the pattern of this world; we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. For that we must know truth.

To know the truth about a given situation, we must usually be equipped with the facts. But discerning fact from fiction is not always easy. Concerning Israel, it can prove a daunting task. Every form of media imaginable communicates something, every day, about the Jewish state and its contention with

the world. Often the narratives conflict and the complexities confuse. Many find it difficult to assess how reliable the seemingly boundless barrage of data can be. As a result, they may be misguided—or flatly manipulated—by raw emotion having little to do with facts or truth. They may believe whatever narrative of the conflict stirs the most sympathy, even if it happens to be fake. Allow me to share from personal experience.

World Pattern: The Media

My first visit to a Palestinian refugee camp was in 1982, but is still relevant today. From all the dreadful news reports even back then, I braced myself for the worst: row upon row of flimsily strung tents surrounded by piles of filth, men and women clothed in rags and crying children with runny noses and distended bellies. But that was not what I saw.

The camps I visited were neighborhoods with homes quite decently built by Middle East standards of the day. The streets were calm. Women strolled casually about, groceries and other goods balanced on top of their heads. Men sat and sipped coffee together in the doorways of their shops. Palestinian children were off the streets and in school. Young Israeli soldiers leaned lazily at their posts, puffing cigarettes. Now and then a dog barked or a goat bleated.

I was more than a bit befuddled. The scene, while far from idyllic, hardly reflected the abject squalor and oppression widely reported by the media. Admittedly, I viewed only two camps, and neither would qualify for anyone's list of residential best picks. Nevertheless, the refugees' condition looked nothing like the deplorable imprisonment I had been led to expect.^a Later, I learned that Palestinians had experienced rapid

and broad based improvements in their standard of living shortly after the Israelis began “oppressively occupying” them.^b

Media distortions about the Palestinian–Israeli conflict have exponentially worsened since that visit decades ago. A recent trip to the Palestinian West Bank left me dazzled and practically stunned. I saw palatial homes, one after another, several times larger than my own. Businesses were thriving. Large-scale ministry organizations operated in beautifully designed buildings, equipped with sleek appliances and updated technology. Funded by European NGO’s, illegal settlements for Palestinians (not Israelis) were in the process of construction.

I do not deny that poverty exists among Palestinians. I do, however, suggest there is another side to the West Bank story—and that it is rarely told.^c

To gain a sense of the distortion of truth about Israel in today’s public discourse, please look with me at three internationally publicized incidents. Some of the events I describe took place years ago. Sadly, they reflect and typify countless others still regularly occurring. I was in Israel when each of the incidents erupted, accessing reliable sources of information in order to corroborate them. As you read, I think you will discover the highly nuanced nature of today’s war on truth.

Justice in Jenin

During Passover 2002, in the city of Netanya, a Palestinian terrorist walked into a hotel filled with guests celebrating the biblical feast. Without warning, he detonated a suitcase full of explosives. Instantly, thirty Israelis were blown to bits; 143 more were seriously injured in the grisly horror.¹ Similar attacks had been

carried out, murdering and maiming civilians, on an almost weekly basis across the country for over a year.^d Restaurants, shops, buses, schools, public squares—no place was safe. Israel pleaded for help, but the world paid little heed until she was forced to take action on her own.

Days after the Passover massacre, to curtail the relentless slaughter, the Israeli army advanced into the West Bank refugee camp of Jenin. The sole purpose of the incursion was to weed out and dismantle Jenin's *known* terror nests. Each day I watched the newscasts on TV, read the papers and talked with the locals, including army reservists. Clearly this operation, called Defensive Shield, was defensive in nature. It was a necessary response to the deadliest terror wave the country had experienced. Just as clearly, the war had been started not by the Israelis but by the Palestinians in their so-called Second Intifada.

Defensive Shield was a military operation of very limited proportions. Soldiers I knew serving in Jenin told me the army undertook extreme, even heroic, measures to curtail casualties in the very difficult setting of house-to-house combat. So I was perplexed at charges of wide-scale, Holocaust-like genocidal atrocities that quickly beamed via satellite across the globe and landed in UN chambers. How had such a distortion, indeed serpentine tale, hatched?

The Palestinian Authority (PA) Minister of Local Government, I learned, had given this summation to news reporters: "The Jenin refugee camp is no longer in existence; [it is] totally destroyed."² Other PA officials decried a brutal massacre of five hundred innocents, their bodies buried under the rubble by Israeli bulldozers.³ Fuming at Israel, the international media did not bother to investigate facts before releasing the story. The London news reported, "We are talking here of a massacre

and cover-up of genocide” that was “every bit as repellent” as Osama bin Laden’s in New York in September 2001.⁴ The world was outraged; the UN launched an investigation.

What was the truth? In sharp contrast to Palestinian allegations, UN investigators—who were decidedly not pro-Israel—could find no evidence of any massacre in Jenin.⁵ The only affected area was the terror nest itself—which amounted to just 10 percent of the camp. Ninety percent of Jenin had been left practically intact. Not 500, but 52 Palestinians were killed, most of whom were terrorists.⁶ Palestinian News Agency reports about “mass graves” heaped under rubble and bulldozed to conceal the “Zionist massacre”⁷ could never be substantiated. Months later, Israel unearthed and publicly released Palestinian documents confirming the trumped-up nature of the charges.⁸

The truth is the PA had deliberately lied. Recall the Islamist justification for dishonesty called *taqiya*. *Taqiya* affects much of what you—and the international community—hear and see about Israel today.

Eventually it was discovered that much of the property damage and death toll in Jenin had been intentionally caused by the Palestinians themselves. They had planted bombs and booby traps inside civilian homes, buildings⁹ and even ambulances to maximize bloodshed, which could then be blamed on Israel. (Such tactics occur even more often today.) In reality, the Israelis had taken extraordinary precautions at great risk to themselves, tediously searching whole neighborhoods house by house to avoid unnecessary civilian deaths.

Captured Jenin-based terrorist Thabet Mardawi told CNN news reporters the Palestinians had expected Israel to attack with planes and tanks. They were elated when instead the Jews exposed themselves to harm on the ground. Said Mardawi:

I couldn't believe it when I saw the soldiers. The Israelis knew that any soldier who went into the camp like that was going to get killed. Shooting at these men as they walked cautiously down the street was like hunting . . . like being given a prize. . . . I'd been waiting for a moment like that for years.⁹

While the UN exonerated Israel of the massacre charge, by the time it released its report, few folks were listening. Instead, they were busy watching the movie. An Arab filmmaker put together a purported documentary called *Jenin, Jenin*, based on scenarios proven false, which went on to win prestigious international awards.¹⁰ Besides, other accusations against the Zionists were competing for global attention. Devilish damage to Israel's reputation having been done, more and more people grew angrier and angrier at the suspect Jewish state. Some may think 2002 was a long time ago and things have changed. *They have not*. Precisely for that reason, we have detailed the juggernaut of Jenin—and turn now to lies growing in Gaza.

Gaza Grown Lies

In 2005, Israel unilaterally withdrew its presence from Gaza, painfully uprooting all Jewish communities and ending any occupation of the area. This unprecedented gesture toward peace was met with a nightmarish barrage of rockets and missiles that, at this writing, has not ended. By 2013, Palestinians in Gaza had launched approximately 12,000 projectiles into the Jewish state.¹¹ ^f The attacks reached a peak in late 2008, when they escalated to dozens each day for over a week. Israel pleaded to the UN for help, but (again) to no avail. When more than sixty rockets and mortars hit civilian population centers on a single day,¹² Israel was compelled to commence

Operation Cast Lead. The sole purpose of the operation, as in Jenin, was to defensively dismantle terror nests and neutralize munitions supplies.⁸

Immediately, Palestinians charged Israel with all manner of macabre crimes against humanity in the course of the operation, including the deliberate killing of babies. The UN quickly investigated, but interviewed only Palestinians—not Israelis. Consequently, its final report condemned Israel harshly.¹³ But that was just the beginning.

Months later, the UN's lead investigator publicly recanted key findings in the report. He admitted that his conclusions were wrongly based on insufficient evidence and biased testimony. Only after the formal inquiry closed, he said, did he acquire evidence that Israel had never targeted civilians, particularly not babies.¹⁴ He confessed the number of Gazans killed had been far lower than claimed, and mostly limited to militants. He noted that Israel had dedicated significant resources to investigate, on its own initiative, allegations of misconduct in Gaza. He praised the Jewish state for quickly implementing policy changes to limit future collateral casualties.¹⁵

As is typical, however, practically nobody listened—though there would be other opportunities in other wars with Gaza. The UN report had worsened the damage to Israel's reputation to the extent that most folks did not care to be bothered with the facts. Too many new, false claims against the Jewish state were already filling the air waves and flying through cyberspace. As a result, in 2010, anti-Israel activists joined together with militants to launch a naval flotilla into Israeli waters. Sadly, few suspected what was really afloat.

Facts on Flotillas

By 2010, Palestinians were complaining of a humanitarian crisis in Gaza due to the “oppressive occupation”—even though Israel had had no physical or occupational presence in Gaza for five years. Israel was, however, delivering over 100 truckloads of aid to Gaza each day. This took place despite the fact Gaza was (and is) governed by Hamas, which explicitly declares in its charter its intent to destroy the Jewish state.¹⁶

Notably, by mid-2012, Israel facilitated the shipment into Gaza of 250 truckloads of humanitarian aid per day, or 40,000 tons weekly.^{17 h} Concurrently, upscale neighborhoods and hotels, shopping malls, theme parks, beach resorts and entertainment centers sprang up in the area. In 2011, the Red Cross had determined the humanitarian crisis in Gaza was over.^{18 i} This happened after impoverished Palestinians, along with some Western leaders, exposed how Hamas had been artificially maintaining the crisis as a propaganda tool against Israel.^j But that (again) is just the beginning.

Humanitarian crisis or not, a fleet of nautical vessels launched by Turkish and other anti-Israel activists set sail for Gaza in 2010. The flotilla’s stated purpose was to peacefully deliver humanitarian aid to needy civilians suffering from the occupation. Israel countered that any humanitarian crisis was due to extreme mismanagement by Gaza’s own government. The real reason for the flotilla, Israel said, was to defy its lawful and necessary maritime blockade. (The blockade was in place to prevent the extensively documented, ongoing smuggling into Gaza of materials used to build terror weapons for murdering Israeli civilians.) If the peace activists wanted to deliver aid, Israel invited them to do so via truck.

As matters turned out, most of the flotilla participants respected the blockade and turned their vessels around. The aid they brought was inspected and trucked into Gaza, under the watchful eyes of international observers. But on one vessel, the *Mavi Marmara*, the situation turned deadly.

When the *Mavi Marmara* did not respond to repeated warnings to retreat, a single Israeli soldier tried to peacefully board and commandeer it. Expecting to encounter nonviolent social activists, he was armed with only a small hand pistol. But as live video footage showed, the so-called peace activists responded by overpowering him with a cache of knives, metal bars and guns. Just as they tried to throw his pummeled body overboard, Israeli backup troops arrived. The fighting escalated. Nine militant "peace activists"—eight of whom had ties to recognized terror organizations—were killed.

Within minutes the world learned of the event, and by day's end, nations seethed with fury against the Jewish state. Another international investigation took place. The UN's formal report^k concluded that flotilla activists and militants had illegally breached Israel's legitimate maritime border and blockade. Naval officers who boarded the *Mavi Marmara* had rightfully defended themselves. But no Israeli had died in the skirmish. So the UN determined the Jewish state must have used excessive force.

Now, to ascertain excessive or disproportionate force, UN standards focus almost exclusively on the relative number of combatants killed. But by this measure, the UN would have also condemned Israel for using excessive force in the exodus, where Pharaoh's army drowned in the Red Sea while not one Jew perished (or physically fought). A more updated, accurate and fair determinant of excessive force would consider the extent of force needed to prevent or defend against imminent

assault by the other side.

With this widely publicized accusation of excessive force, frenzied lies about the Jewish state—and Jewish people—exploded at new levels.¹ Frightening Nazi cartoons and propaganda pieces slamming Israel went viral worldwide. International activists and militants were emboldened to instigate all new manner of illegal land, air and sea breaches of Israel’s borders—based on lies, breeding more lies.

God’s Word tells us not to conform to the pattern of this world but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds in order to know and do His will. But this requires knowledge of truth, and when it comes to Israel, “the father of lies” is usually hard at work to distort it (John 8:44).

Timeless Weapons of Deceit

“What has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9). The biblical truism has applied to Israel and her enemies since ancient times. A snapshot survey of Scripture shows how Satan has used world weapons of deceit against the Jews like no other nation on earth.

In the book of Esther, a Persian official named Haman demands that all bow down and worship him. Mordecai, a God-fearing Jew, refuses. At this Haman is outraged; to retaliate, he plots the annihilation of Jews throughout the empire. Like Israel’s enemies today, Haman concocts a scheme based on lies that he reports to the government: “There is a certain people . . . who . . . do not obey the king’s laws; it is not in the king’s best interest to tolerate them. If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them” (Esther 3:8–9).

The duped king concedes to Haman's request. But the sinister ploy is fabricated and undeserving. There is no mention of sin on the Jews' part; to the contrary, it is Mordecai's worship of Yahweh that stirs the enemy's wrath. While the plan providentially backfires and Haman is killed, the spirit of Haman lives on.

Consider next the book of Ezra. After exile in Babylon, many Jewish people have returned to the Promised Land. They plan to rebuild their country and at first things go well. But after the foundation of the Temple is laid, the opposition stirs. When local efforts to stop the Jews from rebuilding fail, a formal appeal is filed with the authorities. The deceitfully crafted complaint distorts reality almost beyond recognition:

The king should know that [the Jews] . . . are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city [Jerusalem]. . . . Furthermore, the king should know that if this city is built and its walls are restored, no more taxes, tribute or duty will be paid, and eventually the royal revenues will suffer. Now since we are under obligation to the palace and it is not proper for us to see the king dishonored, we are sending this message. . . . We inform the king that if this city is built and its walls are restored, you will be left with nothing in Trans-Euphrates.

Ezra 4:12–14, 16

The threat is thoroughly fabricated. But the propaganda campaign succeeds, at least temporarily, and the king orders the construction to stop.

Five hundred years go by and Yeshua is born. Obsessed with a lie that the child will lead a revolution and usurp his royal crown, a Roman king executes every Jewish boy in the region of Messiah's birth (see Matthew 2:13–18). Decades later, another Roman ruler sentences Yeshua to death, based again on

more lies (see Matthew 26:59–61; Luke 23:2).

What does the devil do to oppose God’s purposes? Throughout the Bible a pattern emerges. Satan’s timeless weapon of choice is deceit. The father of lies, *lies*. And his goal is murder.

Modern Myths

Fast forward with me to the Nazi Holocaust, where lie upon lie formed the foundation for the most brutal genocide campaign the world has known. At the beginning of his rise to power, Hitler publicly noted that people fall victim more easily to a big lie, repeated often, than to a little one.¹⁹ Accordingly, he instituted a widespread propaganda campaign—built on lies most of us would regard as outrageous—to set the stage for his future, Jew-free regime. I have listed some of these notorious “Big Lies” below, along with contemporary, Islamist variations on the theme. You may wonder how any thinking person could have believed them. I assure you that even today, many millions still do.

Each of these preposterous myths—and countless more—circulates widely through the Internet, government institutions, social and mainstream media, stores, schools and everyday society in the Palestinian, Arab and Islamist world:^m

Jews regularly murder non-Jews to use their blood in religious ceremonies and for baking unleavened Passover bread.ⁿ

Jews are a biologically inferior people—part pig and ape—with evil genes that will destroy the human race if they are not destroyed first.

Jews harbor a pernicious plot to subvert and take over the world, as revealed in their book *The Protocols of the Elders*

of Zion. (This egregiously antisemitic book, purportedly written by world Zionist leaders, was proved in court to have been forged by the Russian army in the 1800s.^o Yet the sordid tale remains a bestseller in the Arab world. It was formally presented to the UN in 2003 by an Egyptian diplomat as “historical truth.”^p)

Jews caused the Black Plague of the 1300s and, more recently, AIDS.^q Today, Israel infects (or steals or withholds) Palestinian water^r and will infect the whole world with dreadful diseases if she is not eradicated first.

Jews are Satan’s agents on earth. That is why they killed Christ, and that is why God (or Allah) wants them killed now.

Jews control the global economy and are ultimately at fault for every nation’s money problems or economic collapse.

Israel causes earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes and meteorological storms to destroy other nations.

Jews control the media, feeding the world false information to try to dispute all of the above “facts.”

Hitler’s minister of propaganda, Josef Goebbels, summarized: “All Jews, by virtue of their birth and race, are part of an international conspiracy against us. . . . They started this war. . . . The treatment they receive from us is hardly unjust. They have deserved it all.”²⁰ Goebbels’ inverted logic echoes in much of the Islamist world today, in which Israel is held responsible for every assault she is forced to endure, simply because she exists. As King Solomon said, there is nothing new under the sun. What has been done to curse God’s people through lies and false reports is being done again.

As a result, Israel finds herself having to fight a war on at least three different fronts.^s In addition to the traditional military front, a public relations war of words wages against her in

the media. Israel's third precarious front, known as lawfare (described later in this chapter), now exists in the sphere of international law and multinational governing bodies.

Concluding that anti-Israel "irrationality and hysteria" rules over "truth and reason" in the realms of media and lawfare, Melanie Phillips cautions us all of the consequences:

What is unique about the treatment of Israel is that a conflict subjected to an unprecedented level of scrutiny should be presented in such a way as to drive out truth and rationality. History is turned on its head; facts and falsehoods, victims and victimizers are reversed; logic is suspended and a fictional narrative is now widely accepted as incontrovertible truth. . . . Israel sits at the epicenter of the West's repudiation of reason.²¹

Phillips discerns that today's war against Israel is a war against truth. It is often said that whatever begins with the Jews, does not stay with the Jews. When evil attacks in new ways it usually takes first, but not final aim, at the Jewish people. Therefore, Phillips sadly but rightly predicts that Israel sits at the epicenter of the West's contemporary repudiation of reason.

News Not to Believe

A sad reality is that in reporting on the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, facts and events may be egregiously misrepresented and truth disregarded altogether. Investigations reveal that some reporters and photographers regularly stage "news" events to shoot. Scripted scenes are acted out, depicting fictitious Israeli oppression, then released internationally as formal or informal reporting of facts.[†] These highly distorted images, beamed electronically worldwide, aim to plant one picture in the global conscience: a viciously oppressive, Goliath-like Israeli pitted

against brave, little Palestinian David. If, as the adage goes, one picture is worth a thousand words, it can also spread a thousand lies.

