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Messianic Perspectives®

God has not forgotten the Jewish people, and neither have we.

SEVEN THINGS EVERY CHRISTIAN SHOULD KNOW ABOUT ISRAEL

PART I

BY DR. GARY HEDRICK

Israel is one of the smallest countries in the world, both numerically and geographically. Yet, in spite of its being so seemingly insignificant and inconsequential, no other country in history has consistently commanded the world's attention like Israel. Hardly a day passes without a bulletin coming across the news wires from the Land of the Bible.

This is precisely what the ancient prophets said would happen someday. They predicted that the time would come when the eyes of the entire world would be riveted on Jerusalem. For centuries, Bible students assumed that those prophecies must have been fulfilled in the past because it seemed so far-fetched to think they might yet lie in the future. After all, for most of the last 2,000 years, there was no such place as Israel! The land of "Palestine" up until the 1800s or so was a wasteland. Jerusalem wasn't much more than a footnote in the annals of history. It was difficult for anyone to imagine that those prophecies would someday begin to unfold on the world stage.



Take the Prophet Zechariah, for example. Sixty-eight years after the Fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC, he delivered this ominous warning from God: "And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it" (12:3). The prophet was using an event that had happened in the recent past (the Babylonian siege and eventual attack on the Holy City in 586 BC) as a template for events that would transpire in the distant future.¹

And now, here we are in the 21st century. This prophesied international fixation on controversies over Jerusalem is exactly what we are seeing in our generation.

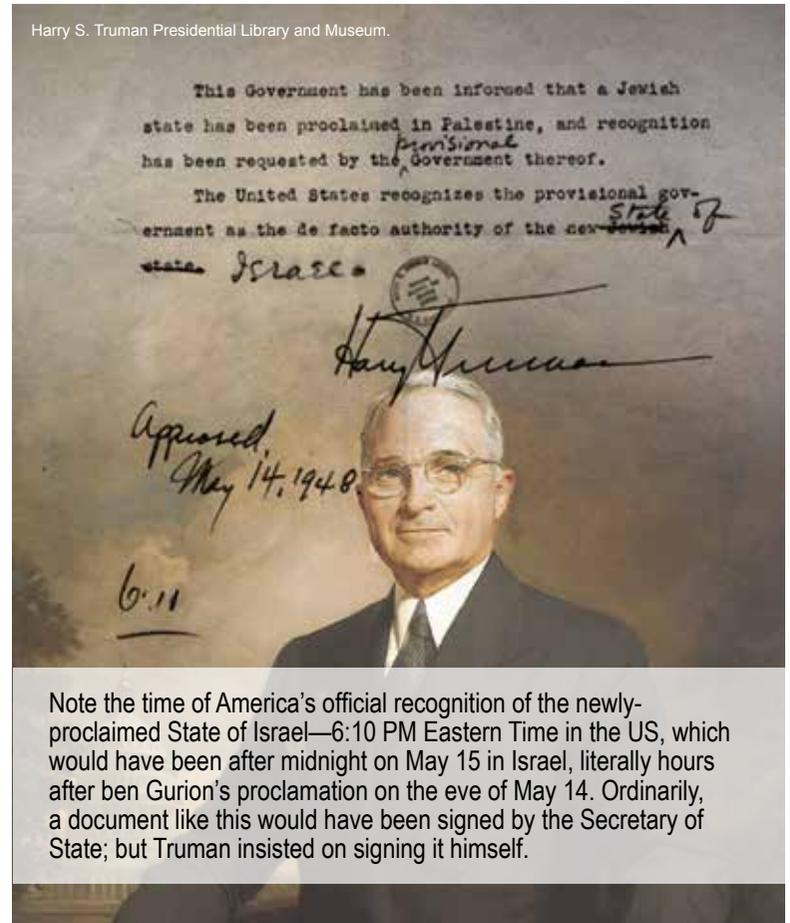
Some people think the ongoing conflict in the Middle East is just a matter of historical coincidence—a pointless squabble between religious rivals for the same tiny sliver of real estate. But it's so much more than that!

Here are seven basic facts about Israel that provide clarity and context about what's happening today in that pivotal part of the world. These simple statements will give every believer a greater appreciation for Israel, her people, and her place in God's ongoing plan for our world.

1. The modern State of Israel is a miracle.

According to English Oxford *Living Dictionaries*, a miracle is "an extraordinary and welcome event that is not explicable by natural or scientific laws and is therefore attributed to a divine agency." The sample phrase the dictionary uses is: "the miracle of rising from the grave."²

After a century or more of strange, inexplicable noises emanating from the Valley of Dry Bones,³ Israel finally rose from her "grave" on May 14, 1948, when David ben Gurion and the Jewish Agency formally declared the formation of the modern State of Israel. Harry Truman, president of the United States, was the first head of state to officially recognize the newly-reborn Jewish State.



Note the time of America's official recognition of the newly-proclaimed State of Israel—6:10 PM Eastern Time in the US, which would have been after midnight on May 15 in Israel, literally hours after ben Gurion's proclamation on the eve of May 14. Ordinarily, a document like this would have been signed by the Secretary of State; but Truman insisted on signing it himself.

Ancient Israel had been destroyed by the Romans in AD 70. Jerusalem was left in ruins and the Jewish people were scattered to the four winds in the Diaspora. All that remained was a sparse, scattered, almost imperceptible Jewish presence, a number of Arab settlements, and mobile enclaves of itinerant Bedouins. The Land remained in this wasted condition for nearly 2,000 years. Most of it was either mosquito-infested swampland or parched, rocky, desolate desert—with not much in-between.⁴

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Dr. Gary Hedrick, *Editor in Chief*
Erastos Leiloglou, *Creative Director*



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Captain Avraham "Bren" Adan raising the Ink Flag at Umm Rashrash (a site now in Eilat), marking the end of the war on March 10, 1949.



Once she declared her independence in 1948, tiny Israel was attacked within a matter of hours from all sides by the combined forces of Egypt, Transjordan (later renamed Jordan), Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. As the combatants took sides, it was 806,000 Jewish people against the entire Arab world, with an estimated population at that time of well over 350 million. So the Arab/Jewish population ratio was around 400 to 1.

The fledgling Israeli air force was very small. Some of the pilots flew small, rickety, makeshift planes held together with baling wire and spare parts from junkyards. Others were volunteers who flew unarmed Piper Cub planes (several of which had arrived in crates and had to be assembled by hand) on reconnaissance missions.⁵ Able-bodied Israelis of all ages became soldiers virtually overnight. The ensuing war dragged on for almost a year through a series of aborted cease-fires until the spring and summer of 1949, when Israel emerged as the victor. The Jewish State had won the war against seemingly impossible odds. That's why the 1948 Arab-Israeli War is known in Arabic as the *Nakba* ("Catastrophe") to this day.

