

Israel, God's Covenants, and the Church - Part 1

by Clarence H. Wagner, Jr.

The Middle East, Israel, Egypt, the Palestinian Authority, Hafez al-Assad, Yasser Arafat, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Saddam Hussein, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank, Netanyahu... These are names we hear in the news each day.

But, how do we interpret what we are hearing? Too often, the information, without the proper background needed to interpret it, causes confusion or a lack of interest. Nevertheless, for those who live by the Bible, it is important to understand what is happening in both Israel and with today's players on the Middle East stage, as they are part of the unfolding of biblical prophecy. When we think of today's Israel in relation to the Israel of the Bible, several questions come to mind:

- Is the modern state of Israel connected to biblical Israel - is it the same land?
- Is the Arab/Palestinian claim that today's Israel has no connection to biblical Israel correct?
- Why did God choose this land and call it "His land?"
- Why did He choose the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to live in thisland and give it to them in covenant?
- How does Israel today fit into biblical prophecy?
- Did God promise that the Jewish people, dispersed into the world, would one day return to their ancestral homeland and that the land would be restored?
- Will today's Israel survive?
- Why do many Christians support Israel as a State?
- How should Christians relate to the Jewish people?

As Christians, we should be looking for answers to these questions, because there is a relationship between us, the Bible, Israel, and the Jewish people. In Ephesians 2:11-13, Paul writes, *"In Christ Jesus, we Gentiles are made partakers in all the covenants of God...are made part of the commonwealth of Israel, the promises, and hopes."*

In Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is the fulfillment of the Law and the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament). Our salvation brings with it an acceptance of the God of Israel, along with the heritage and roots in the history of the Jewish people, the chosen of God...and the land of Israel. In order to interpret the present and future events, we need a biblical and historical understanding of the past.

I want us to gain this understanding as we look together at the players and the playing board of the Middle East: past, present and future.

It is important to understand:

- 1) The Land of Israel and its unique place among nations;
- 2) The land in relation to the people God chose for it and why; and,
- 3) The role of the Jewish people in history - the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

With this foundation, we will be able to develop a biblically-based position on Israel and the Middle East.

The Land

In order to determine if today's Israel is located in the same place as biblical Israel, we have to look at the biblical descriptions. What "land" are we talking about? In Genesis 15:18, we are given some dimensions: *"The Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates."*

More specifically, Genesis 17:8 states, *"all the Land of Canaan."* In Ex. 3:8, God speaks to Moses in the wilderness and tells him: *"I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and bring them up to that land...to a good and spacious land...to a land flowing with milk and honey...to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite, and the Amorite and the Perizzite, and the Hivite and the Jebusite."*

This description comprises today's Israel, plus part of western Jordan, western Syria, and most of Lebanon.

But, what kind of a land is this Promised Land? In Exodus 3:8, it is described as, *"...a land flowing with milk and honey."* Then, in Ezekiel 20:6, we read, *"...a land flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands."*

By the term, "milk and honey," God was describing a land that could sustain animals which produce milk, and flowering, fruitful trees for the bees. And, in the Hebrew Scriptures, honey could also be referring to what we would call fruit jam today, which would further validate the idea of fruit-bearing trees. A land of milk and honey in a desert region would be considered a precious promise from the Lord.

By the term, "glory of all lands," God indicates that Israel would not only be chief among the nations spiritually, but also reflect the other nations of the world temporally in its terrain, flora and fauna. Let's look at this. Israel is small (150 x 50 miles), but it is blessed with the climate, terrain, and location on earth to sustain vegetation and animal life from four different ecological zones - African, Asian, Mediterranean and Euro-Siberian, as all these zones cross-sect Israel at their extremes.

Israel has lofty mountains, deserts, forests, swamps and sea-coasts, and boasts the lowest place on earth. It can support summer, winter and tropical fruits and vegetables. In fact, in Jerusalem you can grow apples and oranges, a cold climate and a tropical fruit all in the same garden! There are twice the plant species in Israel as in its neighbor, Egypt, with the rich Nile Delta. Birds from as far away as South Africa and Iceland spend time in Israel. And, it is visited by the Siberian wolf from the far north and the African leopard from the south.