During Israel's military operation in Jenin, for example, the world winced at photos of hapless and heartbroken Palestinian women wailing amid rubble that used to be called home. The untold back story was that "home" had been serving as a terrorist hideout or munitions plant for the murder of Jews—despite Israel's repeated warnings to quit. In 2008, Palestinians in Gaza released presumed photographic evidence that Israel was inhumanely withholding electricity from them. Pictures of suffering innocents huddled in the dark were sent and seen around the world. One photo of a roomful of "innocents," however, betrayed a narrow streak of sunlight beaming through curtains that were not completely closed. The particular photo pictured Hamas leaders meeting in what was actually broad daylight, attempting to stage a nighttime scene. It turned out they had engineered the blackout themselves to gain sympathy and international support in their fight against Israel.^u

Fake news and dishonest depictions of Israel became so widespread that in 2011, an Italian photojournalist produced an exposé of it. He showed how some photographers cooperate with Palestinians to create news events by taking images of nonexistent conflict. He personally shot pictures of his colleagues photographing Palestinians who were posing in fighting positions for the other photographers who needed scenes they could sell.^v Once on the market, the pictures could be published with captions condemning Israel for any array of alleged abuses. The exposé cautions that today's media spins and sells to the world a narrative of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict that is biased and often unsubstantiated.

The falsehoods and fake news reports are not limited to

mainstream media outlets. Social media are flooded with fake photos generating hate for Israel and the Jews.^w Consider one of dozens that went viral in 2012. In it a bloodstained, limp-bodied toddler was clutched in the arms of her grief-stricken dad. The caption read, “Little Girl in Gaza Is Casualty of Israeli Airstrikes.” In response to the heart-wrenching picture, hundreds of comments were posted online, cursing the Jewish state. Weeks later, investigators found the photo was actually several years old, and the girl had been killed in a car accident having nothing to do with Israeli air strikes.^x

Later that year, during Operation Pillar of Cloud/Defense in Gaza, an international audience was treated to video footage of Gazans decrying Israeli brutality, mourning over a corpse and dragging it away from the site of an apparent missile attack. Seconds later they watched the corpse stand up, brush himself off and walk away with his comrades.^y When Palestinians became aware of the gaffe, the video came down but a panoply of photos went up. Some of them, attempting to evidence excessive Israeli force, were later proved to have been shot years earlier—some inside Israel and actually depicting *Jews* injured in *Palestinian* terror attacks.^z

Sadly, you and I live in an information-saturated Digital Age in which truth is an increasingly rare commodity. What may be sadder is that many people do not seem to care. Famed investigative journalists of the twentieth century Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein comment on the reality: “We had a readership that was much more open to real fact than today. Today there is a huge audience only looking for information to confirm their already held political, cultural and religious prejudices, beliefs and ideologies.”²²

Lawfare

As a result of the world's diminished value on truth, 21st century Palestinian and other anti-Israel leaders have made extensive use of what is called lawfare. Lawfare is warfare not by customary military means, but by manipulating or changing the laws of traditional Western civilization for otherwise unobtainable political goals. As such, it is an abuse of the law for disingenuous means.²³ Because it has little regard or respect for the law it employs, lawfare can gradually give way to lawlessness. Real-life examples of lawfare include claims filed according to an Al-Qaeda manual that instructs captured militants to file false charges of torture in order to portray themselves as victims; and hate speech lawsuits based on speaking peaceably but publicly about fundamentalist Islam and terror funding.²⁴

In practical effect, lawfare usually seeks to take advantage of Judeo-Christian based, democratic style laws to achieve Islamist or secularist goals. It has been associated with the spread of "universal jurisdiction," in which a nation or international organization may prosecute individuals or leaders of any other nation for committing crimes against humanity.²⁵ Because Israel is on the front lines in the battles against both extremist Islam and globalism, her right to exist is now being assailed through lawfare and universal jurisdiction at precedent-setting levels.

Anti-Israel Lawfare at the UN

A major victory (or defeat, depending on your view) for the use of lawfare occurred when the UN upgraded Palestinians'

status to that of nonmember observer state in 2012. The upgrade was approved at the expense of violating several preexisting international agreements. Most critically, the upgrade breached a major provision of the Oslo Accords, the formal peace agreement signed in 1993 between Israel and the PA. In the agreement, both parties pledged not to take any actions apart from direct negotiations with each other to establish a Palestinian state. Sidestepping direct negotiations could void the Accords and cause the peace process to self-destruct.^{aa}

In the UN's precedent-setting upgrade of Palestine,^{bb} its people have arguably gained standing toward a sovereign state, solely by loopholes in international law.^{cc} In the process, they may seek—as other nations do—to file charges against Israel in the International Criminal Court at The Hague.^{dd} They may submit complaints to the General Assembly, Security Council and other UN agencies, where for decades they have held “automatic majorities” (defined momentarily).

The UN General Assembly that approved the Palestinian status upgrade was not necessarily interested in respecting the preexisting rule of law. The UN is heavily influenced by *sharia*-oriented Arab and Islamic states. The Arab League alone boasts a membership of 23 nations, counting Palestine. They are connected closely to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, presently comprised of 56 states.²⁶ Consistently aligned with them are several dozen other countries highly dependent on oil from the Middle East. This unified bloc is typically unconcerned with traditional Western values of freedom and moral justice. Collectively, it has long constituted an automatic majority against Israel on issues relevant to the Jewish state.^{ee}

As far back as 2002, former US ambassador to the United Nations Jeane Kirkpatrick spoke of her “very deep shock” over extreme antisemitism pervading the UN. Concerned about the potential for another Holocaust worse than the first, Kirkpatrick described the world’s treatment of Israel as “nearly unbelievably insulting and outrageous.”²⁷ She pointed out that in the history of the UN and its agencies, more than one thousand resolutions condemned Israel—but not one resolution had ever passed specifically condemning Arab terror against the Jewish state. Successive American ambassadors to the UN have made similar observations.²⁸ Today Israel stands as the only member state of the UN repeatedly—and illegally—threatened with genocide by another member state (Iran).

Of the United Nations and its automatic majority, former Israeli diplomat Abba Eban said, “If [an Arab country] introduced a resolution declaring that the earth was flat and that Israel had flattened it, it would pass.”²⁹ Mr. Eban did not exaggerate.

Pray for Israel as she is forced daily to defend herself from distortions and lies in the realms of media and lawfare. Pray also for Palestinians who need to know truth and deserve a better life. God is grieved for those suffering on both sides of the conflict, and we should be, too. At the same time, He knows the story ends well. As “the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain,” as “the kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against [Him] . . . the One enthroned in heaven laughs” (Psalm 2:1–2, 4).

If we do not conform to the pattern of this world, if we are transformed by minds renewed, we will be optimistic, too.

Israeli Statehood and the Palestinian Plight

Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot a vain thing?
The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take
counsel together against the Lord and His anointed, saying,
"Let us break their bonds in pieces and cast off their cords
from us." He who sits in the heavens shall laugh. . . "Yet I have
set My King On My holy hill of Zion."

Psalm 2:1-6

A true story opens on May 14, 1948, as the Jewish people prepare to declare a state. The air is electric. After two thousand years of exile, the sons and daughters of Jacob have come home. High pitched excitement circles the globe.

That morning, Israel's founding father and first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, pores over maps showing the array of Arab armies poised to attack. The Jews are outnumbered 100 to 1.¹ "I feel like a mourner at a wedding," he writes in his diary.²

In a few hours Ben-Gurion will deliver Israel's Declaration of Independence. He scribbles down notes for his speech on the

only writing material at hand—sheets of toilet paper.³

At exactly 4:00 p.m., he steps to the podium in an overcrowded hall in Tel Aviv, before a hushed audience. This is the moment for which millions of Jews have lived and died. As Ben-Gurion reads the Israeli Declaration of Independence, those present cling to his every word. He speaks of Bible history and the Jews' undying hope to return to their ancestral home. Then with prophetic clarity Ben-Gurion decrees: "By virtue of the natural and historic right of the Jewish people . . . we hereby proclaim the establishment of the Jewish state in Palestine, to be called the State of Israel . . . for the fulfillment of the dream of generations—the redemption of Israel."

At once, cheers and tears resound. Golda Meir, who would later serve as prime minister, cannot stop crying. Her sobs, she explains, are for the many who should have been there, but are no more.³ According to the nation's chief rabbi, "The dawn of redemption has broken."⁴

Euphoria erupts in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, where traffic stops as streets swell with singing and dancing. But the party is soon interrupted. Sirens wail to warn of Egyptian bombers overhead. Joining them are the armies of Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq, together with militants from throughout the Arab world. All have a common goal: to annihilate the Jewish state in Allah's name.⁵ The War of Independence has begun. *Happy birthday, Israel.*

Since 1948, tomes have been written on the history of Israel's restoration, and the Islamist/Arab/Palestinian resistance against it. Time and space permit us to summarize only basic facts. (For more detail visit whystillcareaboutisrael.com.) I think you will discover a surprising perspective on today's conflict emerges when you consider the context from which it arose. You will see that Israel is not so much in a fight for land

as for her life—and that changes everything.

Palestinian History: The Back Story

In the first century AD, Israel was renamed Palestine by the Romans who conquered her. This was done in derisive remembrance of the Jews' former—and extinct—enemy, the Philistines. The Philistines had by then already died out, so despite the similarity in name, they are not related to the Palestinians of today.^b

Collectively, Palestinians have no traceable ancient tie to the land of Israel and never identified as a self-governing people group. Like other Arabs in the Middle East, most of their ancestors dwelt as scattered family tribes on lands they often did not personally own. Generally, they coexisted alongside Jews who had, in small numbers, lived in Palestine since biblical times on inherited or legally purchased land.⁶ But periodically, Islamic terror would erupt⁷ and *jihadi* expropriation of Jewish real estate took place.⁸

From the 1500s up until World War I, the entire Middle East was ruled by the Ottoman Turkish Empire, a type of Muslim caliphate. No autonomous Arab state was on the map. Most Arabs belonged to nomadic tribes wandering all over the Middle East.^c At the same time, hundreds of thousands of Jews also lived in the region under Ottoman rule. According to a census taken in 1882, approximately 25,000 of them lived in Palestine, along with 260,000 Arabs.⁹ As tourists and pilgrims testified, Palestine was by then mostly desolate and depopulated,¹⁰ a far cry from the land of milk and honey it had once been for millions of Jews.

By the early 1900s, Palestinian Arab identity was said to be

extremely mixed.¹¹ Persons counted as indigenous Palestinian Arabs included ethnic Balkans, Greeks, Syrians, Latins, Turks, Armenians, Italians, Persians, Kurds, Germans, Afghans, Circassians, Bosnians, Sudanese, Samaritans, Algerians, Tartars and others.¹² An official British document published in 1920 stated the majority of people living in Palestine were not indigenous Arabs but only Arabic-speaking.¹³

When Zionist pioneers began arriving in the early 20th century, the number of Arabs immigrating to Palestine also sharply increased. With Jews from the West came new job opportunities, vastly improved medical care and a higher standard of living, all of which attracted their tribal neighbors.¹⁴ Once inside Israel, most Arab immigrants continued living as Bedouin, built simple villages or served for decades as tenants on farmlands owned by others. Later, countless more poured in from surrounding countries—not to carry on normal lives but to fight the formation of a Jewish state.¹⁵ Together with the small indigenous Arab population, these individuals and their descendants comprise the Palestinian people of today.

Palestinians are not, as some have rather unkindly said, “an invented people.” They are flesh and blood human beings created in God’s image, with inherent dignity and worth. Though many of their ancestors came from across the Middle East and even beyond, they did form an identifiable collective by the mid-20th century. Palestinians are not the first people group formed by the force of history. They are, however, the only modern group whose creation and self-definition, as one Palestinian journalist writes,¹⁶ rests on the planned elimination of another, namely Israel—or as they prefer to call her, “the Zionist entity.”

Zionism and the Reestablishment of a Jewish State

Zionism is defined, in a broad secular sense, as the national liberation movement of the Jewish people. The Zionist movement contends that the Jewish nation, like every other indigenous people, is entitled to live autonomously in its ancestral homeland. As such, Zionism cannot be viewed as something separate from the Jewish people and Jewish nation-state. To be anti-Zionist is essentially the same as being anti-Israel and, to a significant degree, antisemitic.

Zionism is not and has never been entirely secular; a strong religious element has always underlain it.^d Officially launched in 1896, modern-day Zionism involves the return of the Jewish people to their God-given ancestral homeland.^e The name of the movement derives from the Bible, where *Zion* is used over 150 times. “You will arise and have compassion on Zion; for it is time to show favor to her; the appointed time has come. . . . For the Lord will rebuild Zion and appear in his glory” (Psalm 102:13, 16). We could correctly say that Zionism precipitates His Kingdom glory.

In rebuilding Zion, Sovereign God has worked through nations and human beings. The modern story starts with World War I, when the Ottoman Turks aligned with Axis nations, and collectively they lost the war. As a result, the Allies dismantled the Ottoman Empire and created Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Iran for the Arabs and Persians to inhabit, respectively.^f

In an international agreement known as the San Remo Resolution of 1920, Allied nations set Palestine aside for the Jews.^g Great Britain was made responsible for implementing the resolution by unanimous vote of the League of Nations, predecessor organization to the UN. The League of Nations directive, called the Mandate for Palestine, reserved explicitly for the

Jews not just present-day Israel, but all of Judea, Samaria, Gaza and Jordan.¹⁷

The Mandate for Palestine was scarcely issued when Palestinian Arabs began rioting and conducting terror operations in protest of it. The deadly terror had nothing to do with occupation, settlements or allegedly disproportionate military force. From the beginning, Islamic terror had everything to do with opposing the existence of a Jewish state.

In an effort to appease Palestinian Arabs—and although international law did not support the action^h—Great Britain unilaterally took 78 percent of the land allotted to the Jews and gave it to Palestinian Arabs—*specifically to create a Palestinian state*. Today that state is known as Jordan. Palestinian Arabs were expected to move to Jordan, and any Jews living in Jordan would relocate to the 22 percent of land remaining from the San Remo and Mandatory allotments. A smaller section of land in the Golan Heights, originally designated for the Jews, was also given away by Britain to Syria.

But appeasement did not work, which we would do well to remember. Those who forget history, it is said, are doomed to repeat it. The acts we engage in for appeasement today, Britain's Winston Churchill presciently forewarned, we will have to remedy at far greater cost and remorse tomorrow.¹⁸

After Jordan was established as a large Palestinian state, Palestinian rioting and terror killings of Jews persisted.ⁱ An exasperated Great Britain finally turned the political foray over to the UN. (When the League of Nations failed to prevent World War II, the UN was formed to replace it.) The UN's charter required that it adopt all laws and resolutions passed by the League of Nations. So when it inherited the Mandate for Palestine from the League of Nations, the UN became responsible for creating a Jewish state.

As you can see, plans for the reestablishment of Israel were underway well before the onset of World War II. Israel's right to exist by international law is not fundamentally based on the Nazi Holocaust, as compelling a cause as that is from a humanitarian point of view. Certainly, the Holocaust demonstrated the need for a Jewish state to protect Jewish lives. But if we believe Israel's right to exist is rooted in a compassionate response to the Holocaust, when that compassion wears off, so will our belief that Israel has a right to exist. Israel's fundamental right to exist under international law rests on the recognition of the Jews' ancestral, sovereign control over identifiable land that, since their forced removal from it, remained sparsely occupied and mostly undeveloped.

Disregarding Israel's historical and legal right to the land, and dismissing international commitments to the Jews, the UN continued with a policy of Arab appeasement. In 1947, it partitioned the remaining 22 percent of the original Mandate for a Jewish homeland into two proposed states: one for Jews and yet another, second Palestinian state for Palestinian Arabs. The Partition Plan, also called UN Resolution 181, recognized the Jews' right to sovereign control over a sliver of space amounting to a mere 10 percent of the original British Mandate. The state it offered to Palestinian Arabs who lived within Mandate territory consisted of Judea, Samaria and Gaza.

Zionist pioneers felt it best to accept the UN's offer. They reasoned that ten percent of the Promised Land after nearly two thousand years was better than zero. Moreover, they had no political clout or practical means with which to resist whatever the world community told them to do.

The Arabs, however, thoroughly rejected the Partition Plan--which legally voided the UN's offer to them. Ninety percent of British Mandate land, they insisted, was not enough. They

wanted it *all*—an empire spanning the entire Middle East, leaving no place on earth for the Jews. They mobilized for a regional war against Israel they felt certain they would win.

The world wondered, much as it does today, *Will Israel survive?*

Born Into War

Israel did not want the War of Independence to occur and tried hard to prevent it.¹⁹ When her every effort toward peace was rebuffed, Ben-Gurion extended a final appeal to the Arabs in his Declaration of Independence speech:

We yet call upon the Arab inhabitants of the State of Israel to preserve the ways of peace and play their part in the development of the State, on the basis of full and equal citizenship and due representation in all its bodies and institutions. . . . We extend our hand in peace and neighborliness to all the neighboring states and their peoples, and invite them to cooperate with the independent Jewish nation for the common good of all.²⁰

The same invitation had been offered daily for weeks.^j British Mandate authorities who were stationed on the ground testified: “Every effort is being made by the Jews to persuade the Arab populace to stay and carry on with their normal lives . . . and to be assured that their lives and interests will be safe.”²¹ Most, however, chose to flee, creating a local refugee crisis that would upend history. A Palestinian priest who watched the events unfold stated, “[The Arabs] fled in spite of the fact the Jewish authorities guaranteed their safety and rights as citizens of Israel.”²²

Arab-Nazi Alliance

Why did so many Palestinians run from their homes and livelihoods? An overlooked historical fact is perhaps one of the most pivotal and still fuels the conflict today. A robust Islamic/Arab–Nazi alliance predated World War II, and as a result of it, many Arabs vehemently despised and feared the Jews.

Early in his career, Hitler formed a pact with Jerusalem’s grand mufti, Haj Amin al-Husseini. The notoriously antisemitic mufti held religious and political sway over Muslims throughout Palestine and the larger Middle East. He and Hitler schemed together to annihilate the Jewish people worldwide. The fuhrer would focus on Europe and the highly influential mufti would target Palestine’s growing Jewish population.²³

Building on fundamental Islam’s anti-Jewish ideology, Husseini mobilized an Arab militia, which served as a formal Nazi brigade. Supplied with German weaponry, the brigade murdered Palestinian Jews in acts of heinous terror throughout World War II.²⁴ To keep the violence going, Husseini saturated the Middle East with lies about the Zionists via propaganda broadcasts radioed in from Berlin.^k So after the Holocaust ended in Europe, he and other Arab leaders hoped to immediately start another.

Creating a Refugee Crisis

When, to their profound dismay, Israel declared statehood, Palestinian Arabs panicked. An estimated 600,000 to 700,000 fled.²⁵ ^l Approximately 150,000 to 160,000 chose to remain inside the Jewish state.²⁶ Today, they and their descendants can enjoy full democratic rights of Israeli citizenship, including a

standard of living much higher than that of their brethren anywhere else in North Africa or the Middle East.