Never before in the history of the world has a nation been conquered, its cities destroyed, and the people scattered to the four corners of the earth, only to have that nation be resurrected 2,000 years later to reclaim its ancient homeland and resurrect its national language. It is unprecedented. It is, in every meaningful sense, a modern-day miracle. As the definition says, it can only be explained as "attributed to a divine agency"—God himself.

Therefore I believe that a wondrous generation of Jews will spring into existence. The Maccabees will rise again.

Let me repeat once more my opening words: The Jews wish to have a State, and they shall have one.

We shall live at last as free men on our own soil, and die peacefully in our own home.

The world will be freed by our liberty, enriched by our wealth, magnified by our greatness.

And whatever we attempt there to accomplish for our own welfare will react with beneficent force for the good of humanity.

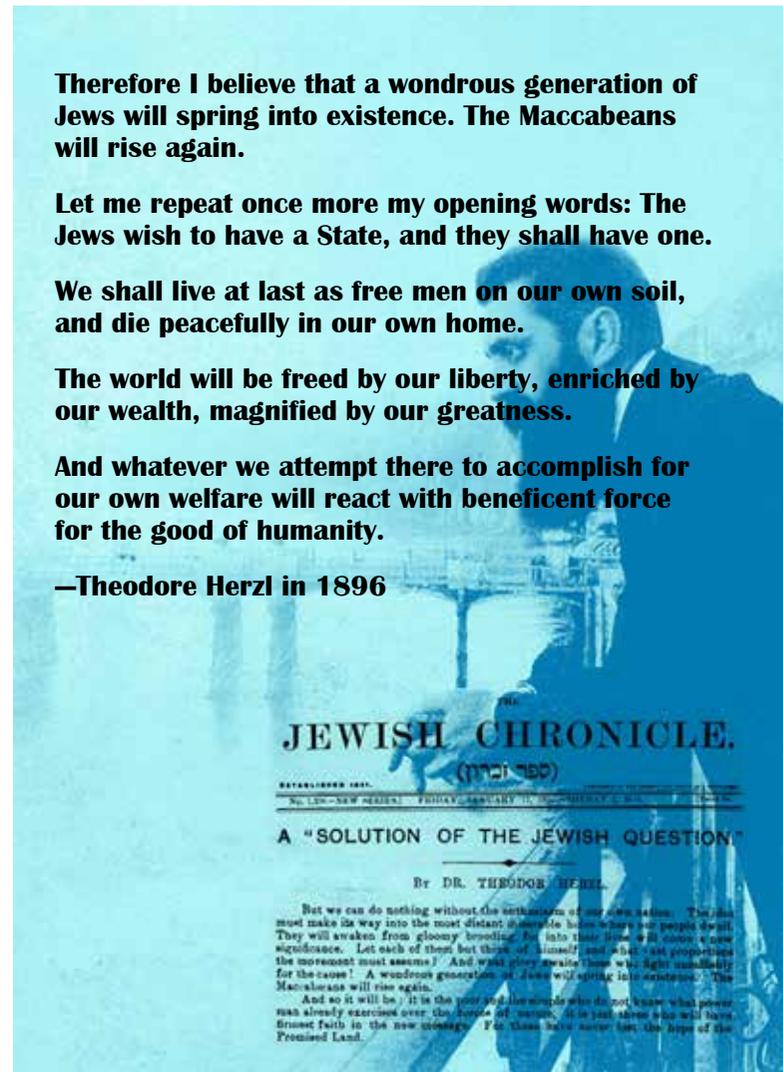
—Theodore Herzl in 1896

2. God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob didn't come with an expiration date.

The easiest way to understand the Bible is to read it like one long story. It's a riveting saga about men and women who served God, very often under dangerous circumstances, and some of whom embarked on rather spectacular adventures. The Lord made key covenants (i.e., agreements or contracts) with several of those people. Those eight or nine covenants governed His relationship with them as individuals, and also with humankind in general—and they helped shape the course of history. One of them, the Sinai Covenant, was conditional. The others, including the one He made with Abraham (or Abram), were unilateral (unconditional).⁶

In English, the mark of a condition is the term *if*. The formula looks something like this: "I will do this *if* you do that." So, if Party B does what is required, Party A agrees to do something in return. If either party fails to keep the terms, the covenant lapses. It may continue to be useful as a template for the relationship, or for voluntary compliance to some of its terms, but it is no longer enforceable as a legal, binding contract.⁷

The unconditional Abrahamic Covenant has three basic provisos.⁸ All three are God's responsibility, not Abraham's. God promised Abraham that (1) he would receive a land for himself and his posterity (Gen. 12:7), (2) he would have innumerable descendants, including the Messianic line leading to the birth of the ultimate Seed, Yeshua (13:15-16), and (3) he would be blessed by God so that he, in turn, could bless the whole world (12:2).⁹



Conditional or Unconditional?

Some people teach that God's promises to Abraham and his descendants were conditional, like the Sinai Covenant; that is, the promises would only continue in effect for as long as they walked in obedience to God. If they ever wavered, the promises would be annulled. However, that's not what the Bible says (see endnote 7).

The unconditional nature of God's covenant with Abraham is clearly seen in passages like Exodus 32. This is where the children of Israel had already started running wild and breaking the Ten Commandments even before Moses got down from Mount Sinai with the stone tablets! (That had to be some kind of record!) God was angry with them, and who could blame Him? He had done everything for them, including delivering them from slavery, parting the Red Sea, destroying Pharaoh's army, and feeding them in the wilderness; and yet here they were, acting like bratty, spoiled children.

So, to make a point, the LORD told Moses (hypothetically, I believe; that is, for Moses' benefit) that maybe He should wipe out the Israelites on the spot and start over with Moses and his family (vv. 9-10). It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Moses! The Abrahamic line would be terminated and he could start a dynasty of his own.

Now watch this. Moses responded, right on cue, just like the LORD knew he would. With all due respect, he reminded God of His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: "*Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit [it] forever'*" (Exod. 32:13).

Based on the information in the passage, for how long does the Land remain the inheritance of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Is it only for as long as their behavior is exemplary? No. Is it only for as long as they don't sin against God? No. Is it only for as long as they do what they're supposed to do? Again, no. Moses reminded the LORD that He had said, "They shall inherit it forever"! Forever means as long as the world exists, and as long as the stars remain in the sky above us.