Truly, Israel is not only the glory of all lands in a spiritual sense, but also physically, as well.

More than this, it is very important to understand that God owns this land. Leviticus 25:23 states: *"The land, moreover, shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine, for you are but sojourners with Me."* God holds title to the property. And, in the same way we transfer title of ownership on a car or a house that we own, God chose to transfer title to His land, Israel, to a particular people for all time. God chose a man, Abraham, to possess His Land, Israel, because He had a plan: the redemption of the world.

The Land In Relation To The People Chosen Of God

Nearly 4,000 years ago, God called a man named Abram for a special task. Originally from Ur of the Chaldees, (near Basra, Iraq today), he was living in Haran, in today's southern Turkey, when God called him. When he was 75 years old, God spoke to Abram: *"Get out of your*

country, and from your kindred, and from your father's house, unto a land that I will show you; And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great; and you will be a blessing. And I will bless them that bless you, and curse him that curses you: and in you will all the families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:1-3).

Abram, his barren wife Sarai, and nephew Lot left Haran for Canaan where God said to him: "*Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your descendants forever. I will make your descendants like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your descendants could be counted. Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you*" (Gen. 13:14-17).

Ten years after Abram and Sarai waited in Canaan for the promised offspring, they became impatient. Sarai offered her handmaid, Hagar, to Abram, and they had a son whom they named Ishmael. However, this was not the promised son.

Isaac, The Promised Son:

Finally, fourteen years later (24 years after their arrival in Canaan), God spoke to Abram about His promise. It was then God changed Abram's name to Abraham, and Sarai's name to Sarah, as He began to unfold the rest of His promise. In Genesis 17:7-8, God says, "*I will establish My covenant as an everlasting covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.*" This confirms that God's covenant was everlasting and unconditional, not temporary. At this point, Abraham was 99 years old, and Sarah was 90 years old and still barren. Because of this, he got the idea that Ishmael, who was his son, would be the carrier of the promise. In Genesis 17:18, Abraham said to God, "*Oh, that Ishmael might live before you.*"

This was not God's plan, which He explained: Ishmael was not the promised son and Sarah would, in fact, have a child: Isaac, who would be heir and possessor of the promises and the deed to the land. To Abraham's inquiry, God said, "*No, but Sarah, your wife, shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him*" (Gen. 17:19).

What About Ishmael?

Isn't he too a son of Abraham? Yes, but not the son of promise.

God went on to say, "*And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him: I will make him into a great nation. But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year*" (Gen. 17:20-22).

Read this verse again. Isaac was to receive the covenant blessing, not Ishmael. This brings us right up to date, because a burning issue today is, "Whose Land is Israel - the Arabs or the Jews?" God promised to greatly bless Ishmael and his descendants, but not with the land of Canaan which God deeded to Abraham's descendants via Isaac. This is a critical point since many Arabs claim a right to the land of Israel as descendants of Abraham through Ishmael's line! As descendants of Abraham via Ishmael, they may receive many promised blessings, but NOT the land of Israel. That is for the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

We also know that Abraham had other sons who also were NOT given rights in the land of Canaan. In Genesis 25:1-4, we read that Abraham's other sons were given gifts and sent away to lands in the east: "*Abraham left everything he owned to Isaac. But while he was still living he gave gifts to the sons of his concubines and sent them away from his son Isaac to the land of the east.*"

Jacob, The Promised Son:

Later, Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau, and we read a similar promise God made to Jacob. In Genesis 35:11-12, God says to Jacob: "*I am God Almighty; Be fruitful and multiply; A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings come forth from you. And the land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give it to you, And I will give the land to your descendants after you.*"

What About Esau?

In Genesis 36:6-9, we learn that Esau took his family and moved out of the Land of Canaan away from Jacob. The reason is that he was so rich that the land could not sustain all of his animals. He moved to the Land of Edom, across the Dead Sea (the southern part of today's Kingdom of Jordan). Covenantally and historically, the land of Israel scripturally belongs to the Jews, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yet, have the Arabs been cheated? God said He would bless them, and today, there are 21 sovereign Arab states and just ONE Jewish state. And, the combined land area of the Arab world is 650 times larger than Israel. In other terms, Israel is the same size as the US state of New Jersey, or Wales. However, the Arab states are one and a half million square miles larger than the U.S.A., and they still control much of today's oil supplies. (That's a land area the size of the U.S., including Alaska and Hawaii, and 3/4 of Canada opposed to the state of New Jersey.) No, the Arabs have not been cheated, simply because the Jews have returned to their ancient homeland in Israel.