Under the influence of Muslim-Nazi antisemitism, the majority of Arabs who left their homes did so because their leaders told them to. Evacuations were ordered to make way for approaching armies that would quickly destroy the Jewish state.^m Arab leaders boasted that Israel would be “driven into the [Mediterranean] sea” within a few days. Accordingly, the Higher Arab Executive gave Palestinians a choice: Quit and run, or accept Jewish protection and be regarded as a renegade in the Arab world that would imminently take over. The Arab National Committee in Jerusalem ordered its constituency out of their homes, adding, “Any opposition to this order . . . is an obstacle to the holy war . . . and will hamper the operations of the fighters in these districts.”²⁷

The Arab Legion and Arab Liberation Army directed wholesale civilian flight from entire villages. Leaders like Iraqi prime minister Nuri Said warned, “We will smash the country with our guns and obliterate every place the Jews seek shelter. The Arabs should conduct their wives and children to safe areas until the fighting has died down.”²⁸ To ensure compliance, some leaders planted rumors of Israeli terror operations and nonexistent atrocities.²⁹ ⁿ Shortly after the war—which to their deep humiliation they did not win—Arab leaders freely admitted to having created the refugee crisis.^o Mahmoud Abbas,^p who would later serve as president of the PA, confessed:

The Arab armies entered Palestine to protect the Palestinians from the Zionist tyranny, but instead they abandoned them, forced them to emigrate and leave their homeland, and threw them into prisons similar to the ghettos in which the Jews used to live.³⁰

Palestinian Injustice

A sad reality is that the War of Independence was not fought without collateral damage to both Palestinian and Jewish civilians. For the sake of perspective, no war can be fought without collateral damage—and in this instance, there would not have been a war if the Arabs had not insisted on starting one. Nevertheless, some Arab families and villages were wrongly expelled or inexcusably overrun by Jewish soldiers.^q In at least one such raid at Deir Yassin, innocent victims were cruelly massacred.³¹ Upon learning of the sordid event, Israel denounced it and sought to compensate the victims.^r

The Palestinian narrative claims that since 1948, Israel has stolen or destroyed over four hundred Arab villages. This figure, based on a recently created map of questionable veracity, cannot be objectively verified.

Israeli historians point out that many Arab families who were forced to leave their homes did not actually own the lands or homes they left. Some were long-term renters—for generations—of lands sold legally, but without their knowledge, to the Jews.^s Moreover—and without diminishing the genuine loss some Arabs have suffered—a large Palestinian state (Jordan) existed just across the border. Those who might be displaced were expected to voluntarily seek refuge there, just as 800,000 Jewish refugees who were *forced* to leave their homes and wealth behind, relocated to Israel.^t (More on this momentarily.)

Lacking objective documentation of their plight, Palestinians have amassed global sympathies through a narrative that often inverts history.^u Many share tragic personal tales that eventually prove either unverifiable or highly embellished.^v The sto-

ries tend either to romanticize Arab tribal-village life or misrepresent it as a bustling society.^w Sadly, some of these accounts are presented by Christians as honest-to-God facts. Their pitiable tales tug at the heartstrings of any hearer. *It's their personal story, we reason. How can it not be true—and how can we not be deeply moved?* Emotions are stirred, then inflamed, against Israel. Gradually, hearts are hardened against the Jewish people and what God is doing with them today.

Jesus loves and died for the Palestinian people. He does not want us to disparage them. We must compassionately acknowledge their suffering and seek a right response to it. But even genuine suffering must be viewed in context to rightly ascertain truth and transform realities justly.

Refugees, Palestinian and Jewish

Palestinians were not the only refugees to result from the War of Independence. According to official UN figures, over 800,000 Jewish refugees were forced to flee homes and lands in North Africa and the Middle East where they had lived for generations.³² Unlike some Palestinians, they were in no sense “voluntary refugees.” Jews were expelled, stripped of citizenship or both in retaliation for Israel’s declaration of statehood. Arab nations have persistently refused to compensate these refugees for their confiscated properties, valued today at billions of dollars.³³

Meanwhile, during the War of Independence, unincorporated areas proposed by the Partition Plan for a second Palestinian Arab state were illegally annexed and occupied—not by Israel but by Jordan and Egypt. Jordan seized Judea and Samaria, including East Jerusalem, while Egypt staked claim to Gaza. Now, the Arabs’ publicly stated goal for the war had been

to liberate Palestine. But neither Jordan nor Egypt ever gave the territories they annexed to the Palestinians in order to help liberate them. Instead, the latter were compelled—by their own brethren—to stay put indefinitely in refugee camp limbo.^x *Why?* you may ask. They would not talk about it; let me explain.

Israel began offering, as early as 1949, to negotiate for the refugees' return—and full repatriation—back into the Jewish state. But no Arab leader was willing to talk or negotiate with Jews. Transacting with Israel, they said, would involve an implicit recognition of her existence. This they had vowed never to do.³⁴ Further, by refusing either to negotiate for the refugees' return or to absorb those refugees themselves, they could continue the war against Israel in political and diplomatic realms.^y This they had vowed never to *cease* doing.

In 1949 the UN established a relief fund (United Nations Relief and Works Agency or UNRWA) to provide for the refugees' basic needs. Soon thereafter, UNRWA acceded to Arab demands to grant refugee status—for the first time in history—not only to those who fled Israel, but to their descendants, *indefinitely*. This redefinition of “refugee” guaranteed the Palestinian population would dramatically increase over time.³⁵

Today, of an estimated Palestinian population of five million, less than 30,000—or approximately half of 1 percent—actually ever left a home in Israel.³⁶ Meanwhile, many billions of dollars have been given to Palestinians by Israel and other nations to provide for their “basic needs.”^z At this writing, UNRWA remains the largest employer in the West Bank, with thousands of Palestinians on its payroll and, according to many accounts, padding the personal fortunes of Palestinian leaders.³⁷

Former UNRWA director Ralph Galloway concluded early on:

The Arab States do not want to solve the refugee problem. They want to keep it as an open sore . . . *as a weapon against Israel*. Arab leaders don't give a damn whether the refugees live or die.³⁸

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu similarly noted:

The consistent refusal of Arab leaders to solve this problem is particularly tragic because it would have been so easy to do. . . . That the fifty million Arabs in 1948 could not absorb 650,000 Arab refugees—and have not finished the job even after half a century, and even after the fantastic multiplication of their oil wealth—is an indication of [how] the Arabs have manipulated the refugee issue to create reasons for world censure of Israel.³⁹

Of the situation an Arab American journalist comments:

What are the real roots of this [Palestinian-Israeli] conflict? . . . That Palestinians want a homeland and Muslims want control over sites they consider holy? . . . These two demands are nothing more than strategic deceptions, propaganda ploys. They are nothing more than phony excuses and rationalizations for the terrorism and murdering of Jews. The real goal of those making these demands is the destruction of the State of Israel.⁴⁰

Palestinian Statehood and the Phased Plan

In 1964, Yasser Arafat assumed leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), a terror group with the stated purpose to liberate all of Palestine. It was not, however, created to liberate the West Bank and Gaza; this was never the “Pales-

tine” to which it referred. Recall that in 1964, Gaza still belonged to Egypt and the West Bank was governed by Jordan. Since 1964 the Palestinian agenda has been to liberate a Palestine that includes, by definition, every square meter of land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River; that is, all of Israel.^{41 aa}

Shortly after the PLO published its goals, Israel fought for her life in the Six Day War of 1967. To the world’s surprise, she *defensively* acquired Gaza from Egypt and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, from Jordan. Then, in 1973, Egypt and Syria launched another unprovoked attack against her, the Yom Kippur War. Again, Israel prevailed. As a result of these mounting and humiliating Arab defeats, the PLO announced its “Phased Plan” the following year. The Phased Plan has never been revoked and still represents Palestinian strategy today.

The Phased Plan refers to the slightly revised goal of liberating Palestine not all at once, but in stages. Phase One is the establishment of an independent, combatant national authority consisting of Gaza and the West Bank. This was to a large degree accomplished by creating the Palestinian Authority and Israel’s withdrawing from Gaza. Phase Two is the reconfiguration of Gaza and the West Bank into launching pads for provoking an all-out regional war, in which Israel is wiped off the map.⁴² This is to be accomplished by military operations, warfare, cyberattack or any combination thereof, with more than a little help from Iran.

On the Occupation

When Israel pushed back her attackers in the Six Day War and gained Gaza and the West Bank, she acquired land that had

been originally and legally allotted to her in 1920. By 1967, however, the areas were inhabited by over a million Jew-hating Palestinians and angry insurgents.⁴³ Israel had no desire to govern or try to “rule over” them.⁴⁴

The Six Day War ended with UN Security Council Resolution 242, a truce that purposefully did not define borders. Resolution 242 authorized Israel to remain in possession of newly acquired territories until peace was established and final borders secured. It was meticulously and explicitly worded so that Israel would not be forced to withdraw from *all* the newly acquired territories, back to the boundary lines from which she had just been attacked.⁴⁵

Those boundaries, the 1949 armistice lines ending the War of Independence, were never meant to be permanent. Nor were they intended to substitute for negotiations to determine final borders. In less than twenty years, the lines had proved indefensible,^{46 bb} leaving the middle and most populous section of the country only nine miles wide. With Palestinians having shown themselves unwilling or unable to make peace, some Israeli leaders have termed the 1949 lines “Auschwitz Borders,” referring to a notorious Nazi death camp in Germany. Today the international community euphemistically calls them “pre-1967 borders.” It pressures Israel to retreat to them, with no enforceable guarantee of peace in return.

After the Six Day War, Egypt and Jordan eventually signed peace treaties with Israel. These nations refused, however, to take back either Gaza or the West Bank. Reclaiming those territories would have betrayed the pan-Arab plan, notoriously reaffirmed after the war,⁴⁷ to leave in place a local population of hapless refugees to help destroy Israel. As a result, Gaza and the West Bank have remained in a state of perpetual war with Israel.

This being the case, Israel is authorized by international law to administratively govern the territories, with quasi-military powers of enforcement, until a final peace is achieved. The administration of law and order in a hostile, enemy population in such circumstances is termed a legal occupation under currently existing international law.

Some Israelis say, however, that they have not occupied any of these areas because the land rightfully belongs to them under customary international law. Customary international law refers to the body of international law and policy that Western nations have traditionally practiced and followed. Under customary international law, Israel would have claim to territory allotted her in the original British Mandate, including lands Britain and the UN gave away.

In any case, Israel's quasi-military administration known as the occupation is not illegal. The term "illegal occupation" is a pejorative mischaracterization, intended to conjure up images of oppression. Admittedly, Israel has not always acted fairly or justly during the difficult course of governing people who are dedicated to her demise. But to brand her lawful jurisdiction illegal or oppressive obscures the reality that if Palestinians sincerely accepted Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state, the war and the occupation would end. Let me explain.

Peace Negotiations

In 1993, the PLO morphed into the Palestinian Authority under an agreement called the Oslo Accords. At that time, Palestinians gained the right to directly negotiate peace with Israel for themselves.^{cc} Sadly, rather than pursue a peaceful coexistence alongside Israel, history records how they proliferated terror

instead. Finally, in 2000, Israel offered the Palestinians full sovereignty over 95 percent of the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem, with secured geographic contiguity. There was virtually nothing left for the Jews to give away. But the Palestinians still said no. Offering no counterproposal to the offer, they literally walked out on negotiations⁴⁸ and immediately launched a murderous terror *intifada* (uprising) lasting several years.^{dd} Former US Middle East envoy Dennis Ross, who was present at the negotiations, said the Palestinians' main objection was the insertion of one critical clause in the agreement: "This is the end of the conflict."⁴⁹ ^{ee} The Palestinians could not end the conflict, he said, with anything less than ending Israel.^{ff}

Yasser Arafat, who signed the Oslo Accords and walked out on the offer of a sovereign state, said in Arabic, not English: "I do not consider the [Oslo] agreement any more than the agreement which was signed by our prophet Muhammad and the Qurayish."⁵⁰ Arafat referred to an agreement, called *hudna*, that establishes the right for Muslims to fake peace when they are weak so they can wait for better timing to fight when they are strong.^{gg} A Muslim saying goes like this: "When your enemy is strong, kiss his hand and pray that it will be broken one day."⁵¹

Faisal Hussein, a moderate Palestinian leader, compared the Oslo peace process to a proverbial "Trojan horse."⁵² From the Arab perspective, it had been designed to fool Israel into letting the Palestinians arm themselves in order to destroy it. Said Hussein, "If you are asking me as a pan-Arab nationalist what are the Palestinian borders according to the higher strategy, I will immediately reply, from the [Jordan] river to the [Mediterranean] sea."⁵³

Perhaps that would explain why, in 2008, when Israel of-

ferred Palestinians 93 percent of the territory they desired—including 98 percent of the West Bank—they again said no.⁵⁴ And why, in 2009, PA leaders said they would resume negotiations on the precondition that Israel stop all settlement construction, but still refused to talk when Israel complied fully with the demand. After that, with one perceived betrayal following another, Israelis were less willing to believe Palestinians could be sincere about peace.^{hh}

In 2011, former Prime Minister Netanyahu tried to restart peace talks. He pleaded at the UN with PA President Abbas to meet face to face, without preconditions. Abbas refused, demanding that Israel first agree to a whole new, expanded list of preconditions.ⁱⁱ The preconditions he now demanded were supposed to be the subject of negotiations under the Oslo Accords and related agreements. By agreeing to all the preconditions first, there would be very little left to negotiate. So Netanyahu replied with one precondition of his own. He demanded that Palestinians recognize Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state. If the PA would agree to the one precondition, Israel would agree to their whole list of them. The Palestinians refused.^{jj}

In 2012, Palestinians sidestepped negotiations and thereby breached the Oslo Accords, by seeking to forge a path for statehood in the UN. At the same time, they launched a war from Gaza and new wave of terror from the West Bank. In 2013, Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon commented on the situation:

This is our history: Every time a proposal was raised to partition the land, the other side started a war. Every time we expressed willingness to give up territory, terror rose to new heights.⁵⁵

Some Palestinian leaders have said they resort to terror because they want a peace plan to include a universal “right of return” to Israel, something even the international community has not supported. Unwilling to limit the right of return to refugees who personally left Israel, they insist on extending it to every Palestinian in Gaza, the West Bank and anywhere else in the world. From Israel’s perspective, granting several million Muslims, many of whom are murderously militant, permission to immigrate and repopulate the country is tantamount to committing national suicide. It would destroy Israel as a Jewish state. The right of return has remained, at this writing, uncompromisable.

In a related standoff, Palestinians have sometimes agreed to recognize (at least temporarily) a country named Israel—but never as a specifically *Jewish* state.^{kk} If Palestinians were to acknowledge Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish state, they would necessarily have to relinquish their strategy for turning it into an Islamic one by flooding it with millions of Palestinians returning there.^{ll} Again, the issue has, at this writing, proven uncompromisable.

Israeli Settlements

In 2012, the PA began claiming that Israeli settlements were the main reason for the failure of the peace process. At the time, settlements represented only 1.6 percent of the disputed territories,⁵⁶ and 70 percent of settlers lived in suburbs adjacent to major Israeli cities, not deep inside the West Bank.⁵⁷ Settlements do not disrupt Palestinian geographic contiguity. Despite public opinion to the contrary, settlements officially authorized by the Israeli government are not illegal under

standards of customary international law.^{mm} To be sure, settlements have been built on lands whose ownership is technically disputed. But a dispute of ownership is not the same as a determination of the dispute. And in this dispute, Israel actually possesses the best claim to lawful ownership.ⁿⁿ

Recall that when Israel acquired the West Bank, no state or political entity held legal title to it. The last rightful owner of the land had been Israel, and historically, a Jewish presence has been maintained in Judea and Samaria for thousands of years. After World War I, Britain obtained the land and, through international agreements, returned recognized legal title to the Jews. When the UN offered the land to Palestinian Arabs in 1947, it wrongfully tried to take that title away. But the Palestinians rejected the offer, thereby rendering it null and void.

Years later, Jordan illegally annexed the West Bank, but Israel defensively—and therefore, legally—acquired it from Jordan in the Six Day War. Under international law, the land has been technically “disputed” since 1967.^{oo} In the future, international bodies may attempt to rule on the legality of the territories and settlements built on them. Given the nations’ collective stance toward Israel, it would likely take an act of God for a ruling in her favor to result. Which we cannot rule out.

Meanwhile, to be sure, Israel’s settlement policies are not perfect. Some extremist Jewish settlers have turned violent and the violence must be stopped. Some Israelis have tried to stake claim to biblical lands by erecting self-declared, unauthorized outposts. Usually these are dismantled by Israel within a very short time. Jewish settlement construction has resulted in genuine hardship for some Bedouin and other Arabs, not always handled properly by Israeli courts.^{pp} But these proportionately few unfair cases do not render all settlements

illegal. Nor do they provide a reason to suspend peace negotiations, if the parties sincerely desire peace.

Future Palestine?

Surveys consistently reveal that a solid majority of Israelis would agree to live alongside a peaceful Palestinian state. The operative word is *peaceful*. But similar surveys consistently show the majority of Palestinians say they would never accept peaceful coexistence with a Jewish state.⁴⁹ In 2011, 66 percent of West Bank Palestinians said that while they would accept a two-state solution as a “first step,” they wanted to eventually replace Israel with a single Palestinian state.⁵⁹ In 2012, 88 percent of all Palestinians preferred a strategy of terror, or another *intifada*, over diplomacy to achieve it.⁶⁰ Today, similar polls yield similar results.⁶¹ Palestinians continue to insist their state must stretch from the “river to the sea,” encompassing all Israel.⁵⁸

As you can see, the root of the Palestinian plight is well hidden beneath the surface tension exposed to public view. Deep-seated realities that will not change are often disguised and distorted. I do not minimize the genuine suffering, frustration and injustice that affects some or perhaps many Palestinians. But fundamentally, these conditions are not the *cause* of Arab and Islamist enmity toward Israel; they are the *result* of it. Moreover, injustices have repeatedly come about at the hands of Arab, not Israeli, leaders betraying their own people. That the world faults Israel—and threatens her survival—for a Palestinian plight that is Islamist generated, is highly unjust.

God wants transformational justice for both Israelis and Palestinians. But justice must be pursued and attained His way—

according to righteousness based on truth—however His enemies try to obscure it. In the next chapter, we will see that with God all things are possible, perhaps even genuine peace in the century-old, Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

11

Israeli Injustice?

Judge not according to appearance but judge with righteous judgment.

When I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat ["The Lord Judges"}. There I will enter Into judgment against them concerning my inheritance, my people Israel.

John 7:24, Joel 3:1-2

For many years I lived with my family in an apartment in the heart of West Jerusalem. It was a small place by modern standards, but one that came with a panoramic cityscape. From my living room I looked daily upon the Israeli security wall, a sprawling, high and impenetrable concrete barrier. No doubt about it, the wall was ugly. Its gray concrete was ugly. The reason it got built was ugly. The suffering resulting from it was ugly. I could not look at the thing without praying for both the Arabs and Jews on either side of it.