The Prophet Jeremiah confirms that as long as the world stands, and as long as the sun rises and sets, the Land of Israel belongs to the Jewish people:

Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for a light by day,
The ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by
night, Who disturbs the sea, And its waves roar (The LORD
of hosts [is] His name):

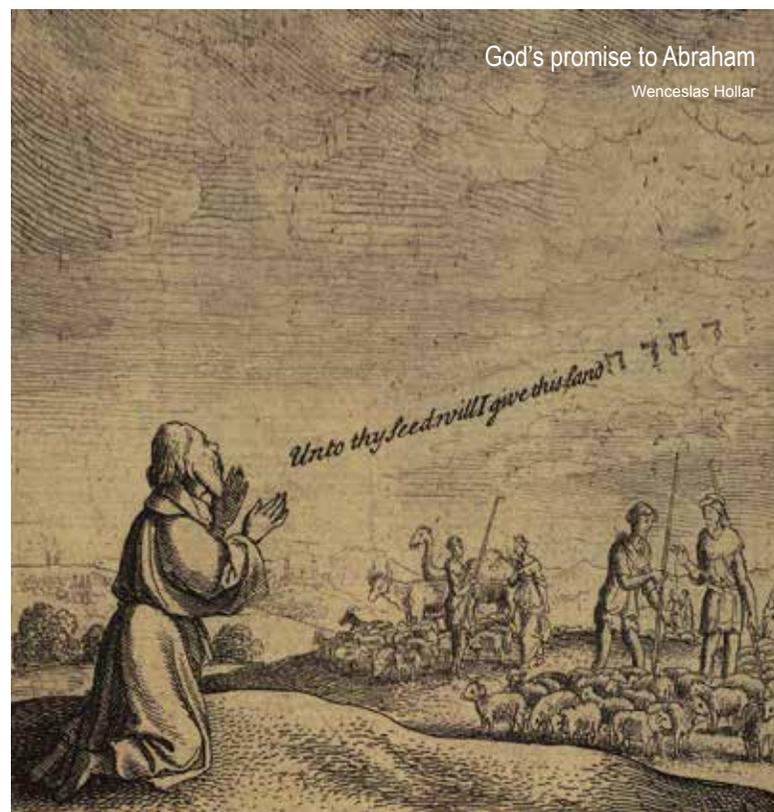
"If those ordinances depart From before Me, says the LORD,
[Then] the seed of Israel shall also cease From being a
nation before Me forever."

Thus says the LORD: "If heaven above can be measured,
And the foundations of the earth searched out beneath,
I will also cast off all the seed of Israel For all that they
have done, says the LORD" (Jer. 31:35-37).

In his negotiation with the LORD that day, Moses made sure to mention how it would look to the surrounding nations (specifically the Egyptians) if He failed to keep His promise to Abraham and his descendants. This shows us that Moses was in tune with God's heart. He knew full well that God's reputation among the nations is important to Him (Joshua 4:24; 1 Kings 8:60, 18:36; Psalm 9:19-20,

83:18). The LORD wants the world to know Him! So Moses very wisely used this as a negotiating point.

Note that Jeremiah anticipates that the Jewish people will fail miserably at times. He says when we figure out how to measure the heavens, He will cast off Israel "... for all that they have done. . . ." So He knows full well that they have failed Him, and will continue to fail Him; but He will never cast them off permanently. By the way, it's interesting that even today, in the 21st century, with all of our scientific advances and technology, astronomers and cosmologists still struggle to tell us how large the universe is. So, the statement in Jeremiah still stands!



Notice, too, that word "inherit": "They shall *inherit* [the Land] forever" (emphasis added). So, what is an inheritance? It's when someone comes into legal possession of money, property, or a title upon the death of the owner. The Hebrew term (*nachal*) narrows it down even more and says a permanent inheritance of land in Israel can only go to a family (*mishpochah*) member. This is how the term is used in Exodus 32:13.¹⁰

So, *Eretz Yisrael* (the "Land of Israel") must remain in the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. If it were possible to order a title search, you'd find that the trail of ownership goes back to God himself because "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" (Psalm 24:1).¹¹ It's His because He made it! He, in turn, gave the Land to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants in perpetuity as an inheritance. That's how it has passed down from generation to generation even to the present day. The inheritance is forever and it stays in the *mishpochah*.¹²

It's true that Israel broke the Sinai (or Mosaic) Covenant and thereby made it unenforceable as a legal contract (Jeremiah 31:32). However, their possession of the Land harkens back to the Abrahamic Covenant, not the Sinai Covenant. They did not forfeit their inheritance by breaking the Law of Moses. Their disobedience disrupted their *possession* of the Land, but not their *ownership* of it.

Ownership vs. Possession

Here's something that most people—even supposed experts—don't understand about this ongoing dispute over the Land of Israel: namely, the difference between *ownership* and *possession*. This simple distinction clarifies the basis for Israel's claim on the Land. You see, ownership and possession are not the same thing. The Israelites/Israelis have always *owned* the Land; but they have not always *possessed* it.



Even today, in real estate law, ownership and possession are two different concepts. If you take possession of a piece of property without actually owning it, it's called "adverse possession." Remember the old saying that "possession is nine-tenths of the law"? It's absolutely not true; at least, not in any binding, legal sense. In most instances, it doesn't matter who lives at an address. The true owner is the person whose name is on the title deed—and that record is on file at the local courthouse.

So, the issue becomes this: who decides how and when Israel can dwell in (or possess) her Land? The answer is—God does. It's not in the hands of the world community of nations, the United Nations, the European Union, the World Court, the World or National Council of Churches, the Vatican, the White House, the Kremlin, or any other earthly entity. God decides when the Jewish people can inhabit their Land.

Always by Grace

Sometimes people say, "The Israelis don't deserve to dwell in the Land because they're still in unbelief." Or they'll say, "If we allow them to have their Land now, we are 'enabling' their unbelief." Well, guess what? They have *never* deserved to dwell in their Land. It has *always* been because of God's grace and mercy. Again, He is the One who decides when the Jewish people can possess their Land—not us.

Even in OT times, God allowed His people Israel to dwell in their Land during certain periods of idolatry and apostasy. Yes, there were times when God exiled them from their Land; but, it was at His discretion and no one else's. So, the argument that the Jewish people today shouldn't be in possession of their Land because of their unbelief and shortcomings rings hollow. God decides when they come and when they go. During the *Aliyot* leading up to the rebirth of Israel in 1948, He brought them back in five waves over a period of roughly 57 years—and the world just needs to get over it.¹³ When the hand of God is at work, it is unwise to oppose it.

The Jewish people have a special, unalterable, and divine calling on them. As the Bible says, *For the gifts and the calling of God [are] irrevocable* (Rom. 11:29).