Why Did God Choose A Particular People And A Particular Land?

There was an important reason for God to establish His covenants with His chosen people in His chosen land. You see, God chose a particular place, Israel, and a particular people, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for a particular purpose. The Jewish people were chosen:

- 1) To witness to the unity of God in the midst of universal idolatry.
- 2) To show the nations the blessedness of serving the true God.
- 3) To receive, preserve, and transmit the Scriptures, (64 of the 66 books of the Bible were written by Jewish writers), and,
- 4) To be the human channel for the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

The land was chosen for one reason. As they say in the advertising business: location, location, location. While small in size, strategically, the land of Israel sits right in the middle of the great trade routes of the ancient world - between the great empires of Assyria and Babylonia in the north and Egypt to the south. One of the best descriptions for Israel could be, "The Land In-Between." This is exactly where God wanted His people. Israel is actually a hinge, like the hinge on a door, between the great regions of the ancient world. Whoever controlled the Land of Israel, could exert great influence in the world. That is why conquering Israel was, and still is, a strategic goal of nations seeking to control the Middle East. However, this parcel of land is not up for grabs, for God had, and has, a plan for it.

God put His chosen people in a precarious place, right where God wanted them for a chosen purpose. At times of war or at times of peace, God's message would get out to the known world. But why? God could have taken them to the remotest desert of the Middle East and created another Garden of Eden for them. There, they could have just basked in God's glory and provision, being removed from the conflicts of the world. In fact, out in the driest part of the desert where no one travels, they could have gone unnoticed until this century when our satellites would have finally photographed them from above.

God had other plans.

1. The strategic location of the land would create special pressures. You might call it, "God's testing ground of faith." In this land, there was much pressure and many tests. But, through these tests, with all odds against the Israelites, God showed forth His miracle power to sustain them and bless them, even in difficult situations. That made people sit up and take notice.

2. Since all communication, trade, and even armies of the ancient world had to pass through this land, the message of God's relationship to man through His chosen people would be spread to the known world.

The people of Israel were to be the living testimony of God through their lifestyle and message.

In times of peace, traders and travelers could see and hear God's message to take to the world.

In times of war, God showed His power to miraculously defend them. This message also went around the world. For example, the great King Sennacherib of Assyria invaded Judah in 720 BC. When he reached Jerusalem, he blockaded the city and mocked King Hezekiah and the God of Israel. God moved. The angel of the Lord killed the soldiers and officers of Sennacherib. II Chron. 32 says that Sennacherib returned back to Assyria in disgrace. Not only is this recorded in the Bible, but Sennacherib left an account of this event chiseled in stone which testifies to what God did on this day in Israel.

What Does All Of This Mean To Us?

"I will establish My covenant with him (Isaac) for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him" (Gen. 17:19)

God's eternal, redemptive plan is clear in the Bible. Man sinned, separating himself from God. Yet, God wants to fellowship with us, so He implemented a plan that involved a man, Abraham, and a land, Israel, to bring about the salvation of the world.

However, this plan is not finished and the fulfillment of God's prophetic Word is taking place and relates to Israel and the Jewish people today. No doubt, there was, and is, a destiny that has shaped the history of the world.

The people of Israel were chosen to be a testimony for God. They did not have books, tapes, radio and television, as we do today. Their lives were a living message of God's love and power which He used to spread His Word to the people of the world.

This is also true for us as Christians. Paul says of us, *"You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. You show that you are a letter from Messiah, the result of our ministry, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts"* (II Corinthians 3:2,3).

Like Israel, when we are born into the Kingdom of God, He does not remove us from the pressures of life. Rather, He puts us into a busy intersection of life, with traffic swirling all around us. There, He blesses us. And, when problems arise, He is there to protect and defend us. In both cases, this becomes a testimony to the living God, whom we serve. God never promised that He would put us into heaven on earth - that will come in eternity. Here on earth, we are called to walk out our salvation and be a witness of Him. We have an opportunity to do this each day, and should not depend on someone or something else to do the job for us.