Israel built its security wall for one reason: as a defensive barrier against unrelenting terror during the Palestinian Intifada of 2000–2005. At the time, suicide bombers easily found

and made their way from the West Bank into Jewish population centers, where they murdered and maimed hundreds of innocent civilians en masse. The bombings came to an abrupt halt, however, once the security wall was built.^a The wall has saved countless lives, including those of potential *jihadi* martyrs. But it has led to many problems, too.

Precisely because the wall immediately quelled the terror, within a few years, people around the world forgot why it had been built. No longer was it seen for what it actually is: a wall of protection and safeguard of life. Instead, the wall morphed into a flashpoint for global accusations of oppression, racism and apartheid (described later in this chapter).

Admittedly, the wall has resulted in inconvenience and hardship for some Palestinians. Time-consuming checkpoints—where, sporadically, inexcusable instances of humiliation or abuse have occurred—are associated with it. Sadly, innocent civilians suffer because of a minority of militant extremists whom their leaders are unable or unwilling to control.

Palestinians understandably want the wall torn down, the UN wants it down, social justice activists want it down and some left-wing Israelis want it down. Pejoratively called a separation barrier, the wall separates two people groups that I believe will come together someday through the love, forgiveness and peace that only Jesus can offer them. Meanwhile, does justice require, as much of the world insists, that this life-saving structure be dismantled and the grisly killing of Israeli civilians resumed? Would that reflect the type of righteous judgment New Covenant believers are instructed to make (see John 7:24)?

What is in Justice?

What exactly does the Bible, as opposed to secular society, mean by "justice?" Throughout the Scriptures, justice is inextricably tied to, or founded on, righteousness. Bible scholars define righteousness as that which is right, which means it must also be true. Biblical justice can only exist, therefore, to the extent it rests on biblical truth.

Stressing the interconnection between justice and righteousness, the same word in both Hebrew (*tsedek*) and Greek (*dikaio*s) is used to refer to both.¹ A simple definition for *justice*, then, is the administration of righteousness according to truth.²

As we have seen, to ascertain truth about a complex, controversial situation, context is critical. Only then can we make an apparent wrong, right. Biblical justice is *moral* justice. This means biblical *social* justice must be moral or righteous. It must be founded on principles of biblical truth. Lest this reasoning sound lacking in compassion toward those enduring injustice, bear in mind that biblical truth without love is not the whole truth.

From this perspective, we will address in this chapter some of the questions commonly asked about Israeli injustice. But instead of focusing on alleged injustice to Palestinians, about which plenty of material already exists, we will look at injustice endured by *Israel*. To start, let us revisit the issue of disproportionate military force.

Does Israel Use Disproportionate Military Force?

From 2005 through this writing in 2012, Israel endured approximately 12,000 terror attacks from Gaza in the form of rockets and other projectiles.³ For the sake of perspective, based on population ratios, this would compare to roughly 480,000 violent acts of terror committed during the same period inside the United States. The unprovoked raining down of rockets at the end of 2012 was such that life practically came to a standstill for half the country. Day after day, offices, schools and businesses were forced to shut down. When the crisis could not be solved through diplomatic means, Israel assassinated the terrorist masterminding the onslaught. As a result of the one assassination, Gaza launched a full-scale retaliation. Rockets were intentionally aimed at maximizing civilian casualties in cities from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

An Israeli response of *proportionate* force would have meant hurtling thousands of deadly projectiles directly into Palestinian civilian population centers. But this, Israel chose not to do. Instead, the Jewish state determined to respond disproportionately. So in its defensive "Operation Pillar of Cloud" in Gaza, Israel undertook extreme efforts to minimize civilian casualties of war rather than maximize them.

Before striking targets, the army sent text messages to civilian cell phones, dropped mass leaflets over neighborhoods and aired broadcasts to warn of attacks, urging noncombatants to leave targeted zones.⁴ Then Israel used surgical strikes to pinpoint just the militants and their weapons stores. If any civilians were spotted in a strike zone, meticulously planned operations were aborted, even at the last second.⁵ But war is war; despite all the precautions, some collateral damage was inevitable.

Much of the collateral damage occurred because Palestinian terror organizations have changed the rules of conventional warfare in order to maximize civilian casualties. Rocket launch pads and weapons caches are intentionally placed inside or adjacent to homes, schools, hospitals, mosques, sports arenas and other public sites.^b For militants this serves two purposes. First, any outside attack is discouraged altogether; second, if an attack resulting in casualties does take place, the incident can be used to score a public relations victory against Israel.

To further enhance the appearance of Israeli brutality, *ji-hadists* often summon—or force—families with children to sneak back into or around a target Israel has just warned them to leave.⁶ The hope is that Israel will learn of the human shields and fail to attack. But Israeli military intelligence is not perfect; sometimes accidents take place and civilian deaths occur. When they do, Palestinians often view such deeds among themselves as laudable acts of martyrdom. But to the world they mourn passionately and protest with rage.^c Fake evidence of excessive force typically includes staged photos and scripted video footage. *The recurring and bizarre—yet tragic—scenario is like a proverbial story in which a man murders both his parents, and then pleads to be pardoned because he is an orphan.*

From the Israeli perspective, chronic charges of excessive military force or war crimes against humanity, based on death tolls she deliberately tries to minimize and her enemies intentionally maximize, are patently unjust.^d From a Christian perspective, how can we not fall to our knees in prayer for all involved?

Is Israel an Apartheid, Racist State?

In 2001, at the UN Conference on Racism in Durban, South Africa, a formal international movement was launched to delegitimize Israel and undermine the legality of her existence. Known as Durban I, the UN conference called outright for dissolution of the Jewish state.⁷ Israel—not any of several totalitarian, tyrannical regimes—was accused of crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and genocide. During the proceedings, the World Council of Churches proposed that Zionism be equated with, and declared a form of, racism.^e Jewish delegates from around the world were sought out, spat upon, physically pushed around and pressured to leave public sessions.

Durban I condemned Israel for being an apartheid state, comparable to former white South Africa, because it is a Jewish state. But South African apartheid was entirely different. There a governmentally legislated system of official racial segregation between blacks and whites was brutally enforced. Somewhat like the word *holocaust*, the use of *apartheid* conjures up emotional associations of systematic hate and murderous oppression of a minority group. Any fair-minded person who has spent a few days in Israel would recognize the apartheid charge as absurd.^f

Israel is a robust democracy in which over twenty percent of its citizens are Arab or otherwise not Jewish. Israeli Arabs (and others such as Druze, Arameans and more) legally integrate with Jews and enjoy full rights of citizenship. Discrimination against them in any public or semi-public sphere is illegal.

Recall that Israeli Arabs are Palestinian Arabs who did not flee when the Jewish state was born. Today, some of their descendants hold public office, serving at the highest levels of

legislative and judicial authority. All professions are open to them, and some are quite prosperous. Not surprisingly, polls consistently indicate that, if given a choice, most Israeli Arabs would prefer to live in Israel as a minority than in any presently existing Arab country as a majority.⁸

This does not mean all Israeli Arabs have a terrific life or harbor great love for their country. Some actively and aggressively aspire to replace the Jewish state with a Palestinian one.⁹ But their right to speak out against Israel is protected—precisely because Israel is not an apartheid state.⁸

Durban I gave impetus to “Israel Apartheid Week,” which is now observed annually, to varying degrees, in many nations around the world.^h Israel Apartheid Week is marked by anti-Israel rallies and programs designed to stir sympathy and support for the Palestinian cause. Recall that this cause involves overrunning Israel as a Jewish state.

Sponsored by affiliates of wealthy Islamist groups,ⁱ Apartheid programs especially target young, impressionable future leaders. On college campuses across the earth, rousing outdoor speeches are made and demonstrations held. Alleged Israeli abuse is acted out in street theater that typically depicts soldiers beating innocent Palestinian women and children. University students and faculty alike testify these deceptive tactics incite irrational hate for Israel and the Jews.

The hate has reached and taken root in many campuses throughout the United States. America has been regarded as a nation traditionally, even extraordinarily, hospitable to Jews. But some Jewish students are now so afraid for their physical safety¹⁰ that at times, police must escort them to class. Professor Alan Dershowitz of Harvard Law School, who speaks on Israel at universities across America, writes of the “passionate hatred, ecstatic hatred,” even “orgasmic hatred”

he sees in the eyes and actions of students toward Israel and those who support her.^{11 j} I have personally witnessed similar reactions among students at colleges where I have spoken in the US.

Dershowitz points out that challenging Israel's identity as an apartheid or racist state simply because it is Jewish might *possibly* be acceptable if all countries with official state religions or ethnicities were similarly challenged. But no such accusation is hurled at any Islamist *sharia* state—including the putative state of Palestine, with its official religion of Islam.¹² Nor is any other state denounced as racist because of its law of return^k based on national ethnicity. Countries such as China, Russia and Germany have had laws of return extending automatic citizenship to ethnic Chinese, Russians and Germans. Their laws are comparable to Israel's law of return for ethnic Jews.^l Only Israel, however, is globally censured for favoring and granting citizenship based on ethnicity.

Ironically, while “apartheid” Israel is committed to protecting its Muslim, Christian and other minority populations, Palestinians are not. They insist no Jew will ever be allowed to live—let alone gain citizenship—in Palestine.¹³

In 2009, the UN sponsored its second Durban Conference on Racism. Like the first, it was primarily dedicated to denouncing, demonizing and delegitimizing Israel. Durban II showcased as its plenary session speaker the President of Iran, Israel's consummate enemy, who first denied the Holocaust ever took place, then called for another to finish the job. In 2011, Durban III morphed into a UN-sponsored Islamist/Arab tirade, largely unattended by Western officials. Acknowledging their loss of support, participants strategized on fomenting anti-Israelism through a global boycott, divestment and sanctions movement.

Do Boycotts, Divestments and Sanctions Promote Justice?

An international Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel is now observed, to varying degrees, by countries, corporations and organizations around the world. The movement promotes the boycott of Israeli goods, products and sometimes, people. Israeli professionals, from academics to athletes and artists, have found themselves targets of the boycott. They have been singularly excluded from professional organizations, global initiatives, international competitions and other events.

Within BDS, the boycott of Israeli academics is particularly baffling. More Nobel and other international academic prizes have been awarded to Israelis than to all Arab and Muslim nations combined.¹⁴ Whereas the tiny Jewish state has long been on the cutting edge of medical, scientific and technological advance, the most significant academic contribution of the collective Arab world is in the proliferating field of Islamic studies. Arab regimes and political lobbies have established Islamic studies programs with hundreds of millions of dollars donated to top universities such as Harvard, Princeton, Columbia, Georgetown, Cornell, Oxford and Cambridge.¹⁵

The BDS campaign involves more than boycotts. It pressures public and private institutions to divest from Israeli companies and from any companies that do business with Israeli enterprises—particularly those operating in Judea and Samaria (aka the West Bank). International corporations, NGO's and even individuals such as entertainers and artists are pressured not to do business with, perform in, or set foot inside Israel. The goal of the BDS movement is to economically sanction and isolate, and thereby strangle, the Jewish state.^m Several large Christian denominations are among the

most vocal advocates of BDS.

BDS pundits rarely mention that Israeli inventions include a burgeoning array of lifesaving and life enhancing medical interventions and technologies, computer chips used in nearly every electronic device, the cell phone, instant messaging, voicemail technology, drip irrigation, desalination techniques, the regional infrastructure to support electric cars and many other agricultural, environmental and counter-terror solutions beneficial to the world. Moreover, Israelis have for decades offered their inventions and humanitarian relief efforts at no cost to undeveloped nations and those hit by widespread disaster. To boycott these tangible blessings would amount to the proverbial cutting off of one's nose to spite one's face. Does this achieve justice for either Israel or the nations? Does it reflect the good, pleasing or perfect will of God?

Does Israel's Military Violate Human Rights?¹⁶

The concept of human rights, in its original and pure expression, derives from the Word of God. Scripture attributes inherent worth and dignity to every human being, for all are created in His image. The Bible strongly advocates mercy and compassion for the needy and oppressed---but not at the expense of moral right and wrong. It does not advocate unsanctified mercy, or mercy extended in situations where it would ultimately prove unjust or unbeneficial to those who receive it.

Sometimes, receiving mercy involves taking responsibility for consequences, accountability and biblical rehabilitation. To illustrate, recall the story of the man who murders his parents, then pleads for mercy because he is an orphan. Or, consider what biblical mercy might look like to someone suffering from

an addiction to alcohol or illegal drugs. To respond to an addict's desperate plea for a "fix" by providing the substance to which he is addicted, and doing nothing more, might give temporary relief. But It would feed his addiction and worsen his plight. It would not represent or reflect biblical mercy.

Based originally on Judeo-Christian values of human worth, mercy and justice, an international human rights movement developed in the mid twentieth century. Its goals were laudable and some of its initiatives, very effective. As the movement evolved, however, it gradually jettisoned its biblical worldview for secular and universalist (globalist) goals. Humanistic and relativistic thinking replaced traditional values of moral right and wrong.

Soon, troubling ideologiesⁿ such as extremist Islam appeared on the scene. Without biblical moorings, universal-minded human rights organizations were unable or unwilling to withstand them. At the tip of the spear against both extremist Islam and secular globalism, Israel as a Jewish state has borne the brunt of today's sadly skewed human rights movement.

We have already viewed, in previous chapters, a small sampling of invectives issued against the Jewish state for alleged violations of human rights. We have seen how these indictments usually stem from the fact that since her rebirth, Israel has existed under constant threat of terror, war and annihilation. Surrounded by enemies vastly outnumbering her, Israel has had to maintain a strong military defense simply to stay alive. What's more, that defense force has had to deal with enemies who do not conform to traditional Western standards of military conduct, fair play, reason or logic. In this context, it can be accurately said that no nation in history that has faced com-

parable existential danger has tried so hard—and so successfully—to require its military to operate within the rule of law.¹⁷

Most of the world does not know that Israeli defense forces have adopted what is probably the highest ethical standard of any modern army.¹⁸ In the heat of conflict or fog of war, individual troops cannot or do not always abide by those standards. But this is true of any army, anywhere.

Israelis themselves are outraged when, even in a tense military situation, soldiers respond with genuinely excessive force.^o Public outcry upbraids the incident, military procedures are investigated and discipline is meted out to prevent similar mistakes. Even the courts get involved.

Most of the world does not know the Jewish state extends fair judicial access to Palestinians so they may file complaints in court about the Israeli military. The Israeli Supreme Court has taken what is probably the most active role of any high court in any democracy to strike the balance between state security and individual freedom. Most of the world does not know that the court often overrides the military to protect the rights of both Palestinian noncombatants and terrorist prisoners, sometimes at considerable risk to Jewish civilians and soldiers.¹⁹ In a very real sense, Israel has tried to protect Palestinian human rights more than Palestinian leaders themselves have tried to do.

Sometimes, charges of human rights abuse do not come in the context of a military operation, but from checkpoints designed to prevent Palestinian militants from sneaking into Israel.^p Checkpoint procedures can be difficult and complex. It is not uncommon for potential terrorists to disguise themselves as pregnant, sick or injured women. Some have tucked explosive devices in their underwear or private body parts; as a result, strip searches may be necessary. (What is a checkpoint

soldier to do when he or she has reason to suspect a Palestinian man, woman or child is a deathtrap in disguise?) Even apparent humanitarian emergencies have been used to stage terror operations, such as booby-trapping ambulances with explosives. At times, checkpoint passage can be tedious, tensions can run high and both sides can overreact. Does justice require that Israel bear full blame for the dilemma?

How Do Human Rights Organizations View the Conflict?

How have human rights organizations treated the Arab/Islamist/Palestinian–Israeli conflict? The UN Human Rights Council has made the Jewish state the one and only permanent standing item on its agenda.^q A portion of every session it holds is dedicated to examining and excoriating Israel. In 2003, the Council went so far as to pass a resolution that condones terror---if it is aimed at one country, Israel.^r In 2013 the Council declared that private companies around the world *must* consider boycotting and divesting from Israel because of its purportedly criminal occupation.^s

A prominent non-governmental organization, Human Rights Watch, issues condemnations almost monthly, and almost exclusively against Israel.^t The NGO's original founder has rebuked it for sacrificing its vision and mandate because of what he calls an "unjust obsession with Israel, the only nation in the Middle East that genuinely strives to safeguard human rights."²⁰ In like manner, Amnesty International publishes regular reports that single out and uniquely chastise the Jewish state for her presumed treatment of Palestinians and other Arabs. As of this writing, it has not issued comparable reports on human rights abuses in any other nation, including regimes

where citizens are systematically murdered for reasons having nothing to do with terror or existential threats.²¹

International human rights champion Natan Sharansky, once held prisoner by the former Soviet Union, cautions that human rights can be safeguarded only through clear moral criteria. He warns these criteria are rapidly eroding, evidenced by the double standard used against Israel and measures taken to delegitimize her by today's human rights activists.²²

Former prime minister of Spain José Aznar also decries today's eroding moral criteria:

To defend Israel's right to exist in peace, within secure borders, requires a degree of moral and strategic clarity that too often seems to have disappeared. . . . The West is going through a period of confusion . . . caused by . . . the rule of political correctness, by a multiculturalism that forces us to our knees before others, by a secularism which . . . blinds us even when we are confronted by jihadists promoting the most fanatical incarnation of their faith. To abandon Israel . . . would merely serve to illustrate how far we have sunk. . . . The West is what it is thanks to its Judeo-Christian roots. If the Jewish element of those roots is upturned and Israel is lost, then we are lost too. . . . Our fate is inextricably intertwined.²³

By its treatment of Israel, is it possible the human rights movement is chipping away at the very rights it originally sought to protect?^u Consider that as a result of global censure against her, Israel's hands are often tied in responding effectively to human rights violations of her own citizens. Only in the Jewish state do the following realities exist: an entire civilian population endures foreign militant attack—regularly—without reprisal; proportionately large swaths of land are re-

linquished to enemy states, with no guarantee of peace in return;^v terrorists are released from Israeli prisons as bargaining chips or gestures of good will, only to publicly announce their intent to kill more Jews; a country of only nine million suffers more than a million cyber terror attacks—targeting electrical, water, communications, medical, financial and other essential civilian infrastructures^w—*every day*; national borders are illegally breached by masses of militants and “peaceful civilians” marching in cahoots with them;²⁴ a nation is pressured to shrink itself to suicidally narrow borders that cannot be defended from invasion—while at the same time being threatened with nuclear genocide. Why?

A respected journalist who is decidedly *not* pro-Israel concludes, “Singling out Israel for opprobrium and international sanction—out of all proportion to any other party in the Middle East—is antisemitic, and not saying so is dishonest.”²⁵

When Is Criticism of Israel Antisemitic?

Most reasonably educated individuals would agree, at least publicly, that antisemitism is unjust and wrong. Not all criticism of Israel is antisemitic, however, and we ought not think that it is. We can care deeply for Israel while at the same time pointing out specific mistakes and flaws. Every Israeli I know, including every Messianic believer, disagrees with certain Israeli policies and practices—and sometimes, quite strongly. In an era when criticism of Israel and Zionism^x runs rampant, how do we discern when that criticism is fair and reasonable and when it is antisemitic?