3. Today's State of Israel is a modern-day continuation of biblical Israel.

We hear occasionally from anti-Semites who spout off about an alleged lack of continuity between ancient Israel and the Jewish people who live in Israel today. They'll say, "Modern Israelis are not related to the ancient Israelites." They argue that the people who established Israel in 1948 were imposters—not the same race as those who were driven out in AD 70 and again later in 135.

In fact, there's a whole montage of hare-brained theories out there claiming that modern Israelis aren't Jewish at all, but are pretenders. One theory suggests that today's Israelis are descended from the ancient Khazars whose empire thrived around the Caspian Sea in the 7th and 8th centuries AD, and who at one point converted to Judaism en masse. The story contains just enough truth to make it misleading, and to confuse people who are ignorant and naïve.

There are other variations, as well. Whichever version the anti-Semites embrace, however, the conclusion is always the same: today's Israelis are not true Israelites; therefore, they are not the beneficiaries of the promises God gave to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.¹⁴ The rightful recipients of those ancient promises, they insist, were scattered in the Diaspora and have long since been absorbed into other nations/ethnicities and disappeared.¹⁵ In the meantime, they say, the world has been deceived by a clever and deeply-entrenched conspiracy masterminded by today's shrewd "Jews" who are not Jews at all.¹⁶ That's their story and they're sticking to it.¹⁷

When Will the Kingdom Be Restored to Israel? (Acts 1:6-8)

“When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Sam. 7:12-13).

For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of [His] government and peace [There will be] no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this (Isa. 9:6-7).

“And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name [Yeshua]. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:31-33).

The Nazis Knew the Truth

All of these theories are flawed in many respects and the books that have been written about them would fill a good-sized library. For our purposes here, however, the issue is not complicated. If there’s any lingering doubt about who the “true Jews” are in modern times, just look at the people who’ve been targeted by God’s enemies. Who were the tens of thousands of people who were killed in the 1800s and early 1900s in the pogroms of Eastern Europe and the Russian Empire? Who were the millions who perished in the Holocaust in the 1930s and 40s? Who were the 3.2 million who were forcibly removed from their homes and communities in Poland and either gunned down on the spot or shipped by train, like cattle, to death camps across the country? And where do anti-Semites continue to direct their venom even in our generation? The objects of these hostilities were (and are) the same ethnicity that we find in Israel today—that is, the Jewish people.

That’s one thing the Nazis weren’t confused about. Hitler (and the devil who inspired him) knew exactly who and where God’s chosen people were—and they pursued and persecuted them relentlessly!

So if you don’t believe us when we tell you that today’s Jewish people in Israel (and elsewhere) are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, believe the evil one himself! He knows exactly who and where they are.¹⁸ And being the diabolical superintelligence he is, as well as a former resident of Heaven, the devil is in a unique position to know exactly where to paint his target.

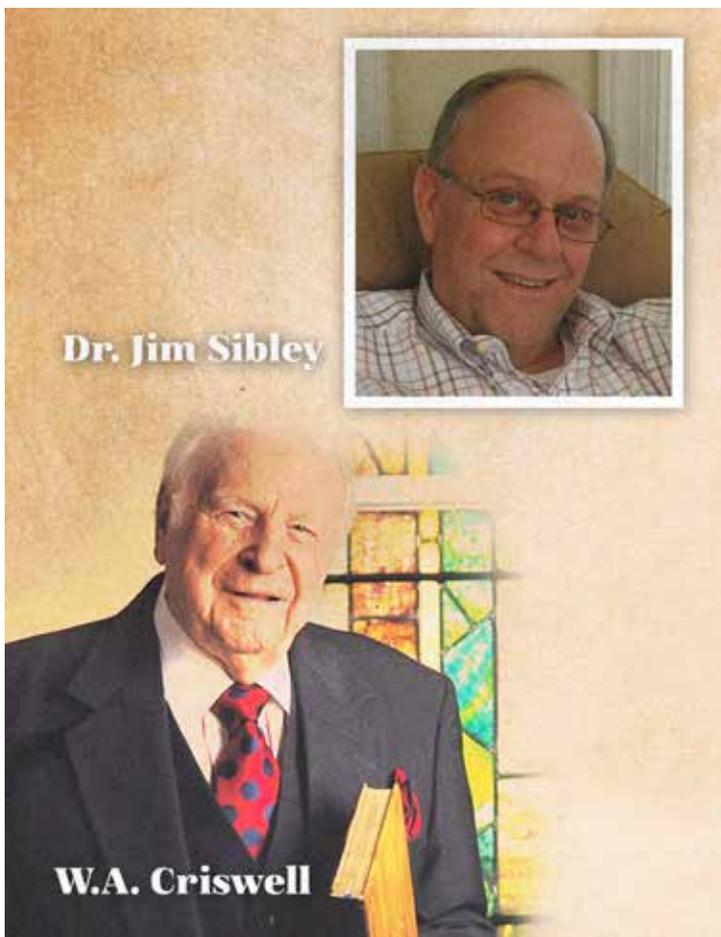
Those who despise and denigrate Israel and the Jewish people should think twice. They need to realize that anyone who sets himself against Israel is siding with the devil and positioning himself as God’s enemy. *For thus says the LORD of hosts: “He sent Me after glory, to the nations which plunder you; for he who touches you touches the apple of His eye” (Zech. 2:8).*

Just look at what happened to Hitler and his cronies. After murdering six million Jewish people all over Europe, squandering the resources of an entire nation, spilling the blood of multitudes of their own people and their enemies, and alienating their European neighbors, the demented leaders of the Third Reich came to an abrupt and ignominious end. When the curtain fell on their dreams of a thousand-year *Reich* (“realm”), all that remained of the Fuehrer himself (and his bride) was a clump of ashes at the bottom of a crater outside his bunker in Berlin. Ten of the elite Nazi leaders who survived the war found themselves hanging at the end of a rope after the Nuremberg trials, and one—Hermann Göring—committed suicide before he could be hanged. This is how people tend to end up—even in this life—when they give themselves over to evil and stubbornly set themselves in opposition to God.¹⁹

Love for Israel Is Instinctive for Believers

Every redeemed heart overflows with love for Israel and the Jewish people. For a Christian, it comes naturally. It’s like an instinct or an automatic reflex. Most of us don’t even have to think about it. We love them because God loves them.