Like Israel, we need to be rooted and grounded in the Lord, lest our enemies overrun us, or famine and drought overcome us. This is what happened when Israel took their eyes off the Lord. Only as we abide in the Lord, will we find His provision and protection that will amaze the world around us and bring others into God's kingdom.

Like Israel, we are not an island unto ourselves. We are standing in the crossroads of life, so we can bring glory to His Name.

Israel, God's Covenants, and the Church - Part 2

by Clarence H. Wagner, Jr.

In Part I, we learned that the location of the biblical Land of Israel is the same as the location of modern Israel today. We saw how God chose this land and called it, "His own." He also called a people to be His covenant people - the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - the Jewish people. God has always had a plan for the redemption of the world.

This He accomplished through bringing forth the Messiah, Yeshua (Jesus), to be the Savior of the world. He was born in the Land of Israel, and from the House of Israel. However, God was not finished with this Land or His covenant people, Israel. They are still a part of His plan for the world. His promises to them are everlasting, and concerning the Land, unconditional. This in no way diminishes His love or promises to His Church. Rather, it is time for us, as Christians, to appreciate the relationship God intended for us to have with Israel and the Jewish people. It is time to show the love and mercy towards the Jewish people that God intended in the first place (Rom. 11:28,31; 15:27).

Let's continue our journey of discovery:

- How does Israel today fit into biblical prophecy?
- Did God promise that the Jewish people, dispersed into the world, would one day return to their ancestral homeland and that the land would be restored?
- Will today's Israel survive?
- Why do many Christians support Israel as a State?
- How should Christians relate to the Jewish people?

The Land And People In Prophecy

In the days of the Bible, the land and people of Israel were integral to God's message to the nations. Today, it is no less important in God's end-time plans, showing the world that He is faithful to His Word. The prophets of old foretold of a great Day of Restoration, which is taking place now. There are hundreds of prophetic Scriptures in the Bible which speak of this Restoration.

Ezekiel 39:25-29 says, "Therefore thus says the Lord God, Now I shall restore the fortunes of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I shall be jealous for My holy name. And, they shall forget their disgrace and all their treachery which they perpetrated against Me, when they live securely on their own land with no one to make them afraid. When I bring them back from the people and gather them from the lands of their enemies, I shall be sanctified through them in the sight of many nations. Then, they will know that I am the Lord their God because I made them go into exile among the nations, and then gathered them again to their own land; and I will leave none of them there any longer. And I will not hide My face from them any longer for I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel, declares the Lord God."

In Amos 9:14-15: God says: "Also, I will restore the captivity of My people, Israel, and they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will also plant vineyards and drink their wine, and make gardens and eat their fruit. I will also plant them on their land and they will not again be rooted out from their land which I have given them, says the Lord your God."

These are not some obscure verses in the Bible with no relevance to today. We can see them being fulfilled right before our eyes. For me, living in Israel makes Bible prophecy read like the daily newspaper. For example, Isaiah wrote, "The wilderness and the solitary place will be glad for them and the desert will rejoice and blossom as a rose" (Isa. 35:1).

He wrote these words to express the excitement there would be when the Jewish people would return to their ancient homeland, Israel. Even the land would burst forth with joy. You may ask, return from where? Many Old Testament prophets spoke of a day when most of the Jewish people would be exiled from Israel. This occurred shortly after the time of Jesus. But God did not intend to leave them in exile, and the prophets foretold of their return from the nations of the world in a future day. That day is today. We are living in a day when Bible prophecy is being fulfilled right before our eyes. As we prepare for the coming of the Lord, the Bible gives us signs to be watching for. One of these signs is Israel's deserts and vacant places blooming. And blooming, they are.

The Judean Desert, for example, is normally dry and desolate. However, each spring, after the winter rains, the desert comes to life all on its own. Some very delicate flowers such as wild orchids, cyclamen, irises, crocuses, and even tulips burst forth in a carpet of color, along with lush green grass. Everywhere you can find clusters of poppy-like anemones of many colors. These are the lilies-of-the-field that we read about in the Gospels. Not only do Israel's deserts burst forth each spring, but Israel grows flowers in the desert all year around. In the sun-parched landscape, literally tens of millions of flowers of many varieties are grown and exported around the world.