Several nations and organizations have adopted criteria for distinguishing between fair criticism of Israel and the so-called,

new antisemitism. The US Department of State has set forth guidelines which can be especially helpful. The State Department regards criticism of Israel to be antisemitic when any one of “Three Ds” is present: (1) an expression that *delegitimizes* Israel; (2) a *double standard* used for Israel vis-à-vis other states; or (3) an attempt to *demonize* Israel by using images associated with classic antisemitism, making comparisons with Nazism or putting all the blame on Israel for the Islamist/Arab/Palestinian–Israeli conflict.^y

Sadly, across the nations and even in some churches, it seems the new antisemitism flourishes in full 3-D. Sometimes it is expressed blatantly, but other times it is subtle. To illustrate, in one widely circulated Internet video called “Freedom for Palestine,”²⁶ a church Gospel choir sings an impassioned hip-hop ballad about Israeli injustice and alleged crimes against humanity. Images depict dishonest and cruel caricatures of abuse committed against presumably peace-loving Palestinians. The victims are made to look like you and me, regular folk with whom we can easily identify. The subconscious message and subtle connotation is that we are all “Palestine.” So, when the Jewish state oppresses Palestinians, she oppresses us all. The video makes no mention of the ongoing and well documented, tortuous human rights abuse by Palestinian leaders; the ongoing Palestinian terror against Israel or agenda to annihilate her; or Israeli efforts to protect Palestinian human rights which, though strenuous, are not always successful. Rather, it demonizes and delegitimizes Israel, rousing resentment against her by the use of an unfair, double standard.

A less subtle but more puzzling phenomenon in the anti-Israel movement is that a small number of left-wing Jews, including Israelis, are some of its most vocal proponents. Almost always they identify as secularists,^z subscribing to a globalist

worldview that downplays faith, including fundamentalist Islam and Judaism. Anti-Israel commentators who are Jewish attract large audiences in both the Arab world and the West.^{aa} Please understand that the fact they are Jewish—and perhaps sincerely mean well—does not exempt them from antisemitism, however much they deny it.^{bb}

One of Israel's iconic, left-wing historian-activists, Benny Morris, spent decades denouncing Israeli actions toward Palestinians. Long regarded as an intellectual leader in the pro-Palestinian movement, Morris recanted much of his life's work in 2012. Publicly professing his disappointment, he concluded the core reason for the conflict and resulting injustice suffered by Palestinians was their own, persistent refusal to accept the existence of a Jewish state.^{cc}

Morris joins a growing number of disillusioned liberals.^{dd} They have been forced to rethink their idealism and face facts honestly. You and I will have to do the same if we want moral justice in our day. Without sacrificing compassion, we will have to engage our God-given intellect, ask Him to sharpen our discernment and stand for righteousness based on truth.

Pursuing Justice

Despite ubiquitous antisemitism around her, Israel wants desperately to make peace with her neighbors, especially the Palestinian people.^{ee} It is aptly said that if the Arabs put down their weapons today, there would be no more violence; if the Jews put down their weapons today, there would be no more Israel.

The Arab-Israeli conflict cannot be accurately described as a mere cycle of violence. It is about the survival of the Jews on a minuscule slice of their historical homeland. It is about God's

covenant promises contested by His enemies, especially Satan himself.

Israelis say there are two possible solutions to the conflict: the realistic and the miraculous. The realistic solution, they quip, involves divine intervention; the miraculous, a voluntary agreement between the parties themselves.

As we near the end of the age and spiritual warfare heightens, underlying currents of antisemitism (as well as anti-Christian forces) are bound to intensify. Secularism, radical Islam, globalism and more will increasingly impinge on biblical values of justice. The Father is sovereignly allowing individuals and nations to make choices that will chart eternal destinies.

Such things must come to pass, and as they do, there is good news. When darkness covers the earth, God's glorious light rises and shines upon the Bride He is preparing for His Son.

This beautiful Bride includes His elect from the Palestinian Christian Church. Already, the Palestinian Body of believers dramatically impacts the Arab-Israeli conflict and entire Christian world. To them we now turn.

Countering Christian Zionism: Christian Palestinianism

God's gifts and his call are irrevocable.

Romans 11:29

One of my personal joys is worshiping and fellowshiping with Palestinians and other Arabic speaking believers who love and follow Jesus. In Messiah we are one family, healed and reconciled in the beauty of His grace. But Palestinian Christians who carry God's heart for the Jews comprise a very small remnant within the Palestinian church. Because of their love for Israel, they not only endure persecution from Muslims, but harassment from other Palestinian Christians.^a They truly deserve and need our sacrificial love and support. I urge you to pray for them.

Sadly, the majority of Palestinian Christians do not claim a spiritual rebirth experience or intimate walk with the Lord. Instead, they identify as Christian mainly in a cultural sense. Devout evangelicals, Pentecostals and charismatic believers in other parts of the world would consider them nominal in their

faith. Political-nationalist aspirations are generally more important to them than relational surrender to Messiah, regular and personal study of His Word, or sharing the Gospel. Consequently, they rarely care about the Jewish people or the Jewish state.

The Traditional Palestinian Church

Traditional Palestinian Christianity has done little to quell the conflict with Israel. Sadly, traditional church sermons include remarks against the Jews^b such as these:

 Palestine is from the [Mediterranean] sea to the [Jordan] river. . . . They [Jews] have no right to live or settle in it. . . . We encourage our youth to participate in the resistance, to carry out martyrdom attacks and participate in removing the occupation. . . . Martyrdom operations are an excellent and a good way to resist the Zionists.¹

 Had we lived in the days when the church was a church . . . a Crusader war crueler than the Crusader wars of the past would have been waged against Israel. I, the Christian Palestinian, say in all rage and daring to the Christians of the world: You are loathsome! You are contemptible! . . . Our Jesus is not their Jesus. . . . Our God is not their God.²

 The traditional Palestinian Christian view reflects the widespread anti-Jewish theology taught and embraced by the historical Church across the Middle East. With rare exception, traditional denominations in the Middle East have not been affected by Israel-supportive views that arose after the Protestant Reformation, and later, the Holocaust of World War II. Accordingly, most Middle East churches still adhere to classic

replacement theology. Here is what some of them preach:

This religion [Judaism] is the enemy of God, the enemy of people, and the enemy of Christianity. . . . As Jesus once said to the Jews, “You are the sons of Satan, and you do the will of your father Satan.”³

The existence of Israel is an historic sin. . . . Israel managed to drug the leaders of those Christian countries . . . because of their surly nature. Israel planted among them the spirit of hatred and rage. . . . If only God would intervene to defend the world from these enemies of peace.⁴

Terrorism . . . against Christians . . . has nothing to do with Islam. . . . It is actually a conspiracy planned by Zionists and some Christians with Zionist orientations, and it aims at undermining and giving a bad image of Islam.⁵

In these diatribes I hear a crying need for the Gospel to reach a pained people groping in darkness. May Messiah's healing light and love reach deep in their hearts. Christian or not, may they come to know the blessing He has reserved for them through, of all peoples and nations, Israel.

Palestinian Evangelicals

Meanwhile, traditional anti-Jewish teachings in churches across the Middle East have strongly influenced most Palestinians who identify specifically as evangelicals. As a result, a new theology with varying expressions has emerged out of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Messianic Jews (and others) around the world keenly disagree with this theology in all its forms. It is not wrong to disagree, but we must do so humbly and gently, in a gracious spirit toward brothers and sisters with whom we

differ. As we look at facts and issues in this chapter which may surprise you and stir emotion, let us remember at all times to lean into God's love for all involved.

Given the difficult religious and political climate in which they live, Palestinian evangelicals are confronted with a dilemma. Should they side with Palestinian nationalism and its aspirations for a sovereign state or with a biblical view supportive of Israel?

Nearly all have resolved the issue by aligning with their Muslim compatriots and denying God's present restoration of Israel. Any former Jewish ties to the land, they say, have been superseded by new realities. These realities are sometimes said to be the Church, sometimes Palestinians and their right to a state, or sometimes Jesus Himself.

At the core of their reasoning is a hermeneutic of the Bible virtually the same as that used in replacement theology. Accordingly, a Christian Palestinian spokesman concludes: "[The] concept of a promised land is expired to give way to the new concept of the kingdom of God, which resides in every believer's heart."⁶ The result is a new 21st century form of supersessionism, with variants collectively known as "fulfillment theology."

As a whole, Palestinian evangelical fulfillment theology teaches that all Old Covenant promises, especially those about land, have been completely fulfilled in the Person of Messiah. These promises, they say, are now expressed *exclusively* in the kingdom that exists inside believers' hearts.⁷ As we saw in chapter 3, this perspective is correct in that it reflects God's promises find *consummate* fulfillment in Yeshua (see Ephesians 1:22–23) and have *a certain* fulfillment for all believers in the spiritual realm. But the perspective is quite incorrect inso-

far as it denies these promises find their *fundamental* fulfillment in Israel, in the physical realm. So while Palestinian fulfillment doctrines differ slightly from classic replacement theology, their practical effect is the same. They teach that Israel's calling is superseded and done away with, leaving no biblical justification for her existence today. In so doing, they open wide the door to Christian antisemitism.

To believers in the nations, Palestinian Christians often say something like this: "I am not against the Jewish people and I am not antisemitic. I do not believe in replacement theology. But the Bible does not justify the existence of a Jewish state today. Don't you want to hear how your Christian brothers and sisters are suffering due to unjust Israeli abuse?"

Sadly, the narrative they share is usually a litany of unforgiving accusations against Israel—but *not* against militant Islam. Tales are told, preserved in dour, personal pain, blaming Israel for every perceived misfortune in life.

I believe Palestinian Christians' theology must be addressed, their pain recognized and healed, and their destiny in God restored. By His grace, let's try to begin.

Christian Palestinian Fulfillment-Liberation Theology

Frequently, Palestinian evangelical views on Israel incorporate into fulfillment theology what is known as liberation theology. Liberation theology esteems justice for the oppressed as a foremost—typically *the* foremost—theme of Scripture. Social justice becomes the lens through which the entire Bible is read. At all times and in all matters, God is seen as taking the side of the poor and oppressed.^c Combining liberation with fulfillment

theology to the Palestinian plight,^d variants of the new anti-Israel theologies are known as Palestinian fulfillment theology, Palestinian liberation theology or Christian Palestinianism.^e

Palestinian theologies teach that Old Covenant prophecies concerning Israel and the Kingdom “vanish in Jesus Christ, who has fulfilled them.”⁸ One of their top scholars writes: “The New Testament relocates the properties of the Holy Land and discovers them in Christ Himself.”⁹

Because Jesus fulfills the Old Covenant, its original meaning to its original hearers is said to be irrelevant. While exception may be made for certain ethical teachings, prophetic promises originally made to the Jews are to be reinterpreted. They now apply exclusively to Jesus, because they were and are fulfilled in Him.^f But with all due respect, the reasoning is not scripturally sound and the logic is circular.

With every Old Covenant passage having been fulfilled in the Person of Messiah, it is not the Church that disinherits or replaces Israel this time, but Yeshua Himself. This belief permits fulfillment advocates to distance themselves from classic replacement theology. Christians only indirectly supersede Israel as recipients of Old Covenant promises because Jesus has already transferred the promises into Himself.

Certain quandaries, however, are caused by this interpretive scheme. To illustrate, consider Zechariah 14:3-4, which pertains to Israel's restoration: “Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations, as He fights on a day of battle. On that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem.” In context, the passage refers to a future, apocalyptic battle in which Yeshua comes to rescue Jerusalem. There is no past or literal fulfillment of this prophecy.

Palestinian fulfillment theology would reason that in Zech-

ariah 14:3-4, Jesus fights in a battle taking place inside of Himself, where the Mount of Olives has now relocated. In the process, His feet (perhaps symbolically) stand inside of His own divine Person. But this interpretation makes no sense, as many supersessionists themselves admit. Any battle occurring in the Person of Messiah was fought in connection with the Crucifixion, which did not occur on the Mount of Olives. Zechariah 14:3-4 can only be fairly understood as a prophecy yet to be fulfilled, on the physical ground of the literal Mount of Olives.

As you can see, Palestinian fulfillment-liberation theology interprets the Bible allegorically to a large extent. Recall that an allegorical approach rejects the Hebraic-based interpretation of Scripture taught by the Scriptures themselves (see chapter 3). It disregards the plain understanding, or fundamental, literal-grammatical-historical level of interpretation. Because the allegorical method is primarily symbolic and subjective, “Israel” is not seen as referring prophetically to the physical land or people of Israel, the Jews or their restoration. Such an approach to Bible interpretation is intrinsically disposed toward delegitimizing Israel’s existence today. Concerning the Jews, it denies that “God’s gifts and call are irrevocable” (Romans 11:29).

Some Christian Palestinians adopt a less symbolic hermeneutic but hold to a preterist view. Strict preterism teaches that some biblical prophecies, including those of which Jesus spoke, do have literal fulfillments, but those fulfillments have already entirely occurred.⁵ Preterist doctrine denies any future for national Israel or a last days’ restoration of the Jews. Unlike classic replacement theology, preterism can allow Israel to be superseded by any group presenting a supposedly valid claim, including Palestinians. If liberation theology is added to the

mix, God's favor is dispensed to whomever is the perceived victim. The reason for the perceived victimization is not necessarily relevant. (Recall again the orphaned killer.)

Sympathy with Islam

Like other Arab Christians in the Middle East, most Palestinian evangelicals freely admit they rarely, if ever, read the Old Covenant. They say politics and pain make it difficult—if not impossible—for them to study it, much less use it as a source of theology.¹⁰ Many dismiss it as a Jewish book based largely on fabricated myth, not the inspired Word of God.¹¹ ^h Those who do read the Old Covenant often selectively delete personally troubling words such as “Israel” and “Zion.”¹² Therefore, the Jewish state is rarely, if ever, viewed through the lens of Scripture. For some Christian Palestinians, only one aspect of the Hebrew Scriptures still has major significance: the link between Israel's sin and her exile from the land.

At this writing, most Palestinian believers openly confess they do not study prophecy or think much about the end times.¹³ Most do not expect Jesus to physically return to Jerusalem.¹⁴ This expectation, they argue, has resulted in tremendous injustice to them because it encourages a Jewish restoration to the Holy Land and Christian Zionism.

Sadly, to the extent our Palestinian brothers and sisters avoid or reinterpret the Old Covenant, they will likely lack a solid foundation in the Scriptures. As a result, they may be prone to harbor undue sympathy for Islam.ⁱ A small minority in a Muslim majority, they can be intimidated or desperate to prove their patriotism, which necessarily involves resistance against Israel. To gain their countrymen's respect, some have consciously or unconsciously embraced anti-Christian and

anti-Jewish perspectives reflective of fundamental Islam.^{15 j}

Consequently, while most Christian Palestinians insist their problems are due to Israeli occupation, they almost never mention or criticize Islam. Rarely, if ever, do they attribute responsibility to the Palestinian leadership---despite their government's known, widespread corruption and abusive treatment of its people. They disregard the connection between their leaders' relentless campaign to destroy the Jewish state and the "oppressive" occupation that exists as a result. It is hard to dismiss the influence of an antisemitic stronghold over our Palestinian brothers and sisters.

Privately, a Palestinian pastor once confessed to me he had some concern for the future of his very much hoped for, free and sovereign state. He acknowledged that when Israeli administration in the West Bank ends, an Islamist government could easily come to power. In that event, he and others suspect life for Christians may be much worse than it already has been. But, he said, Palestinian believers want their state and will deal with the Islamist problem if it happens.

How, I wondered, will they deal with the problem if they are suddenly forced by sharia law into dhimmi, second-class citizen status?^k Sadly, their brethren in Gaza are now dealing with it through extreme intimidation, daily harassment, forced conversions and at times, martyrdom.^l Under Gaza's Islamist regime, the Christian population there rapidly plummeted by almost 50 percent¹⁶. Some have actually sought political asylum in Israel.¹⁷

Justice for the Foreigner

Christian Palestinians often complain that Israel fails to follow her own code of moral justice. The Hebrew Scriptures, they

point out, require that Jews not mistreat or oppress a stranger or foreigner in the land (see Exodus 22:21; 23:9). They say Israel has wrongly violated this command and they suffer treacherously as a result.

To be sure, God tells Israel to extend compassion, protection and the equivalent of human rights to the stranger sojourning among her (see Jeremiah 7:6–7). But in context, the Scriptures presuppose the stranger has first submitted to Yahweh and the governance of His people. Such an individual (a *ger*) received the privileges and protections of Israel and her God.^m A *ger* inevitably acknowledged Israel's existence as a Jewish nation-state. Consequently, he or she was given privileges not accorded to other foreigners.

A male *ger* could obtain fully equal status to a native Israeli by circumcision, which also placed him and his family in covenant relationship with God. It is the same today, with conversion to Judaism qualifying a foreigner for Israeli citizenship. A prime example in the Scriptures of a *ger* is Ruth.

Israel was not to tolerate, however, a violent stranger refusing to submit to the ways of God. Especially repugnant to Him was the idolatrous foreigner who polluted the land by worshiping false gods—such as the allah of extremist Islam (see Exodus 23:32–33a). The foreigner who despised God's people and whose aim was their annihilation could never claim protection as a *ger*. Such a person was an enemy.

Collectively, Palestinians do not qualify as *ger*-type foreigners and it would be wrong for Israel to treat them as such. My prayer, however, is that more and more Palestinian believers will come to embrace God's Word and heart for the Jews. I pray for the day when our brothers and sisters across the security wall align with the spirit of Ruth (or Rahab or Jethro) in the Bible. In that case, I believe the Jewish state would welcome

them with affection and appreciation. Such Palestinian lovers of Yeshua could uniquely display and reveal to Israel the true face of Messiah she has long desired to see.

Christian Palestinian Movement

Sadly, evangelical Palestinian teachings do not currently depict a Jesus that could warm the heart of any Jew. Some of their most esteemed leaders teach the following:

Jesus was a Palestinian, His Jewish identity merely a misconception of Western Christianity.¹⁸

“Real Christianity exists only in Palestine.”¹⁹

Christian Zionism “is not connected to Christianity in any way.”²⁰

“Jesus is on the cross again with thousands of crucified Palestinians around Him. . . . Palestine has become one huge Golgatha. The Israeli government crucifixion system operates daily.”²¹

“Zionism is just another form of racism.”²²

“The notion that God has purposes for the Jewish people is at best deeply flawed and at worst heretical. . . . Those who insist that this is the case . . . are no different from white South Africans who still try to justify apartheid on biblical grounds.”²³

The New Covenant cancels any plans for the Jewish people.²⁴

Evangelical Palestinians generally express strong resentment toward Christian Zionists and other believers who support the Jewish state.¹ Conferences are convened, personal tales poignantly told, books published and videos produced, specifically to quench evangelical love for Israel. Unique strategies

exist to target justice-minded charismatic and Pentecostal believers.^o Participants, sponsors and spokesmen in the movement include leading Western theologians and seminary professors, most of whom are known for their anti-Israel, even antisemitic, views.^p As a result, Israel now faces international opposition in the form of Christian Palestinianism.