W.A. Criswell, longtime pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas, was known far and wide as a lover and supporter of Israel. One of Criswell’s “preacher boys” was a young Jim Sibley, who later went on to earn his doctorate at Southwestern Seminary and now serves the Lord at Israel College of the Bible in Netanya, Israel. Dr. Sibley was kind enough to write an article for *Messianic Perspectives* several years ago in which he shared some of his memories of his pastor and mentor, Dr. Criswell.



Dr. Jim Sibley

W.A. Criswell

In that article, Jim tells about Dr. Criswell, who was in his late 80s at the time, visiting Israel with a small group of preachers in October of 1995. They decided that they would like to meet Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, so they called his appointment secretary and went to see him. The Mideast peace process was not going well at the time; in fact, Rabin would be assassinated by an extremist only a month or so after this encounter. But, much to their delight, he agreed to see the preachers from America. The people who were present for the meeting described Rabin as he entered the room:

. . . [Rabin was] tired, with a frown and an unpleasant disposition. He was perhaps impatient with the social obligations of his office. As he took his seat, Dr. Criswell immediately took Rabin's large, rough hand in his and said, "Now, sweet boy, here's why we are here." Dr. Criswell then expressed that they had simply come to tell him of their love for Israel and for the Jewish people. By all accounts, Rabin simply melted, and they had a very intimate visit.

On that same visit to Israel, they were walking down Jaffa Road in west Jerusalem, when they realized that Dr. Criswell was no longer with them. They went back, retracing their steps until they found him. He had stopped to listen to a sidewalk musician playing *Ha-Tiqvah*, the Israeli national anthem, on a violin. Dr. Criswell was transfixed as he listened to the music with tears streaming down his cheeks.

Jim continues:

Dr. Criswell loved Israel, the Land and the people, for he loved the things the Lord loves. In Zechariah 2:8, the prophet says of Zion, "He who touches you, touches the apple of [God's] eye." In Psalm 137:5-6, David says, "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget her skill. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not exalt Jerusalem above my chief joy." In the New Testament, Paul expresses his deep love for the Jewish people when he says, in Romans 9:1-3, that he would be willing, if it were possible, to forfeit his salvation and spend an eternity in Hell, if it would result in the salvation of the Jewish people. Dr. Criswell had the heart of Paul; he had the heart of David; he had the heart of Zechariah; and he had the heart of God for Israel and the Jewish people.²⁰

"Christian" Anti-Semitism

One of the scourges of our generation is professing "Christians" who have nothing but disgust and disdain for Israel and her people. These anti-Semites are an embarrassment to true Christians; and even worse, they are self-deceived. Listen: you cannot be an anti-Semite and be a true child of God. It is an impossibility.

Not long ago, a man who portrayed himself as a Christian made some anti-Jewish remarks in an email he sent me. I wrote back and told him he needed to get saved. He became indignant and responded, "Listen, I got saved when I was nine years old." I told him I didn't know what happened when he was nine (because I wasn't there); but whatever it was, it wasn't Bible salvation. It wasn't anything the Spirit of God did. A true child of God cannot hate and despise what God loves and cherishes (see Zechariah 2:8).

At the end of time, when the nations stand before God to give an account for their actions, they will be judged upon the basis of how they treated the Jewish people in their time of need (see Matthew 25:31-46). On the surface, this might seem a bit odd. Shouldn't nations be judged on issues like social justice, accomplishments in the sciences, philanthropy, or contributions toward world peace? Wouldn't that make more sense? But here, it's how they treated Israel during the Tribulation Period (see Matthew 24). But, when you think about it, this makes perfect sense. It's the great litmus test. There's a direct correlation between a person's standing with God and how he feels about the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

ISRAEL: THE PROPHETIC LINCHPIN

Prophecies Currently Being Fulfilled Via Israel

- The Jewish people will be regathered while still in unbelief from the four corners of the earth (Isaiah 11:11-12). Fulfillment: 19th and 20th centuries and continuing.
- The State of Israel will be re-established (Isaiah 66:7-8; Ezekiel 37:21-22). Fulfillment: May 14, 1948.
- The Jews will once again occupy the city of Jerusalem (Zechariah 8:4-8). Fulfillment: June 7, 1967.
- The land of Israel will be reclaimed from its desolation, becoming once again a land of agricultural abundance (Ezekiel 36:34-35). Fulfillment: 20th century and continuing.
- Hebrew will be revived as the mother tongue of the Jewish people after being a "dead" language (i.e., not spoken in everyday conversation) for centuries (Jeremiah 31:23; Zephaniah 3:9). Fulfillment: 19th and 20th centuries.
- All the nations of the world will come together against Israel over the issue of the control of Jerusalem (Zechariah 12:1-3). Fulfillment: Currently occurring.

Prophecies Yet to Be Fulfilled Via Israel

- For a time, Israel will dwell in presumed security and prosperity (Ezekiel 38:8, 11).
- A Russian-led coalition will invade Israel (Ezekiel 38:1-17).
- The Russian coalition will be destroyed supernaturally by God (Ezekiel 38:18-39:8).
- The Anti-messiah (Antichrist) will intervene (perhaps taking credit for what God did in defense of the Jewish State) and guarantee the security of Israel, clearing the way for Orthodox Israelis to rebuild their Temple (Daniel 9:27).
- Once again, Israel will dwell in presumed "peace and safety" (1 Thessalonians 5:3).
- At the end of three and a half years, the Anti-messiah will enter the new Temple in Jerusalem and declare himself to be God (Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:15-18; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4; Revelation 13:14-15).
- The Israelis will reject the Anti-messiah, and he will respond ferociously with an attempt to annihilate them, with a remnant of only one-third of them surviving his Satanically-inspired, Holocaust-like campaign (Revelation 12:13-17; Zechariah 13:8-9).
- Near the close of the seven-year Tribulation, when the Jewish people have finally come to the end of themselves, they will turn to God in desperation and recognize Yeshua as their Messiah (Zechariah 12:10; Romans 9:27-28; 11:25-27). This is what God has been waiting for!
- Yeshua will return, vanquish His enemies, and regather all believing Jewish people to Israel (Deuteronomy 30:1-10).
- Israel, led by her King-Messiah, will be established as the leader of the world community of nations (Isaiah 2:1-4; Micah 4:1-7).
- The Lord will bless believing Israel by restoring His glorious Presence ("light") and fulfilling all the promises He has made to His earthly people (Isaiah 60:1-62:7).
- The blessings of God will flow out to all the nations through believing Israel during the Millennial rule of Yeshua, Israel's Messianic King (Zechariah 8:20-23).

—Adapted from Dr. David Reagan's chart "The Jews in End-Time Prophecy: a Summary" in The Lamplighter newsletter (online at christinprophecy.org).