So, even the flowers of Israel are speaking to us as a sign that God is fulfilling His Word just as the prophets foretold.

But, it hasn't always been like this!

In his travelog, "Innocents Abroad," Mark Twain documented the condition of the land of Israel only 100 years ago.

In the 1860s, the American author, Mark Twain, came here to what was then a backward region of the Turkish Empire, called Palestine. Here is how he described the land: "Nowhere in all the waste around was there a foot of shade. It is a blistering naked, treeless land." Of the Galilee, which boasts beautiful forested areas today, he said, "It is seven in the morning, and as we are in the country, the grass ought to be sparkling with dew, the flowers enriching the air with their fragrance, and the birds singing in the trees. But, alas, there is not dew here, nor flowers, nor birds, nor trees. There is a plain and an unshaded lake, and beyond that some barren mountains."

Mark Twain's summary of Palestine: "Of all the lands there are for dismal scenery, I think Palestine must be the prince. The hills are barren, they are dull of color, they are unpicturesque in shape. It is a hopeless, dreary, heartbroken land."

Ezekiel 36 - The Three R's of Bible Prophecy:

Mark Twain's description of Palestine matches the first seven verses of Ezekiel 36, which begins one of my favorite chapters in the Bible. This chapter is a faithful promise to Israel concerning God's restoration of the land and the people of Israel in the days just before the coming of the Lord.

To the right is a picture of a 1976 watercolor by Gordon Wetmore that visually documents Zechariah's prophecy- "**This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with cane in hand because of his age. The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there.'**" (Zech. 8:4-5)

Reading Ezekiel 36 gives us a remarkably clear description of what has been taking place in Israel over the past 100 years. Interestingly, today's wildflowers on the hills of Israel have a lot to do with this promise and testify to God's faithfulness.

This passage opens with God speaking to the mountains of Israel, lamenting their desolation and abandonment. This was caused by Israel's enemies who invaded the land to conquer the "ancient high places," and then boast about it. God did not intend that His land, Israel, would be inhabited and prosper under any other people, except the Jewish people, so it lay barren for generations. The observations of Mark Twain aptly fit the prophet's lament.

But, in verse 8, God had exciting news for the land: "*But you, O mountains of Israel, you will shoot forth your branches and yield your fruit to My people of Israel; for they are soon to come home.*"

He went on to say that He would multiply the numbers of people from the house of Israel, they would rebuild the ruined and wasted cities, and increase their flocks and produce of the land. When this happens, He says, "*You will know that I am the Lord*" (v. 11).

There is a connection between the fruitfulness of the land of Israel and those inhabiting it. We already read in Leviticus 25:23 where God tells us He owns the land, and He chose to give it to His covenant people - the Jewish people, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Only when the land and the covenant people are together in combination, do both flourish in accordance with God's divine plan.

Ezekiel confirms that it is the return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel that triggers the restoration of the land itself to its former glory - and more.

Their return and the land's restoration was also important for God's integrity, as well. In judgment, God scattered His covenant people for a season. Once scattered, Ezekiel 36:20 tells us that the people of Israel profaned the integrity of the Lord's Name and His promises among the nations, when the nations said mockingly, "*These are the people of the Lord, and they had to leave His land.*"

You see, in the ancient world, the pagans judged the effectiveness of their pagan gods by how well these gods protected them in their land and provided for them. In this region, they worshipped the god Baal, for security from invading armies and the provision of rain and

food; and Astarte, the goddess of fertility, for offspring. Therefore, when the Jewish people went into exile and the land of Israel became desolate, the pagan nations mocked the God of Israel as unable to protect and provide for His people.

For this reason, in Ezekiel 36:23-28, God speaks of a great end-time return of the Jewish people to their covenant land, which He would orchestrate for the integrity of His Name. This was to show the nations of the world that He is the living God who keeps His promises. To accomplish this, in verse 24, God says, *"For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land."* In addition, God also desires to restore spiritual fellowship with His people IN His land when He says in verses 27-28, *"And I will put My Spirit in you and move you to follow My decrees and be careful to keep My laws. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; and you will be My people and I will be your God."*

The process of this latter-day, prophetic move, as expressed by Ezekiel, is what I call the three R's of end-time Bible prophecy concerning Israel:

- a **RETURN** from exile to the land of their forefathers;
- the **RESTORATION** of the land, and then,
- the **REDEMPTION** and renewal of the spiritual life of the Jewish people in the land.