Palestinian evangelicals released a formal document entitled "Christian Palestinian Manifesto" in 2012.²⁵ The purpose of the Manifesto was to challenge evangelicals to bring "peace, justice and reconciliation in Palestine and Israel." At the same time, the document denies any covenantal inheritance of the Jewish people to the land of Israel. It explicitly states that "the occupation" is the "core issue" of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. There is no mention of the historical and ongoing Palestinian agenda to annihilate the Jewish state, which, from Israel's perspective, is the core reason—and probably the only reason—for the conflict. The document is silent about any legal or moral right Israel may have to exist.

The Manifesto includes a statement suggesting that antisemitism and delegitimization of Israel are wrong, the implication being that Christian Palestinian denunciation of Israel is not antisemitic. But in context, the statement rings hollow, if not hypocritical. Israeli Messianic believers do not regard the Manifesto as a fair call to peace, justice or reconciliation.

The Christian Palestinian Manifesto is a product of recurring and globally influential conferences in Bethlehem called Christ at the Checkpoint. Satellite gatherings of Christ at the Checkpoint are held in churches and other venues around the world. Cosponsored by theologians from the West, the conferences use security checkpoints to symbolize alleged Israeli oppression and purported evils of Zionism.^q

Christ at the Checkpoint is a force to be reckoned with. In

2012, its speakers included a head representative of the World Evangelical Alliance, parent group for the largest evangelical network in the US; the National Association of Evangelicals;⁵ and Dr. Stephen Sizer, one of the most vocal anti-Israel and anti-Jewish Western theologians in the world.²⁶ Christian supporters of Israel who went to the gathering regarded the presentations as not only biblically unsound and unfairly anti-Israel, but blatantly antisemitic.⁵ In what some termed a hollow gesture, but others saw as a step toward reconciliation, two Israeli Messianic leaders were invited to speak. Attempting to defend the Jewish state, their presentations were strongly refuted.

Another example of a growing international Christian Palestinian organization is Kairos. Endorsed by leaders of thirteen mainline denominations, Kairos operates according to the belief that “Israel’s occupation of Palestinian land is a sin against God and humanity.” Its documents make no mention of any sin on the part of Palestinian terrorists or Islamists in prolonging the occupation. Written in strident terms used historically by Christians to stir violence against Jews, Kairos’ charter document says that any theology legitimizing Israel’s presence in the West Bank is not Christian.²⁷ In a 2012 interview televised internationally, a Kairos spokesman insisted their document was not antisemitic—simply because the piece of paper on which it was written is nonviolent.²⁸

Joining the Christian Palestinian movement are many Arab Christian, traditional denominational leaders from Israel. Collectively, they make no secret of their aim to overturn the pro-Israel position of the global Body of Christ and counteract Christian Zionism (or as it is sometimes called, Biblical Zionism).[†] As a result, Bible schools and seminaries throughout the West now teach Christian Palestinianism as a valid grid through

which to view the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The movement's impact has spread from the Church into secular Western society. It gained fast and furious momentum in at the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas War with its public release of "A Call to Repentance," urging Christians around the world to repent of blessing or supporting Israel.

"A Call to Repentance" was published and circulated mere days after Hamas' barbaric slaughter and terror kidnap of hundreds of Israeli civilians on October 7, 2023. A masterful compilation of untruths, deceptive distortions and false accusations about Israel, it makes no mention of any wrongdoing by Hamas. The letter's Christian authors thinly disguise their longstanding alignment with the Islamist goal of a Palestinian state from the river to the sea. [Create new endnote: https://sabeel.org/a-call-for-repentance-an-open-letter-from-palestinian-christians-to-western-church-leaders-and-theologians/](https://sabeel.org/a-call-for-repentance-an-open-letter-from-palestinian-christians-to-western-church-leaders-and-theologians/)

Western Response to Christian Palestinianism

Many Jews and Christians alike believe that Christian Palestinianism aggressively promotes antisemitism, replacement theology and the delegitimization of Israel.²⁹ They say it represents a resurgence of the Church's historically anti-Jewish teaching that has led in the past to the widespread murder of Jews.

At minimum, it seems appropriate to ask whether Palestinian fulfillment theologies heed the exhortation of Romans 11:17–25 not to be ignorant or arrogant toward Israel, but to tremble in humility. One Christian Zionist leader comments on the issue:

The big lie is Christian Palestinianism, the anti-Israel, pro-Palestinian crusade going on in the Church today that will say from one corner of its mouth, “We love the Jewish people” and from the other corner of its mouth, “We hate Israel.” That is not possible. You cannot love the Jewish people and hate Israel.³⁰

An influential rabbi in the US has stated that Christian Palestinianism has so impacted the Church that post-Holocaust relations between mainline Protestants and Jews in America have hit their lowest levels. He did not know if the relationship could recover.³¹ Similarly, Israeli Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, a leader in the Jewish-Christian interfaith movement, explains:

As long as you believe in replacement theology . . . and that the Jews no longer stand in covenantal relationship to God, then [you believe] we have no right to be in Israel and you join our enemies.³²

As a follower of Jesus, an Israeli and a mother, I am sobered to realize how many of my evangelical brothers and sisters are urging the world to take action that, apart from divine intervention, could lead to the slaughter of millions of my people, including my family. Now, to my knowledge, none of them is suggesting outright that any of us be killed. But as Rabbi Riskin remarks, some have joined forces with the enemies of Israel who aim at nothing less.

In no small part, the spread of Christian Palestinianism is related to the Western trend that dismisses the notion of absolute truth. Today, more and more Christians say the Bible cannot be read according to any objective hermeneutical standard—because there are no objective standards. Each individual and each culture perceives reality differently, so any given standard is as valid as the next. By this reasoning, Palestinian

victimization provides a framework for Scripture interpretation just as sound as any other. Israeli Messianic scholar Lisa Loden describes the dilemma:

The question of whether or not the [Bible] text has meaning in and of itself, [or] if meaning is derived from the interaction between the reader and the text, is a crucial question in contemporary hermeneutical studies. The primacy of the text has been the gold standard of biblical scholarship . . . but is currently under examination and attack.³³

Forgiveness at the Cross

Palestinian believers freely share that their theology stems in large measure from personal pain and offense. To be sure, some have suffered much and are in need of compassionate help. God does not want us belittling or ignoring them. At the same time, let us remember that they are not the first Christians in history to feel offended or victimized. Sadly, countless believers have unjustly suffered extreme, prolonged pain. But they did not seek to reinvent the message of the Scriptures to accommodate their suffering. To the contrary, those who identified intimately with Messiah in their deepest distress often found victory and gave the world a lasting witness of the Gospel.

Please do not misunderstand: I am not suggesting that Palestinian believers stay silent in the face of injustice. Nor do I advocate that we do nothing to mitigate the evils they endure. I merely point out that Yeshua is greater than any of our circumstances. He can give us the power, strength and wisdom in love, peace and joy to overcome those circumstances. Personally, when I have unjustly suffered prolonged, seemingly

unbearable pain, I have heard the Lord lovingly ask: *Are unforgiveness and self-pity going to limit your response to My ways? If you meet Me at the Cross with your pain, I will transform it.*

Some of my most intimate, life-changing encounters with Yeshua have been at the Cross as I released forgiveness toward those who deeply mistreated, abused or offended me. Is it not possible the Cross of Yeshua could offer our Palestinian brothers and sisters overcoming grace and comfort as well? I recently asked a Palestinian pastor this question, after spending hours listening to him and his church members share personal grievances about the Jewish state. He replied that Palestinian preachers generally did not discuss taking pain and offense about Israel to the Cross. With his next breath, he said they probably should start.

A New Christian Zionism

Some Christian or Biblical Zionists attribute new Palestinian theologies to demonic opposition against the fulfillment of God's promises to the Jews. As we have seen, the devil works hard, and in many ways, to discourage Israel's restoration. No doubt he fears the day Jewish people in restored Jerusalem welcome Messiah back (see Matthew 23:39). Nevertheless, I believe we must forthrightly hear our Palestinian brothers and sisters. We must embrace them with prayerful love, discernment and practical help. In the process, God might even use them to point out areas in *us* that He wants to mature.

What might we learn from Palestinian believers and how can we best respond to them? First, we can acknowledge that certain Israeli policies, forged in the context of the state's struggle to survive, have caused unwarranted suffering and

sometimes, terrible abuse. We must not ignore or excuse Israel's disobedience, reflected in those policies, to God's ethical commands. We can focus support on Israeli policy makers who advance biblical righteousness.

Second, some Christian Zionists have in the past expressed little concern for Palestinians due to an over-emphasis on Israel's fulfillment of Bible prophecy. Because most Palestinian believers reject the idea of Jewish covenant election, they do not regard Israel's existence as anything prophetic at all. They feel they have been marginalized by the international Church and many deeply resent it. To rectify the past, we must seek the Lord for compassionate, honest, just and wise responses. We can seek Spirit led opportunities to engage with Palestinian believers. We can pray for and otherwise aid reconciliation efforts between Christian Palestinians and Israeli Messianic Jews.

Third, we are to remember that being pro-Israel does not—and must not—mean we are anti-Palestinian. It has been aptly said that if our love for Israel means we cannot love Palestinians, then something is wrong with our love for Israel.³⁴ If we lack love for Palestinians because we have been offended or injured by them, we must take that to the Cross.

Last but certainly not least, we must remember the Lord does not want our ultimate focus on either Israel or putative Palestine, but on *Him*. Those who care passionately for the Palestinian (or Jewish) people may be tempted to confuse love with unsanctified mercy. Unsanctified mercy seeks to alleviate suffering at any cost, regardless of the injustice that may result. It does not align with God's will or His Word. It does not flow from a focus on Him.

Christlike love for Palestinian Christians will not be expressed by aligning with them against Israel. God does not want us to enable or empower wrong attitudes or actions out

of soulish sympathy, even for those who genuinely hurt. His love for the Palestinians must be expressed by helping them personally encounter Messiah and His heart for the Jews.

When Palestinians understand God's love, mercy and grace for Israel, I believe they will experience it at new levels for themselves. Healing from heaven will flow to them. Palestinian Christians will begin to walk in the manifest power of the Gospel of the Kingdom as never before.

A leading pro-Palestinian theologian has stated that Christians must choose one side or the other: Israel's or Palestine's. He writes, "The question is, am I as a Christian going to view the Middle East through the lens of prophecy or the lens of justice?"³⁵ In response, I propose it is time to drop the dichotomy. God does not choose between presumably pro-Palestinian justice and presumably pro-Israel prophecy. His immense love magnificently reconciles biblical justice with biblical prophecy. It is not a matter of either/or, but both/and. In the end, each evidences the reality of the Gospel. But neither is itself the Gospel.

The Gospel of the Kingdom revolves around Yeshua and His glorious restoration of all nations in mercy and grace. Which offers Palestinians, Israelis and everyone else a future and a hope.

13

A Future and a Hope

The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.

Romans 11:26–27

Long ago, when the Jewish people were exiled from the Promised Land and heartbroken in distress, their prophets received spectacular visions of hope. Jeremiah foresaw an era of blessed restoration and peace:

I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. . . . I will gather you from all the nations and . . . bring you back . . . to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive.

Jeremiah 29:11, 14 NKJV

Ezekiel envisioned the Jewish people regathered and revived from around the world. They would be restored physically to the land, then spiritually to the Lord:

“These bones are the people of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are

dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' . . . 'My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it.'"

Ezekiel 37:11–14

"For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."

Ezekiel 36:24–26

Israel's reestablishment after the Holocaust, with its thousands of mass graves into which Jewish corpses were piled, strikingly parallels Ezekiel's vision of restoration. The prophet saw a valley of dry bones, physically and spiritually dead. But God miraculously revived the bones. Then He settled His people back in their land (see Ezekiel 37:1–14). Israel's restoration would have nothing to do with righteousness on her part. It would be solely by mercy and grace.

God's mercy is so magnificent and His grace is so great, that as we have seen, some of us are tempted to stumble over it. We see Israel's shortcomings and her sin. We wonder why, if He is truly restoring her, she is not walking in His holy ways. We hear some Christians who oppose the Jewish state insist her rebirth was not a miracle but a mistake—a strictly human and sorely misplaced endeavor. What are we to think? Does Israel's modern-day restoration fulfill Bible prophecy, or not?

Does Israel's Restoration Fulfill Prophecy?¹

The tension that can appear to exist between Israel's restoration and her present condition of spiritual unbelief is easily resolved if we read the Bible according to proper interpretive principles (see chapter 3). We are not to string isolated verses randomly together. We are to carefully consider the context of prophetic promises and their meaning in relation to the overall teaching of Scripture.

Ezekiel, for example, says that God will return the Jewish people to their land before He fully restores their faith. First, He will "gather them from all countries." After that, He will "sprinkle clean water" on them and "put a new spirit" in them. Other Hebrew prophets confirm this sequence of events. They describe a physical regathering of the Jews before the end of the age, contested by the nations and culminating in apocalyptic warfare. After they are back in the land, Israel collectively turns to Messiah in the context of a major military assault (see Zechariah 12). The Second Coming of Jesus follows (see Zechariah 14).

The New Covenant describes a similar end times scenario. Yeshua declares, "Jerusalem will be trampled on by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:24). Messiah foresees that when the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled, the trampling of Jerusalem ends. First, a predominant Jewish presence is restored to Jerusalem. After that, the city welcomes Him back (see Matthew 23:39).

Similarly, Romans 11:26–27 reveals that in the future, the Jewish people are living in the land when "the deliverer will come from Zion" and "turn godlessness away from Jacob." None of these events can be interpreted with biblical integrity as having already occurred in the past. The reality we see today

reflects their last days' unfolding.

To understand how it is that God regathers Israel to her land in unbelief and then allows her to sin in it, recall the difference between the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. The promise of land ownership^a (more accurately, steward ownership) to Israel in the Abrahamic covenant is unconditional. In the Mosaic covenant, however, Israel's ability to physically inhabit or live in the land she owns is conditioned on her obedience to God. To the extent she disobeys Him and sins, she may lose land or even be exiled from it. But if exile occurs, it is temporary, not permanent (see Deuteronomy 28–30). On account of God's covenant promise with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, He eventually returns the Jews back to their land.

God promised that a singular time would come in which Israel would be regathered to her land, follow in His ways, and never again be uprooted (see 2 Samuel 7:10–16; Jeremiah 31:21–40; Amos 9:11–15; Romans 11:26–27). This is the prophetic promise He has been graciously working out since the inception of Zionism over a century ago. But the promise is not instantaneous. It is progressing gradually over time. Now, will God have to dissolve the Jewish state because, during the period of her restoration, most Israelis are not yet following Him? Of course not; that would undermine the whole process.

As God regathers the Jews, He is gradually saving and growing a remnant among them that loves and follows Yeshua. Israeli believers are maturing and preparing the nation for spiritual revival. To upend Israel would upend the believing remnant as well.

Bear in mind that for much of her history, Israel sinned grievously while living in the Promised Land. She was not walking in holy obedience when Joshua led her into Canaan (see Joshua 7:1, 11). Many years later, after her first exile, she was

still not collectively faithful to God when He regathered her. The prophet Ezra was part of this regathering. He told the Jews their return to the land had nothing to do with any righteousness of their own. They had come back because “grace ha[d] been shown from the Lord our God” (Ezra 9:8; see also 9:1–15 NKJV).

After their return in Ezra, the Jewish people lived in the land for five hundred years. During that time only a remnant faithfully served the Lord. Israel’s spiritual condition then, after her first regathering, was comparable to her condition today at her second regathering. For better or worse, her collective unbelief at this phase of her restoration is consistent with the Scriptures. This does not excuse Israel’s sin, but highlights God’s covenant mercy and grace that sustains her today. All for the display of His limitless, majestic glory.

Twice Cursed and Divinely Reversed

Israel’s present regathering parallels Bible prophecy in still other ways. God’s Word describes two—and only two—exiles and returns to the land (see Isaiah 11:11). The first exile occurred from 723 to 586 BC. The Jews who returned from it under Ezra’s guidance came mostly from one place, Babylon.

The second exile, which occurred in 70 AD, dispersed the Jews all over the earth. This is the dispersion that would end when God regathered His people “from *all* the countries” (Ezekiel 36:24, emphasis mine). So, quite unlike the first, the second regathering is global in nature. Not just Ezekiel, but other prophets were given similar revelations of a worldwide return in the last days (see Isaiah 11:10–12; Jeremiah 16:15; 23:3; 29:14).

The Zionist movement, starting in the late 1800s, represents

the only regathering in history of the Jewish people from all nations. It has taken place on a global scale. It is consistent with, and appears to reflect, the second regathering described in the Hebrew Scriptures and affirmed in the New Covenant.

The Zionist movement is not, as some allege, a mistake of history in which the Jewish people regathered themselves. Our God is sovereign over the rise and fall of nations (see Acts 17:26–27). He alone can remove His covenant people from their land or return them back to it.

Messianic scholar Dr. Michael L. Brown points out² that God describes Israel’s exile from the land as His curse upon her,^b and the Church has historically regarded it as such. If He does not reverse His own curse, then, as the Church has taught for nearly two millennia, it cannot possibly be lifted.^c No human enterprise can withstand the decree of our omnipotent King. If the Jews are regathered to their land, He is ultimately responsible for it.

To be sure, God uses human beings in the process, just as He used King Cyrus, Artaxerxes and others to facilitate Israel’s first regathering (see Ezra 1:1–4; Nehemiah 2:4–9). In Israel’s restoration today, the loving aid of believers from the nations, in addition to the support of presidents and prime ministers of some nations, are signs the “time to show favor” to Zion has come (Psalm 102:13; see Isaiah 49:22). International blessing and succor points presciently to the fullness of the Gentiles. The fullness of the Gentiles, in turn, suggests that the times of the Gentiles are starting to come to a close.

Finally, if we insist that Israel’s present restoration does not align with God’s will, it seems we must accuse Him of doing a sloppy job with His curses. But that is not His way. The Almighty has not been outwitted by zealous Zionists, Holocaust-guilt rid-

den Western nations or anyone else. He has merely and magnificently done what He said He would do, reversing His curse and fulfilling His Word.

A Work in Progress

Some prophecies are fulfilled in the blink of an eye, but others take decades or centuries or longer periods of time. Israel's restoration to the land and to the Lord is not an instantaneous event. The Jewish state is very much a work in progress.³ Beginning over a century ago, the process could take much longer than we expect. During this period, human beings exercise free will and demonic opposition exists. As a result, temporary setbacks occur. Sometimes it looks like Israel takes two or three steps forward, followed by one step backward.