4. Israel is the linchpin that keeps God's plan for the world moving ahead.

In the old days, when people got around by means of horse and wagon, a wagon's wheels were affixed to the axle with a linchpin. If the linchpin was lost, the wheel fell off and the wagon came to an abrupt halt.

So, if we think of history as progressing on a long, winding road stretching from the beginning in Genesis all the way to the end in Revelation, we should picture the wagon coming to a halt after Matthew 23:37-39 and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70:

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under [her] wings, but you were not willing!

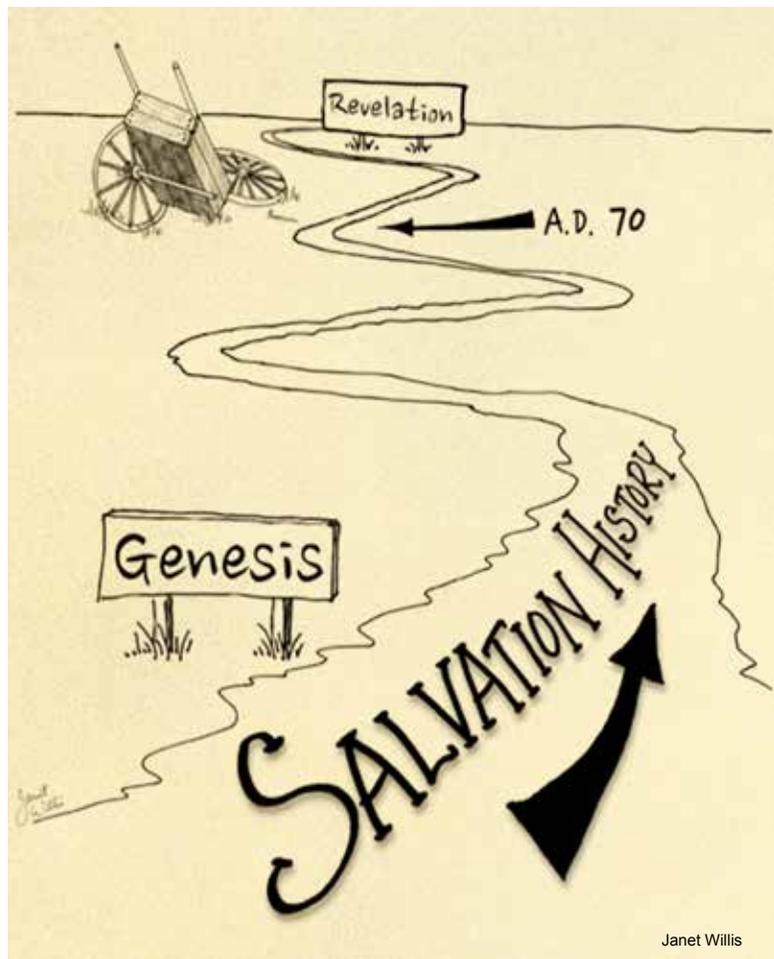
"See! Your house is left to you desolate;

"for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'"

In this quaint metaphor, the "linchpin" is the nation of Israel and the "wagon" is God's ongoing plan for the world. The long, winding "road" is salvation history as it has unfolded (and continues to unfold) through the ages.

Israel is the linchpin that keeps the wheels on the wagon. If you remove the nation Israel, the wheels fall off the prophetic wagon and everything grinds to a halt. That's why nothing prophetically significant happens when Israel is out of her Land.

So, from AD 70, when the nation was destroyed by the Romans, until the 19th century, when the Jewish people began returning in waves back to the Middle East, God's prophetic plan was on hold.²¹



Even some old-time commentators like John Gill (1697-1771), none of whom had ever heard of dispensationalist eschatology or knew anything about Zionism, recognized the centrality of a restored Israel in God's end-time plan. In his comments on Acts 1:7 ("It is not for you to know the times or the seasons"), Gill clarifies what the disciples were asking:

... when should be the time, the day, and hour of the coming of the Son of Man, when He shall set up His kingdom in a more glorious manner, and the kingdoms of this world shall become His; or when the kingdom shall be restored to Israel.²²

Please note that Gill wrote these words long before there was any earthly indication that there would ever be another Jewish State. In his day, Israel didn't exist. Zionism was a mere dream. There was only a place called Palestine, a barren desolate part of the Middle East with mosquito-infested swampland in the north and barren, rocky desert in the south.

Back then, all Gill had to go on were the words of the prophets and some other traditional Jewish sources. For instance, he quotes a passage from the Talmud listing the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel as a legitimate question but one of seven things that men cannot know ahead of time:

Seven things are hid from the children of men, and these are they: the day of death, and the day of consolation, and the depth of judgment, and a man knows not what is in the heart of his neighbor, nor with what he shall be rewarded, and "when the kingdom of the house of David shall return," and when the kingdom of Persia shall fall.²³



Gill (and a few others) understood that the time would come when the Kingdom (i.e., the Davidic reign) would not only be *restored* to a reborn Israel, but it would be *expanded* into a worldwide Kingdom (with Jerusalem as its global capital) when Messiah Yeshua sits on the throne of His ancestor David (2 Sam. 7:12-13; Isa. 9:6-7; Luke 1:31-33).

So once the “linchpin” (Israel) is restored to its rightful place, the “wagon” continues making its way down the road toward prophetic fulfillment.

Many believers today tell us that they have trouble understanding prophecy. They complain that it’s too confusing and complicated. In many cases, however, one reason they think prophecy is complicated and hard to decipher is that

they have yet to figure out that God’s future plan has always revolved around Israel and events in the Middle East. That’s the piece of the puzzle they’ve been missing!

To Be Continued



Dr. Gary Hedrick
is president of
CJF Ministries.

¹ In OT usage, “in that day” is a Hebrew phrase referring to the coming Day of the LORD (*Yom Yahweh*, יוֹם יְהוָה), the time of Messianic fulfillment when God intervenes in power on earth to accomplish, at long last, His purposes in this rebellious world (Isa. 2:12; 13:6, 9; Ezek. 13:5; 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18, 20; Obad. 15; Zeph. 1:7, 14; Zech. 14:1; Mal. 4:5). The NT also references this prophetic Day (Acts 2:20; 1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Peter 3:10). Its primary features are (1) the unleashing of God’s wrath and judgment on His enemies, (2) the fulfillment of His promises, and (3) a sense of urgency. Warnings of its nearness (e.g., Ezek. 30:3) are addressed to the terminal generation—i.e., people who will be living when these earth-shaking events are about to transpire. In his sermon on the Day of Pentecost, Peter refers to a preliminary fulfillment (in the Church, or the Messianic Community) of New Covenant promises and a foreshadowing of the coming Day of the LORD (Acts 2:17-21; cf. Jer. 31:33-34; Ezek. 36:26-27). It’s not a single, literal day, but rather a lengthy period of divine intervention extending from the Second Coming to the end of the Millennium (cf. 2 Peter 3:8).