Yes, this day is today! The rabbis themselves even refer to our present day as, "Messianic Days." Surely, we can see that the land IS being restored and the people have been returning for over 100 years. And, as the Jewish immigrants return, many from former communist lands where the worship of God and the reading of the Bible were forbidden, they are now learning of the Lord God of Israel in their ancient homeland, and a true spiritual renewal is beginning to take place. It is not all happening at once, but it is certainly in process.

Ezekiel gives us God's last word to the heathen nations of the world who sought to occupy His land and prevent His people from returning. In verses 34-36, he says:

"The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it. They will say, 'This land that was laid waste has become like the garden of Eden; the cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited! Then the nations around you that remain will know that I, the Lord, have rebuilt what was destroyed and have replanted what was desolate. I, the Lord, have spoken, and I will do it.'"

Israel - Still a Biblical Land:

You know, nothing much happens in Israel that is not related to the Scriptures. God often uses the obvious and observable to teach us, so His lessons are reinforced over and over again.

No longer is Israel desolate, nor is it devoid of His covenant people. Today, we can see with our own eyes the hills of Israel covered with beautiful wildflowers and lush green grass, abundant fields of produce and forests, new cities rebuilt on ancient sites, cattle on the hills, birds in the trees, and the Jewish people who have returned from over 100 nations and are still returning by the tens of thousands each year. While Israel has not yet seen the complete fulfillment of these prophecies, their fulfillment certainly needs to be the focus of our prayers for Israel!

For those of us who honor the Bible, let us stand with Israel with our prayers and our voices. There are those who constantly challenge Israel's right to exist. But, God says they won't prevail. Psalm 129:6 says, *"May all who hate Zion be turned back in shame. May they be like grass on the housetops, which withers before it can grow..."*

From my house on a hilltop in Jerusalem, I can see several old stone houses in a nearby village. On their roofs, grass grows in abundance in the winter rains, but by late May is scorched brown. So too, all those who mock or disregard God's Word will also quickly wither and fade away, but God's Word will prevail. The prophet Zechariah confirms that God will again use Israel and Jerusalem as a test for the nations of the world. The nations will be judged by how they understand and respond to God's plans for Israel. In other words, will they support God's plan and be blessed, or reject His plans and be crushed? Let's hear it from Zechariah: *"Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling for all the peoples round about, when they will lay siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem. And in that day, I will make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people; all that burden themselves with it will be cut in pieces, even though all the nations of the earth be gathered together against it"* (Zech. 12:2,3).

Today, the world community often mobilizes its armies against wayward nations. It is now easy to see that one day these same nations could consider Israel a "wayward" nation that is not responding to its dictates and thereby launch a siege against Judah and Jerusalem (the capital and seat of Israel's government). When this day comes, may we be found on God's side of the battle, or we too will succumb to God's wrath. History is becoming increasingly focused on Israel and especially on Jerusalem. As Christians, we have an incredible opportunity to reach out and touch Israel and the Jewish people to show them *"the love of God"* and *"the God of love."*

As you enjoy the beautiful flowers where you live, may God remind you often of the "Message of the Flowers of Israel." May He remind you to "pray for the peace of Jerusalem." Our God is faithful and true, and He is completing His work here in Israel, just as He promised and right on schedule!

The Church And The Jewish People

Finally, let us turn our attention to the Jewish people, God's chosen people, who are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In Zechariah 2:8, God refers to them as the *"apple of His eye,"* when He says, *"He that touches you touches the apple of His eye."* Also remember Gen. 12:3, *"I will bless those that bless thee and curse him that curses thee."*

We have read of the enemies of the Israelites in the Hebrew Scriptures (often referred to as the Old Testament): the Egyptian Pharaoh, the Philistines, Canaanites, Moabites, Edomites, Amalekites, Hittites, Assyrians, and the Babylonians, to name a few. In post-biblical days, there were the Greeks, Romans, Persians, Ottoman Turks, Germans, and now the Arabs. In history, all of these great empires who came against Israel have faded into the pages of history (remember Gen. 12:3 on blessings and cursing). But, the Jewish people still continue to live on and Israel is once again flourishing today.