At this writing, for example, the Jewish state has relinquished most of the land she acquired in wars she was forced to defensively fight. In addition, the nation is beset by much of the same sin affecting the rest of the world—and the Church. There is idolatry, ethical and sexual immorality, systematic corruption at institutional levels, widespread abortion, human trafficking, and more. But if we deny the prophetic truth of Israel's restoration because Jews still sin, to be fair, we ought to also deny the prophetic truth of the Gospel because Christians still sin. (Just to be clear, I suggest neither.)

The Scriptures teach that Israel's restoration will not reach its complete fulfillment until after Messiah returns.^d Meanwhile, those who doubt her regathering is genuinely from Him because it is taking so long might consider Yeshua's advice to those of His day who were similarly perplexed. A group of Jewish messengers once approached Him to ask if He was the "Coming One," or if they should expect another. Yeshua told

them to go back and report what they had seen and heard: The lame walked, the blind received sight, the deaf could hear and the poor received good news (see Luke 7:20–22). He added, “Blessed is he who is not offended because of Me” (verse 23 NKJV).

What have we seen and heard about modern Israel? For the first time in two thousand years, Jews have returned from the ends of the earth to their ancestral home. Their language has been revived. Against all odds, Israel has defended herself from millions of mortal enemies surrounding her. In many ways the nation has thrived, rebuilding ancient cities and making deserts bloom. Fruit from the Promised Land blesses every continent on earth, from oranges and grapes to biomedical/technological breakthroughs. Jerusalem is mostly not trampled down. Since the city was returned to Israel in 1967, more Jews have come to faith in Yeshua than in the previous 1,900 years combined. Indigenous believers now worship Messiah across the land. Their numbers are growing. Some go out to the nations, teaching and preaching the Gospel. Blessed is he who is not offended because of what God is doing in our day.

Can We Be Neutral Bystanders?

To those tempted with offense at Israel's progressive restoration, the one-chapter book of Obadiah almost shouts with prophetic advice. Obadiah writes to Edom, Esau's descendants: “Because of the violence against *your brother* Jacob, you will be covered with shame; you will be destroyed forever” (Obadiah 10, emphasis mine). The prophet reminds Edom—and us—that we will be treated by God according to how we have treated the Jews (see Genesis 12:3). Obadiah's message applies uniquely to

Christians because they are grafted-in as brothers to a Jewish-rooted family of faith.

According to the prophet, ignoring Israel's assault or exploitation by others is the same, in God's eyes, as aggressively attacking her: "On the day you stood aloof while strangers carried off his wealth and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them" (Obadiah 11).

The Living Bible says more pointedly: "For you deserted Israel in his time of need. You stood aloof, refusing to lift a finger to help him when invaders carried off his wealth and divided Jerusalem among them. *You were as one of his enemies*" (emphasis mine).

Obadiah uses a Hebrew term for *stood aloof* that refers to a posture of intentionally abstaining from positive action. The idea is that of bystanding, or purposely distancing oneself from a problem or event. When Israel's enemies act violently against her, God does not want us turning aside. We are not to stay silent, ignoring her plight or neutrally standing by. If we do not get involved—or at least earnestly pray—might He regard us as one of her enemies?

Consider how Israeli foreign minister Abba Eban described the nation's quandary at the inception of the Six Day War: "As we looked around us we saw the world divided between those who were seeking our destruction and those who would do nothing to prevent it."⁴ Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.^e similarly remarked that in the end, those who are treated unjustly do not remember the words of their enemies, but the silence of their friends.⁵

Obadiah admonishes even more seriously those who go beyond neutrality and take open delight in Israel's defeat. If you see Islamists, Palestinians, social activists or others cele-

brate or sneer at Israeli suffering—and then appeal to Christians for support—remember his piercing words:

You should not gloat over your brother [Israel] in the day of his misfortune, nor rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their destruction, nor boast so much in the day of their trouble. You should not march through the gates of my people in the day of their disaster, nor gloat over them in their calamity in the day of their disaster, nor seize their wealth in the day of their disaster. You should not wait at the crossroads to cut down their fugitives, nor hand over their survivors in the day of their trouble.

Obadiah 12–14

Finally, Obadiah issues a call to every generation:

The Lord’s vengeance will soon fall upon all Gentile nations. As you have done to Israel, so will it be done to you. Your acts will boomerang upon your heads.

Obadiah 15 TLB

God takes note of how we respond Israel in her time of distress. Neutrally standing by while the world curses and assails her is not an option. What would you like to “boomerang upon your head”? Send it to Israel, and in one form or another you will get it back. Among other prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures, Ezekiel agrees.

Arab Palestine in Prophecy?

When God gave Ezekiel visions of a Jewish restoration, He included a sobering message to future enemies of Israel seeking to overrun “the mountains of Israel” or her “ancient heights”

(Ezekiel 36:1–3). Those mountains and ancient heights include today's Judea and Samaria. The area is also known as the West Bank. Palestinians claim this territory belongs to them for a future sovereign state. Quite possibly, prophecies about the mountains and heights of Israel apply today to them.^f

God decrees judgment for those staking claim to these territories for their “ancient hatred” and for shedding of Jewish blood (see Ezekiel 35:5 NKJV). Then He chastises other nations joining in the fray:

The enemy said of you, “Aha! The ancient heights have become our possession.” Therefore prophesy and say, “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Because they ravaged and crushed you from every side so that you became the possession of the rest of the nations and the object of people’s malicious talk and slander . . . I have spoken against the rest of the nations, and against all Edom, for with glee and with malice in their hearts they made my land their own possession so that they might plunder its pastureland. . . . But you, mountains of Israel, will produce branches and fruit for my people Israel, for they will soon come home.”

Ezekiel 36:2–3, 5, 8

God’s “jealous wrath” is roused and He “swears with uplifted hand” these nations will suffer great scorn (verses 6–7). As for the mountains and heights of Israel, they will be returned to the Jewish people with blessing and favor.

Concerning the creation of a Palestinian state, the Scriptures indicate that despite many warnings, the nations impose ill-intended divisions of Israel’s land. For this, God says they will be judged: “At that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all nations and . . . enter into judgment against them concerning my inheritance, my

people Israel, for they scattered my people among the nations and *divided up my land*" (Joel 3:2 NIV1984, emphasis mine).

In the process of Israel's restoration, the nations have divided her land over and over again. Recall that after the British Mandate, most of her allotted land was relinquished to create Jordan, a Palestinian state. Next, control of the Temple Mount, then the Sinai Peninsula, and then Gaza were given up in pursuit of peace. Today, the international community has slated Jerusalem to be sliced in a manner that would dispossess Israel of much of her ancient and holy, biblical capital city.

Jerusalem: Pray for the Peace or Prey for the Piece

Psalm 122:6 states a succinct and enduring prayer request: "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: 'May those who love you be secure.'" God is passionate about His city and her future. The gospels recount that Yeshua wept only three times in His earthly ministry, one being over Jerusalem (see Luke 19:41).

God is also passionate about *you*. Perhaps you have not realized that your own security is tied to Jerusalem. Events taking place there ripple in the Spirit and rumble on the ground to all nations. To the extent Jerusalem is at peace, and you care rightly for her, you will be secure (as God defines it).

Because I live in Jerusalem, I am often asked how best to pray for the city. My answer always starts the same: Pray for the Prince of Peace to be welcomed into the hearts of those who live and work here. He alone—no international community or coalition—can bring lasting peace to Jerusalem. Pray that His Kingdom will come and His will be done in Jerusalem

as it is in heaven. Then, listening to the leading of the Spirit, go on to the specific issues of the day. Realize that praying for Jerusalem means not just lifting up Israel's capital city, but beyond that, the whole Jewish state. It includes praying for Jerusalem's large Arab population, too.

Jerusalem is destined to serve as the flashpoint of Kingdom conflict on earth. Entities and empires will prey for their piece of the place where God's name has been put. Meanwhile, as events unfold, He will note our hearts' response to them. At minimum, He wants us to pray.

To help you pray for the peace of Jerusalem, I have condensed hundreds of Scripture-based points into a broadly defined few. The ten categories below provide a flexible framework into which specific details can be added as events change.

1. Pray for the outpouring of "a spirit of grace and supplication" (Zechariah 12:10), leading to the salvation of Jews, Arabs and others in Jerusalem (Isaiah 30:19; Romans 10:1; 1 Timothy 2:3–4);
2. Pray for strengthening and maturing of the Body of Messiah (John 17; Acts 4:29–31; Romans 15:26–27), including laborers for the harvest (Luke 10:2);
3. Pray for righteousness, justice and wisdom for all spiritual, governmental, social, military and other authorities (1 Timothy 2:1–2; Proverbs 21:1);
4. Pray for domestic and internal unity, accord and peace within Jerusalem (Psalm 122:3, 8);
5. Pray for her physical restoration and material prosperity (Psalm 147:2; Jeremiah 30:17; Psalm 122:9);
6. Pray for security, protection and defense from attack (Psalm 91; Psalm 125), including the salvation of Jerusalem's enemies seeking to overtake her (Psalm 83:18);

7. Pray for the outworking of prophetic events according to God's sovereign timing (Ecclesiastes 3:1–8; Matthew 24:22);
8. Pray for your church's and nation's blessing of Jerusalem (Genesis 12:3; Obadiah);
9. Pray for watchmen and women who give God "no rest till He establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth" (Isaiah 62:6–7); and
10. Pray for the fulfillment of Jerusalem's destiny as the City of the Great King (Matthew 5:35) which blesses all nations (Psalm 48; Isaiah 2:2–3; 62:1–2).

Jerusalem's Holy Temple

Many believers are intrigued by ongoing plans of some religious Jews to rebuild a holy temple in Jerusalem. They earnestly support the project in a variety of ways. If you are among them, please bear in mind that the Jewish people preparing to build a third temple hope to reconstruct more than just an edifice. They intend to resurrect a system for the forgiveness of sin which cannot be effective. They aim to slaughter and substitute the blood of sheep and goats for the holy atonement and precious blood of Messiah the Lamb. Resumed animal sacrifice will render the Crucified One, in their eyes, more irrelevant than ever.

Temple zealots anticipate their project will bring about the coming of Israel's messiah. They are looking for one who is a mortal man, definitely *not* Yeshua, and who establishes world peace. The third temple is mentioned in Scripture only in connection with its desecration by the Antichrist (see Daniel 9:25–27; Matthew 24:15; 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4; Revelation 13:14–15).

Plans to rebuild the temple inherently include anti-Messiah elements. Although predicted or prophesied in Scripture, to what extent, if any, does Yeshua want us actively encouraging it?

It is possible that God will honor the reconstruction of a Jewish temple in Jerusalem. When He returns, Yeshua may completely cleanse it, then rule and reign from that purified place. But consider that the Bible also describes another, presumably fourth temple, wherein only the true Messiah will be worshiped in holy splendor (see Ezekiel 40–48). That temple will be enormous in size, many times larger than the entire Temple Mount which now exists (see Ezekiel 42:15–20). Whether this fourth, sacred structure pertains to the coming Messianic Age, or whether it exists in the new heaven and earth—or both—we cannot be sure. But we ought not confuse it with current plans to rebuild a third.

We can, meanwhile, be certain and supportive of another type of temple-building in Jerusalem. Yeshua died for living temples He would, by the Holy Spirit, indwell (see 2 Corinthians 6:16). We can invest wholeheartedly in those living temples: Jewish, Arab and other believers in Jerusalem who love and follow the Lord. In the City of the Great King, they carry His presence wherever they go. They prepare the way for His return.

Psalm 83 Alliance

To align with God’s heart and Kingdom plans, those who care about Israel need to have at least a general understanding, in broad strokes, of end times prophecy concerning her. As you know, different believers hold different views of end times events. At one extreme, some Christians teach the events will

not occur at all because they have already been fulfilled spiritually in Jesus. At another extreme, some focus so much on the future that little thought is given to the Great Commission in the present (see Matthew 18-20). Still others believe there is no point to studying prophecy because we cannot be certain of what has not yet taken place.

I believe the Lord wants us to have some idea of what lies ahead or He would not have given us hundreds of Scriptures concerning it. In this book we have looked at some of the blessings and glories that lie ahead for Israel and the nations. We turn now to a distilled macro view of some of the battles and challenges that will also come to pass.

Psalm 83 describes a besetting Middle East campaign against a beleaguered Jewish state. A military operation based on the alignment of nations in this passage has never historically taken place. For that reason, some scholars say the psalm is merely hyperbolic, or an exaggerated expression of an ancient enemy alliance that may have no future, literal fulfillment.

Others believe the psalm literally relates how every nation in her neighborhood will unite against Israel: Edom, the Ishmaelites and Moab (Jordanian and Palestinian areas), the Hagarites (Syria, possibly Saudi Arabia and Egypt), Gebal (north Lebanon), Ammon (Jordanian and Palestinian areas), Amalek (Sinai desert), Philistia (Gaza), Tyre (southern Lebanon), Assyria (areas of Syria, Iraq and possibly Turkey) and Lot (parts of Jordan and the West Bank).⁶ Verse 4 sounds their bellicose cry: "Come . . . let us destroy them as a nation, so that Israel's name is remembered no more."

Since the moment she became a regathered state, Israel's enemies have rallied to this refrain. Daily the call to destroy her echoes across much of the Middle East. Psalm 83 could, therefore, describe that which has already been taking place. Notice,

too, that the attack portrayed is not necessarily a military campaign in the traditional sense. The weapons used against Israel refer mainly to spoken words. It seems we are very possibly experiencing a (perhaps even *the*) prophetic fulfillment of Psalm 83.

In any case, the psalm closes with a prayer I encourage you to make your own. Amid the treacherous onslaught, the writer petitions God to exalt Himself—for sake of the nations: “May they ever be ashamed and dismayed. . . . Let them know that you, whose name is the Lord—that you alone are the Most High over all the earth” (verses 17–18). Yahweh’s overarching goal in end times warfare is to reveal His supremacy to humankind. He will ultimately use the Islamist/Arab/Palestinian–Israeli conflict to do it.

Ezekiel’s Vision of War

Ezekiel 38-39 describes a cataclysmic war that has not yet taken place. “Gog, of the land of Magog,” spearheads a military coalition seeking to destroy Israel (see Ezekiel 38:2). But God is the One who instigates the assault:

“I am against you, Gog, chief prince of Meshek and Tubal. I will turn you around, put hooks in your jaws and bring you out with your whole army. . . . In future years you will invade a land . . . whose people were gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate . . . and now all of them live in safety.”

Ezekiel 38:3–4, 8

This “great horde” descends from the “far north” (verse 15), joined by Persia, Cush, Put, Gomer and Beth Togarmah (see

verses 5–6). The Jewish people are living in their land but are not yet following the Lord. His purpose in the war is to draw both Israel and the nations to Himself.

The passage indicates that Israel experiences a significant, but not lasting, period of peace and prosperity before the attack. Some Bible scholars believe this has already been achieved, and so the war could occur any moment, or at least very soon. Others believe the war does not take place until a time of great tribulation in the very last days. They interpret the peace as resulting from a false peace treaty brokered by the Antichrist. Gog is either aligned with the Antichrist, they say, or he is the Antichrist.

For many years, prophecy teachers identified Russia as leading the Ezekiel 38 invasion. With the rise of fundamental Islam, some propose the onslaught will be led either by Iran or a revived Turkish-based caliphate. Except for Russia and part of Turkey, the nations and people groups of Ezekiel 38 are located in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia.⁷ Notably, all are Islamic and none are friendly toward Israel at this time.

Yahweh plans to pulverize this coalition that invades Israel when she is enjoying relative calm. He decimates her enemies with an earthquake, accompanied by lightning, fire and brimstone, torrents of bloodshed and a plague (see Ezekiel 38:19, 22). The destruction resembles that of a horrific nuclear blast. Displaying His awesome power, God stuns the world in defense of the Jews:

“And so I will show my greatness and my holiness, and I will make myself known in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord.”

Ezekiel 38:23

“I will display my glory among the nations, and all the nations

will see the punishment I inflict and the hand I lay upon them. From that day forward the people of Israel will know that I am the Lord their God. . . . I will no longer hide my face from them, for I will pour out my Spirit on the people of Israel.”

Ezekiel 39:21–22, 29

Zechariah’s Jerusalem

The prophet Zechariah describes a scenario in which God pours out His wrath on a cohort of nations invading Jerusalem. In Chapters 12 through 14, he foresees a series of events leading to the Second Coming and Millennial Age:

“I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling. . . . On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves. . . . On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem.”

Zechariah 12:2–3, 9

Nations today have aligned against Jerusalem as never before. In Zechariah 12, however, those trying to conquer or divide her get crippled in the process. God makes the city an “immovable rock” they cannot lift or push around. In this context Jerusalem recognizes her Messiah, repents wholeheartedly and turns to God. I imagine the heavens rejoice:

“And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. . . . On that day a fountain will

be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.”

Zechariah 12:10; 13:1

In His glorified physical body, Yeshua arrives with heaven's armies and defends Jerusalem. “On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem” (Zechariah 14:4). He unleashes cataclysmic judgments against those who attacked His city and His people. Then, ushering in the Messianic Age, He assumes glorious kingship over the earth (see Zechariah 14).

Spiritual dynamics that crescendo in the battle for Jerusalem have begun to manifest. Jewish sovereignty over the city is threatened by much of the global community. Simultaneously, a spirit of grace and supplication is drizzling over Jerusalem. Some Israelis who do not believe in Yeshua report they've received startling, supernatural dreams and visions of Him. The more the world comes against Jerusalem, the more God wants us contending for her to “look on Me, the One they have pierced,” and see Messiah, His Son.

When Do the Battles Occur?

Not just Ezekiel and Zechariah, but most all of the biblical prophets record glimpses of cataclysmic, end times battles waged against Israel. The "Day of the Lord," with all its devastating warfare, is described in Joel 1:15 and 2:1, 11, 31; Isaiah 13:6, 9; Amos 5:18, 20; Obadiah 1:15; Zephaniah 1:7, 14; and Malachi 4:5. The end times Battle of Armageddon referenced in Revelation 16:16 occurs in connection with the Day of the Lord.

A widely held view is that these eschatological battles are

completely and chronologically distinct from each other. The invasion led by Gog of Magog is thought to describe something entirely different, and years apart, from the assault on Jerusalem or the war related to the Valley of Jehoshaphat, and so on.

An alternative view is supported by some traditional rabbinic writings and contemporary Christian scholars. In their understanding, the prophets were shown different battles all taking place during the same colossal, years-long military campaign. Together, they describe a single gargantuan war that is fought on different battlefronts shortly before the Messianic Age.

It is honest and fair to say that God has not yet clearly disclosed all the details of these end times battles. Even the prophets who wrote down their revelations of the events did not always fully understand them (see Daniel 12:8–9). However matters unfold, there is great trouble and suffering during this time. But there is also a spectacular move of God’s Spirit. When thick darkness covers the earth, His glory will rise brilliantly over and upon His people (see Isaiah 60:1–2).

In that hour, our response to Him in intercessory prayer and proactive deeds may dramatically affect how prophetic realities play out in Israel and elsewhere.