² “Miracle” at en.oxforddictionaries.com.

³ See the prophecy of the Valley of Dry Bones in Ezekiel 37.

⁴ There was one more Jewish uprising after AD 70. During the short-lived Bar Kokhba Revolt (AD 132-135), Jewish forces regained control of much of southern Israel (Judea) temporarily and were making plans to rebuild the Temple. However, all of their hopes and dreams came crashing down at the disastrous Battle of Bethar. Hadrian’s forces crushed Bar Kokhba’s army, sold the survivors into slavery, and plowed up what was left of Jerusalem. Even after this defeat, however, skirmishes continued for years with Jewish resistance fighters hiding in caves in the hills of Judea. The Romans renamed the Land *Palestina* (for the ancient Philistines) and outlawed circumcision, Torah study, Sabbath-keeping, and other traditional practices in the remaining, scattered Jewish enclaves. The Jewish presence was depleted but never eliminated. The Land of Israel has never been completely devoid of a Jewish presence at any time in the last 2,000 years. The idea that the Jewish people ever abandoned their Land is a myth.

⁵ In the interest of accuracy, we should add that most of the Israeli pilots in May 1948 were not clumsy amateurs. They were skilled, combat-experienced veterans who had flown with distinction for the Allies during World War II. They streamed in from 16 foreign lands (including the United States, Canada, the UK, Australia, and Europe) to answer Israel’s desperate plea for help. But, there are hair-raising stories about volunteers who flew very small aircraft (Piper Cubs and Austers, primarily) on reconnaissance missions with no way to defend themselves.

⁶ The term *unilateral* comes from Latin and literally means “one side.” So, a unilateral agreement is where one party takes the initiative and agrees to do certain things, irrespective of what the other party might (or might not) do. A bilateral agreement, on the other hand, is “two-sided” because requirements are placed on both parties. A multilateral agreement could bind together three or more parties, but such agreements are not found in the Bible.

⁷ Our understanding of ancient covenants has been greatly informed by archaeological discoveries and the deciphering of relevant texts. We know, for example, that when someone in biblical times used the term “covenant” (Heb., *berit*), it called to mind one of three main types of agreements or treaties: (1) a **royal grant** by a king to his servant (which was unconditional and continued as long as the king reigned), (2) a **parity agreement** between equals (conditional), or (3) a **suzerain-vassal arrangement** between a conquering king and a vanquished rival (conditional with terms dictated by the victor). The Abrahamic Covenant best fits the pattern of a royal grant; that is, the King of the Universe promised to do certain things for His servant Abraham. At its core, Abraham had no ongoing responsibilities and no duties to perform. He had no goals to achieve or quotas to fulfill. All Abraham did was *believe* that God was able to do what He had promised (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:1-22). The Abrahamic Covenant does have some peripheral aspects that were conditional, which has prompted some scholars to refer to Abrahamic A (i.e., the unconditional core of the covenant having to do with *ownership* of the Land) and Abrahamic B (the conditional periphery having to do with *possession* of the Land). An example of this distinction (between Abrahamic A and Abrahamic B) can be found in the *NIV Study Bible* (“Major Covenants in the Old Testament,” 19). Nonetheless, the essential core of the Abrahamic Covenant is unconditional.

⁸ There are different ways of looking at the terms of the Abrahamic Covenant. In my booklet *The Eight Covenants of the Bible*, I outlined seven aspects of this covenant. Here, however, we’re condensing the terms down to three basic provisions.

⁹ For an overview of this covenant and its terms, see “The Abrahamic Covenant” by Keith Essex in *The Masters Seminary Journal* (Fall 1999), 191-212 (accessed at tms.edu). For a layman’s survey of eight of the Bible’s major covenants, including the one God made with Abraham, see my booklet *The Eight Covenants of the Bible* (available from CJF Ministries’ online store at MessianicSpecialties.com).

¹⁰ C. J. H. Wright, “Family,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 763-764.

¹¹ Yes, we know that a title search back to the Creation in Genesis would be impossible. We’re speaking hypothetically here.

¹² Some people have pointed out that Ishmael was also a son of Abraham. Therefore, they say, Ishmael and his Arab descendants are equally entitled to the Land. However, the Bible is clear that the promise belongs to the specific line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Even after Ishmael had been born, God referred to Isaac as Abraham’s “only son” because he, not Ishmael, was the son of promise (Genesis 22:2).

¹³ The Hebrew term *Aliyah* (plural, *Aliyot*) means “to go up.” Historically, it refers to five waves of Jewish immigration back to their Mideast homeland. The First Aliyah took place from 1882 to 1903; the second, from 1904 to 1914; the third, from 1919 to 1923; the fourth, from 1924 to 1928; and the fifth, from 1929 to 1939.

¹⁴ We’re speaking in generalities here. There are many different variations of this theory, so no single explanation will cover them all. Some “Christian Identity” groups, for example, claim that Great Britain and the United States are descended from the so-called “lost ten tribes of Israel,” and are therefore the rightful inheritors of the ancient promises God made to Abraham (this is sometimes called “British Israelism” or “Anglo Israelism”). The one thing all of these groups have in common is that they are wrong.

¹⁵ Some so-called British Israelites, for example, claim that nations whose names end with *-ish* (e.g., British, Irish, Danish, Swedish, and so on) are descended from one or more of the so-called “lost ten tribes of Israel.” So, they would say the Danish people are descended from the tribe of Dan. See british-israel.com.

¹⁶ One of the supposed proof texts put forward by defenders of the Khazarian theory is Revelation 2:9: “. . . I [know] the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.” The most obvious problem with applying this to the Khazars is that they didn’t come into existence until several centuries after the Book of Revelation was written. Another problem is that the Khazars, strictly speaking, were not an ethnic group. They were an alliance that arose from a patchwork of nomadic tribes in Eurasia, some of which weren’t even closely related. See Peter Golden’s account of how the Khazars in the 9th century converted to Judaism in large numbers (“The World of the Khazars: New Perspectives [Selected Papers from the 1999 International Khazar Colloquium]” in *Handbook of Oriental Studies, Section 8, Uralic & Central Asian Studies* [Boston: Brill, 2007], 123-161) but are ethnically unrelated to most Ashkenazi Jews in Israel today. For more information about the Khazars and what genetic studies tell us about Jewish identity, see my article “The Top 15 Lies About the Jewish People” in *Messianic Perspectives* (Nov.-Dec. 2013), available in our online archives at cjfm.org.