A remnant has always lived in Palestine since they were cast out by Rome in AD 135. Despite all odds, the Jews began to return in great numbers to their land in the mid-1800s. After much persecution and resistance, Israel became a sovereign nation again in 1948. But it is not a new nation, but the continuation of that nation started by God with Abraham nearly 4,000 years ago.

In my list of those who touched the apple of God's eye, persecuted and killed the Jews without mercy, I left out the worst offender-THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

For the first three centuries of the Common Era (A.D.), "Replacement Theology" sprang up to convince Rome that Christianity had superseded Judaism. Christianity set out to discredit Jews and Judaism in order to usurp its legal status before Rome. Out of this also came the bitter roots of Christian anti-Semitism that is still with us today. After Christianity became the religion of the Holy Roman Empire, state-backed Christianity institutionalized anti-Semitism that permeated Europe and spread with the religion. Some of the more extreme results of Christian anti-Semitism are:

- Anti-Jewish writings of some of the Church Fathers
- Constantine - AD 312 - first edicts against the Jews.
- 11-13th centuries - Crusaders killed and persecuted Jews in Europe and Middle East
- 15th Century - The Inquisition, that lasted in Spain until 1820
- 16th Century - Martin Luther's anti-Jewish writings, ghettoization of Jewish communities
- 19th Century - Russian Pogroms
- 20th Century - Hitler - 6 million killed

(For a more detailed discussion on Christian anti-Semitism, see the *Israel Teaching Letters*, Where was Love & Mercy? for my complete teaching on the subject.)

Drink from the "Root of the Olive Tree":

In the last 40 years, a great revival has taken place. Christians are reading the Word of God, which unfolds God's plan for Israel and His continuing covenant with the Jewish people. Many Bible-believing Christians have shown their support for Israel and the Jewish people, which is a very positive change from the past.

Fulfillment of God's Word is obvious. The desert has blossomed as the rose - Israel is exporting hundreds of thousands of flowers, fruit, vegetables and many other items to countries around the world.

A thorough reading of Romans 9-11 clearly shows God's continued mercy for the Jewish people and His desire that Christians show them mercy, not anti-Semitic hostility. We are grafted into the tree of Israel, and we are nourished as we drink of the sap of the root of the olive tree - Israel. Romans 11:18 tells us not to boast against the natural branches, the Jewish people, because we don't support the root, but the root supports us. The Church has often been like a bouquet of cut flowers - beautiful for a season, but cut off from their roots, they quickly wither and die. We need to get reattached to our root (which is Israel and the Hebraic understanding of the Scriptures), to more fully interpret God's message in the Bible. Connecting the Newer Covenant with the Older Covenant will give us the stability that is so often lacking in some Christian expressions.

Isaiah tells us to look to our "elder brother," who gave us our salvation, "*Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the Lord: Look to the rock from which you were hewn; look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth*" (Isa. 51:1-2). Christians, too, are heirs to the promises of Abraham and the fulfillment of God's promise to him that "*in you will all the nations of the world be blessed.*"

We need to take an active part in God's end-time plan to restore Israel and her people in preparation for the coming of Messiah. Isaiah goes on to say, "*The Lord will surely comfort Zion, and will look with compassion on all her ruins; He will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of singing*" (Isa. 51:3). We see this happening in Israel today, and we can participate in prophecy.

God's Church is very much a part of God's redemptive plan for the world. Not only are we called to take God's message to the nations, but the day is long overdue for us to be reconciled to Israel and the Jewish people. Yeshua (Jesus) is the one who "*is our peace, Who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility...*" (Eph. 2:14). While this has not manifested itself throughout Christian history, God's Word is sure and we will see even this come to pass. But, it all starts with one step towards one another. We need to take the first steps. Yes, there is a relationship between Israel, God's covenants and the Church. It is an exciting plan that has been unfolding since the days of Genesis and won't find its ultimate fulfillment until the message of Revelation is complete. From this teaching, we can get excited that we are not just followers of some religious philosophy, but a dynamic part of God's ongoing, living Word.