Israel’s Future Suffering and Sanctification

In the context of end times battles, certain prophetic Scriptures portray Israel as devastatingly overrun, nationally shattered and partially re-scattered amid the fighting.⁸ At first glance, these verses can seem inconsistent with Israel’s present re-gathering and restoration. As a result, some Christians have concluded the Jewish nation exists today only for her necessary failure in the future. They see little point in caring much

about her. Is this a stance the Bible teaches we should take?

First and foremost, we must remember that God grieves over the suffering of His people. When they suffer He suffers, too. Concerning Israel's distress, "in all their affliction He was afflicted" (Isaiah 63:9 NKJV). Therefore, the prospect of Israel's future suffering should cause us to grieve rather than harden our hearts. God wants us praying passionately for the Jewish nation in her day of trouble and caring for her needs (see Matthew 25:34–40). The expectation of peril and plight should not lead us to cease supporting her. If anything, we should be moved toward even greater expressions of His covenant love for Israel.

Second, verses about Israel's future suffering can be properly understood only in connection with other related passages. As we have seen, Israel's restoration is gradual and progressive. In the process, she appears to take some steps backward instead of forward. This does not, however, change the overall trajectory of what Yahweh is doing with her (see Acts 3:17–21). He is in control. Even through hard times, the Jewish people are being restored to their land and their Lord.

On the one side, prophetic passages in the Bible indicate severe distress lies ahead. International opposition to God and His people will reach its zenith during a unique span of seven years, just before the Messianic Age. The Hebrew Scriptures refer to this as the "time of Jacob's trouble" or, as we saw, "the Day of the Lord" (Jeremiah 30:4–7; Joel 1:15; 3:14 NKJV). The New Covenant describes it as a period of "great tribulation." Christians generally call it the Great Tribulation.

But on the other side, the Great Tribulation is not limited to the Jewish state. The entire earth convulses under the heinous rule of the Antichrist and outpouring of God's judgments.^h Military conflagrations erupt in many places other than Israel. Not

only Jews, but all who follow Yahweh are fiercely persecuted during this time.ⁱ In the end, every nation—not just Israel—is broken and laid low. These years prove so devastating that half of all humanity is killed (see Revelation 6:8; 9:15–18). No person or nation would survive if not for a divine shortening of the time (see Matthew 24:22; Joel 2:11). In that sense, we could say that every nation is doomed and exists for its necessary failure apart from Yeshua.

As horrific as it will be, the Great Tribulation represents a relatively brief period of history. Those few years do not upend God’s everlasting covenants. They do not undermine the trajectory of His restorative love or mercy and grace toward Israel.

During the Great Tribulation, many Jews (and others) turn to faith in Yeshua and proclaim the Gospel in the power of the Spirit. A great harvest of souls is reaped.^j At a certain point, believers are caught up in the air to be with Yeshua in what is known as the Rapture (see 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17; 1 Corinthians 15:51–52)⁸.

At the Second Coming, Messiah arrives “with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones” and defeats the Antichrist (Jude 14). The devil and his hordes are banished from the planet for a period described as a thousand years (see Revelation 20:2–3). God judges all nations, based in part on how they responded to Israel before and during the Great Tribulation.

Yeshua regathers from the nations Jews who are not already in the land.^k Then, as He has long yearned to do, He restores His Jewish brothers and sisters to Himself with deep loving-kindness (Matthew 25:40; Romans 11:26). Israel’s consummate restoration follows, as well as that of the nations and the earth itself.

Under Messiah’s thousand-year leadership, the planet is rehabilitated to a resplendent, Eden-like condition. It is in effect

brought back to “life from the dead” (see Romans 11:15). Then, after a short time of testing, a glorious new heaven and earth are established.¹

From Here to Eternity

Why does God give us a broad outline of prophetic, end times events? He wants us to prepare for them and know He is in control (see John 16:4). But He does not want us to compromise our expression of His love, mercy and grace because we think of prophecy as inevitable (see Jeremiah 18:7–10; Jonah 3:10). We are not to wait passively for events to occur, resigned to whatever unfolds. A key reason we are told about end times' tribulation is so we will pray proactively concerning it, rather than wait to be evacuated out of it.

Through prayer, the nature and severity of suffering can be diminished (see 2 Chronicles 7:14). Recall that ancient Nineveh received a prophecy of forthcoming judgment from Jonah. But when the city repented in prayer, the word did not come to pass (see Jonah 3). Jeremiah 18 tells us that repentance can change the course of a prophesied event. God would generally prefer mercy over judgment. Usually, however, someone must stand in the gap and wholeheartedly ask Him to release it.

As the apocalyptic hour approaches, God wants our hearts aligned with His, postured to weep with those who weep. He wants us joyfully ministering the Gospel of the Kingdom in the power of the Spirit. He wants us caring about and comforting the Jewish people in their distress—just like past heroes of the faith, as we see in the next chapter.

Altar of Sacrifice

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

Romans 12:1

I love stories about heroes of the faith. Not only Bible accounts, but biographies of tried-and-true saints through history who have stood valiantly for God despite the cost. Their courage convicts and inspires me. I am convicted because I want to be so in love with Yeshua that nothing deters me from taking up my cross and following Him. He is wholly worthy of all I am, or have, or could ever offer Him. I am inspired because I know all believers are called, to varying degrees, to the sacrament of suffering for the Kingdom's sake. "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12 NKJV).

The story of Pastor Richard Wurmbrand¹ was known throughout the 20th century Christian world. Wurmbrand was a Romanian Jewish believer imprisoned by Nazis, then Communists, for fourteen years. For his faith in Yeshua, he endured excruciating, repulsively inhumane tortures. During that time,

he said, he also experienced unspeakable joy in the Savior's abiding presence and wrap around love. After a miraculous release from prison, Wurmbrand founded a ministry to support persecuted believers around the world.

I met Pastor Wurmbrand when he was in his eighties and living in the US. His face was weathered with crevices and grooves that bore witness to previous pain, and he limped from his former lashings. But Wurmbrand's eyes sparkled with joy and his countenance glowed. Every word he spoke rippled supernatural love and otherworldly peace into the atmosphere. The aged Jewish saint had offered his body a living sacrifice as his spiritual act of worship. That his offering had been holy and pleasing to God was strikingly evident.

I asked Pastor Wurmbrand if he felt profound spiritual depth and Messiah-likeness could be attained only through severe suffering. I will never forget his gentle reply. I would have liked it so much more if he had simply said, No. But instead, he locked his eyes onto mine with fatherly compassion and, after a brief silence, assured me that opportunities to die to self in order to live for Yeshua were not limited to Romanian prisons. "Each day," Pastor Wurmbrand said, "wherever you are and whatever you do, you can choose to offer your body as a living sacrifice—or not."

Living Sacrifices

The apostle Paul was well acquainted with sacrifice and suffering for Messiah's sake. It is not by coincidence that he refers to such realities right after his cornerstone message on Israel. In Romans 9 through 11 the Spirit has just given him—and us—

revelation of God's covenant mercy and grace. His plan of redemption for humankind involves one nation through which all others are eternally blessed. That nation has sacrificed much for the sake of all others. Now, in this present age, it is Israel's turn to receive from the nations---through the Church.

God has used Israel to release mercy and grace to the Gentiles. Now Gentiles are to release mercy and grace to the Jews (see Romans 11:31). Paul cannot help but exuberantly praise God for His unparalleled plan. His merciful ways are "unsearchable" and "to Him be the glory forever!" (Romans 11:33, 36).

In Romans 12:1 the apostle continues, "*Therefore*, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship" (emphasis mine). The Amplified Bible puts it like this:

I appeal to you *therefore*, brethren, and beg of you in view of all the mercies of God, to make a decisive dedication of your bodies—presenting all your members and faculties—as a living sacrifice, holy (devoted, consecrated) and well pleasing to God, which is your reasonable (rational, intelligent) service and spiritual worship.

(emphasis mine)

You have probably heard it said that when we see *therefore* in the Scriptures, we need to ask what that word is there for. In this instance, we are plainly told: In light of all we have just read about Israel and God's mercy, it is only reasonable to worship Him by offering our bodies in living sacrifice.

Accordingly, Bible scholar Mark Nanos interprets Romans 12:1 as a call for Christian sacrifice in view of Israel's sacrifice on behalf of the Gentiles:

They [the Romans] are somehow, in God's unsearchable judgments and unfathomable ways, benefiting from the "stumbling" on the part of Israel, whom they are so quick to condemn for not believing what they now believe. Certainly, this is cause for humility where arrogance had once been tempting, laying the groundwork for the commitment Paul urges from 12:1 onward . . . in the tradition of the suffering of Christ Jesus.²

Wouldn't it have been nice if, instead, God had meant to worship Him by offering up our songs, hymns and high-tech meetings? Such worship would certainly be more consistent with our Western concept of "reasonable." But the Almighty said to offer up our bodies, even as Yeshua did.

Follow God's example . . . and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Ephesians 5:1–2

"Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it."

Mark 8:34–35 NKJV

In the days ahead, the call to sacrificial worship and Christ-likeness, or the "fullness of the Gentiles," will be linked more and more with Israel. As this present age draws to a close, saying yes to the call will not be easy. Some will be willing—but some will not.

The Choice

God uses Israel to expose the intents of our hearts. It has always been so, even for the One we follow, Yeshua crucified and resurrected. “Greater love,” He said, “has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13).

In God’s hand and plan, Israel will prove a point of division among humankind—a last days’ great divide. Nations will realign according to their stance on the Jewish state. Churches will not be exempt from the controversy of Zion. They, too, will make a choice.

Lies will arise about the Jewish people obscured in a worldly reasonableness that will persuade and pervert many. Slowly and subtly, as in the past, devilish deceptions about Israel and the Jews will overtake nations, including many Christians. As you know from this book, it is already happening.

Professor Robert Wistrich is regarded by many as the world’s foremost scholar on antisemitism. In his 2010 tome, *A Lethal Obsession*, Wistrich concludes that less than seventy years after the Holocaust, “the politics of genocidal antisemitism—and the indifference that made it possible—are still with us.”³ Wistrich is not an alarmist; he is a clear-thinking academic.

Sister Basilea Schlink wrote decades ago that future generations of Christians who support antisemitism may suddenly find themselves on the wrong side, just as many German believers failed to recognize Nazism and its theology as an enemy of God. She warns that antisemitism inevitably invites or reflects the anti-Christ spirit:

As God’s plan of salvation nears its final consummation . . . and hatred flares up against Him more than ever, there will be a bringing together of those who belong together because they

fear the living God and give Him glory—Jews and Christians.⁴ . . . But if all the time we have been opposing God’s people or else condoning the attacks made on them by powers hostile to God, woe betide us later when the whole world is caught up in a rebellion against God! Then, even without noticing it, we shall suddenly find ourselves on the side of the antichristian kingdom, whose prime target will be the Jews. . . . [For] our relationship with them is indicative of our true relationship to the Lord Jesus, showing whether it is a relationship of love. If we love Jesus, we shall love the people whom He loves and always will love and who will yet be the centre and blessing of all nations.⁵

During the lifetime of many readers of this book, Israel’s overt battles have been fought mostly with Palestinians, terror groups and Iran. But signs point to a change. The slightest spark could ignite regional conflagration in the tinderbox of the Middle East. Expect Israel to be at the center of it—along with the Commander of the armies of heaven.

The Jewish nation will remain a testing ground in years to come. But our God does not test us to torment us. His tests are designed to conform us to the image of His Son, refining us for outrageous blessing and destiny. He wants us shining as beacons of light to a dark, perplexed world in the throes of kingdom conflict. In the process, He is grooming a Bride.

Jesus cautions that in the last days, because of the increase of wickedness—a significant degree of which will revolve around Israel—the love of many, perhaps most, will grow cold (see Matthew 24:12). Both good and evil will simultaneously increase. Organizations and individuals will polarize over God’s ancient covenant people. Unprecedented dimensions of heaven—and hell—will impact the earth. Riptides of revival

will meet with reprisal. Many may be persecuted for righteousness' sake. But in the end, the Bride of Messiah—those fervidly loving Him, radically obeying Him and denying themselves for Him will align with the Jews. Will that include you?

Are you waiting to get a personal word from God before you decide? Friend, you may never hear it. You see, this is about *your* choice, based on *your* heart and the Word that is already in you.

Are you holding out until a major stand must be taken? Are you waiting until your Jewish neighbor shows up one day on your doorstep, suddenly in need of a hiding place? In case you have not realized it, the test has already begun. You are already taking a stand each time you choose how to access and process the news, or how to pray, or how to study the Scriptures, or how to speak within your personal sphere of influence, or how to promote social justice—or how to respond to this book. As an Israeli ambassador once told the UN about actions destructive to the Jewish state, “God is watching.”⁶

The Remnant in Revelation

Will you join in the alignment of God's Old and New Covenant people in a shared, last days' Kingdom destiny? He is preparing the way for Yeshua's return by preparing hearts. He is looking for those willing to learn to love unconditionally, whose heartbeats resonate to His own. He will join them together with Jesus-following Jews as one new humanity. Together, we will joyfully set the stage for the greatest revival on earth. Thrilling times are ahead.

The book of Revelation, with its mystifying and pulsating prophetic symbolism, also foretells of some down-to-earth, seemingly soon-coming events. One of these involves “the

144,000” (see Revelation 7:3–17; 14:1–5). Coming from “all the tribes of Israel,” with 12,000 per tribe, they are distinct from a larger group, called the “great multitude” (see 7:4–9). The great multitude comes from every nation, tribe, people and language; they are not necessarily Jews. A subgroup of the great multitude, the 144,000 stand on Mount Zion, “follow the Lamb wherever he goes,” and are “offered as first fruits to God and the Lamb” (14:1, 4). Apparently, they are gathered from within the Jewish state, Messianic Jews awaiting Yeshua’s return. But offered as first fruits, many may be martyred.

A sacrament of suffering may await us. You and I may have opportunity to worship in total self-sacrifice to the Worthy One. If so, we will be in very good company. We will join countless courageous saints of the past. Among them will be the valiant and famed Corrie ten Boom and her family.

Heroes of the Holocaust

The beloved and unforgettable Corrie ten Boom, together with her family, took up a cross of self-sacrifice for the Jews of Holland during the Holocaust. Like Ruth in the Bible, in the end, the ten Booms were extravagantly blessed. But not as you or I would think.

When the Nazis overtook Holland, Jews came knocking, one by one, on the ten Booms’ door. “In this household,” Corrie’s father had said, “God’s people are always welcome.”⁷ The ten Booms said they loved the Jewish people for one reason: They loved their God. Their home quickly became a hiding place for Dutch Jews with nowhere else to go—until one horrifying day, German soldiers knocked on the door.

What was this family’s reward for their blessing of Israel,

their kneeling to enrich the Jews? Imprisonment and sentencing to a concentration camp, where they all, except Corrie, died. Did the ten Booms know what they were getting into? Indeed. Losing their lives for the Jews, Corrie's father had said from the start, would be "the greatest honor that could come to my family."⁸

Corrie was miraculously released from prison one day before her scheduled execution, the result of a "clerical error." In years to come millions around the world would hear her story. They would learn of a woman who lived for much more than personal blessing. They would encounter in her the Blesser Himself.

Corrie is but one of a righteous remnant of 20th century Christians who sacrificially cared for the Jews. Archbishop Stefan of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church saved virtually all of Bulgaria's 50,000 Jewish citizens from the Holocaust. No other church in any other country resisted Hitler as did the church under Stefan's leadership. The archbishop effectively persuaded the Bulgarian government to refuse German orders to deport their Jews. When Nazi troops arrived, priests stood alongside the intended victims as human shields. Said one to the frightened Jewish people of his town, "Where you go I will go." Echoing the vow of Ruth, he meant every word.⁹

Jewish-Catholic nun Edith Stein was offered a way of easy escape in the Holocaust. Instead, she chose to accompany and comfort the Jewish people to the end. Leaving the security of her convent in Europe for a concentration camp, she took the hand of a sister and said, "Come, let us go for our people."¹⁰ She was never heard from again.

Such heroes were the exception, however, to the collective Christian response to World War II. Of the Holocaust, Rev. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "The Church . . . has been unwilling to

suffer for what she knows to be right. Thus, the Church is guilty of becoming a traitor to the Lordship of Christ.”¹¹ Bonhoffer himself was martyred.

The Joy of the Cross

Standing for God and sharing His heart for Israel means sacrifice of self in the spirit of Romans 12:1. But those who bless Israel are blessed. They bless God who blesses bountifully of Himself in return. If He uses the Jewish nation to summon us to the Cross, the Cross summons to *us* the Blesser Himself.

Famed missionary-martyr Jim Elliot said, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”¹² I have learned that the more a sacrifice costs, the more blessing it tends to release. The more I give myself to Messiah, the more He gives Himself to me. I discover that whatever was to my temporary profit is loss for the sake of His eternal presence. I am told to consider everything as rubbish compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Yeshua my Lord. If I am willing to share in the fellowship of His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, I may know Him in the glorious power of His resurrection (see Philippians 3:7–11). It isn't easy, but it is good.

Our Messiah is coming for a pure and spotless Bride whose love for Him is stronger than death. She will gladly lay down her life for the One who offered Himself up for her. She will not run from the Cross. In adoring love she will embrace that altar of atonement which binds her heart to His. She will take up her cross to follow Him. This will be her most powerful act of worship, intercession and identification with the Infinite One.

Yeshua endured the Cross for the joy set before Him. So, too, will those who wholeheartedly follow Him. When their

crosses are borne for loving Israel, they can expect lavish and blessed delight. “Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice greatly with her, all you who mourn over her” (Isaiah 66:10). As you pour yourself out for God’s Jewish nation, prepare to exult in the King of Glory and His infinite splendor, forever. Because in the end, it is all about *Him*.

*May the Lord bless you from Zion, He who is the Maker
of heaven and earth.*

Psalm 134:3

Notes

Chapter 1: Why Care About Israel?

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4. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology* (Tustin, Calif.: Ariel Ministries Press, 1993), 343; Sarna, *Genesis*, 114–15.
5. J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Findlay, Ohio: Dunham Publishing Company, 1958) as quoted in Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology*, 343.
6. Grateful acknowledgment is given to Barry Horner, *Future Israel: Why Christian Anti-Judaism Must Be Challenged* (Nashville: B&H Academic Books, 2007), Kindle edition, and Michael Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), Kindle edition, for some of the ideas expressed in the rest of this chapter.
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8. Abraham Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud: The Major Teachings of the Rabbinic Sages* (New York: Schocken, 1949), 63; Juster, *The Irrevocable Calling*, 21.
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The definition of "Jewish" used in this chapter (and book) is the definition reflected in the Bible. The biblical definition is broader than the definition traditionally used by the State of Israel but narrower than that used in some Christian circles. In Scripture, an individual is considered Jewish who has at least one biologically Jewish parent, whose parents are also biologically Jewish.

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Chapter 7: Rejected Roots and Broken Branches

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