¹⁷ The theory that today’s Ashkenazi Jews are descended from the Khazars and represent a separate line from the ancient Israelites has been discredited on the basis of genetics, history, geography, and even linguistics. For instance, see Alexander Beider’s treatment of the linguistics issue in *Forward* magazine (Sept. 25, 2017): forward.com/opinion/382967/ashkenazi-jews-are-not-khazars-heres-the-proof. See also the previous endnote.

¹⁸ Some anti-Semites make the argument that there is no remaining “pure” Jewish bloodline, so there is no one left to inherit the Abrahamic promises. This is a red herring. Jewish racial identity has always been dynamic, not static. It has constantly changed and adapted as it has absorbed DNA from new lines. Everyone knows that the Jewish people over the centuries have welcomed many different nationalities (*gerim*; i.e., resident aliens) into their fold. *Gerim* often became proselytes or converts to Judaism—and when they did, they were considered just as Jewish as anyone else. The Bible tells us that in the Exodus, for example, many Egyptians left their country with the departing Israelites (Ex. 9:20; 12:38-39). So the genealogical line that began with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was never intended to be unchanging and “pure.” In fact, the names of four non-Jewish women—Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba—appear in the Messianic genealogy; and Ruth, a Moabite woman, ended up being the great grandmother of none other than King David of Israel (Matt. 1:5-6)!

¹⁹ To make things even more grotesque for the condemned Nazi war criminals, the executioner may have miscalculated the length of the hanging ropes so their bodies didn’t fall far enough to break their necks and kill them quickly. At least one eyewitness report (later denied by the US Army) said that several of the condemned Nazi leaders remained alive for up to 28 minutes while they hung on the gallows, twitching and jerking, slowly strangling to death. See the Wikipedia article “Nuremberg Executions” (en.wikipedia.org).

²⁰ “W.A. Criswell: Friend of Israel” by Dr. Jim Sibley in *Messianic Perspectives* (March-April 2013), 8-9.

²¹ Note that this 2,000-year interlude of prophetic inactivity corresponds roughly to the church age, or the time-space between the 69th and 70th “weeks” in Daniel 9:25-27.

²² John Gill, *Exposition of the Bible* (available online in a variety of editions) at Acts 1:7.

²³ *Legends of the Talmud—En Jacob: Agada of the Babylonian Talmud* by Rabbi Jacob Ibn Chabib, Vol. 2 (34-35).

Bible Questions AND Answers

by DR. GARY HEDRICK

Have a Bible question?

Submit it to Dr. Hedrick at garyh@cjfm.org, or mail it to 611 Broadway, San Antonio, Texas 78215.

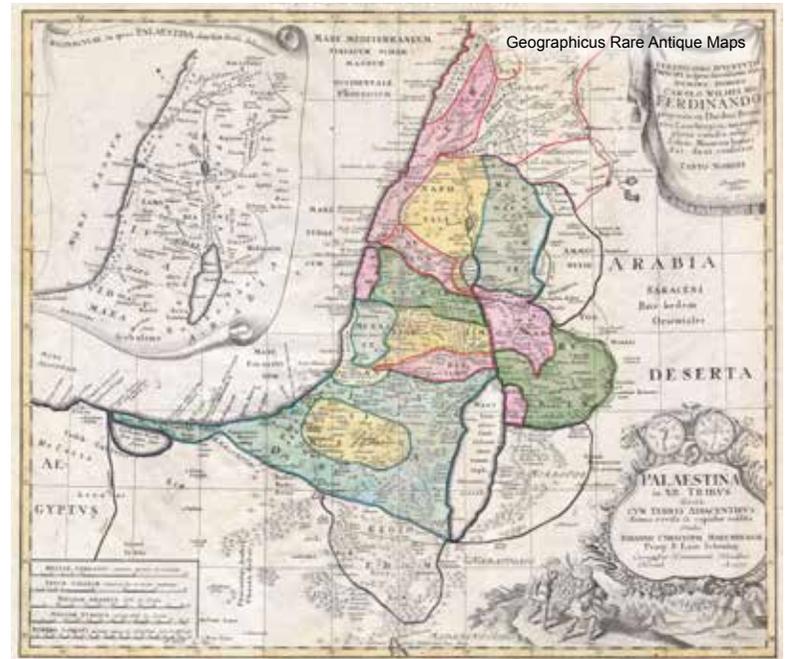
You may see your question addressed in a future issue of *Messianic Perspectives*.

QUESTION: *I'm confused about something. Is there a difference between Arabs and Palestinians? I have always assumed that those terms were basically synonymous, but an Arab colleague who travels a lot in the Middle East for his business says they're not. He says most Arabs don't like Palestinians because they are a "dirty" people. I asked him if that meant they have poor hygiene, and he just laughed and said I wouldn't understand.*

ANSWER: Yes, your Arab friend is right. There's a difference between the terms "Arab" and "Palestinian." "Arab" is an ethnic term (referring to a racial group with specific DNA markers) while "Palestinian" is primarily a geographical designation referring to people living in "Palestine" (or eastern Israel).

Think of the term "American" as an example. It denotes people who are citizens of the United States. It's really not a racial or ethnic term. Americans come from many ethnic backgrounds because our ancestors were immigrants from all over the world. Today, we have native Americans (or Indians, the only group that can claim to be the original "Americans"), European Americans (Caucasians), African Americans, Asian Americans, Greek Americans, Lebanese Americans, and Mexican Americans (Hispanics), among many others. That's how it is with the term "Palestinian." There is no Palestinian race, just as there is no American race. The term is geographic rather than ethnic. Today, Palestinians are simply people from a mixture of ethnic backgrounds who live in the area of eastern Israel (the West Bank of the Jordan River). When the ancient Romans conquered Israel, they followed the Greek custom of calling the area "Palestina" (see map), after the Philistines, Israel's ancient enemies. Even today, the Hebrew word for "Palestinian" is *Filistini* (as in Philistine). That's where the terms "Palestine" and "Palestinian" originated.

So, one of the great ironies in all of this is that *the Jewish people themselves are the earliest surviving Palestinians!* They came after the ancient Canaanites, of course (whom they drove out of Canaan in the 13th century BC); but the Canaanites disappeared from the pages of history millennia ago and no longer exist as an identifiable nationality.¹



So, what is the ethnicity of most Palestinians today? Some have Bedouin or Saudi roots;² but most of them appear to have come from a mix of Arab and Egyptian ancestry. Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian "George Washington," for instance, was from Egypt (born in Cairo). Genetic research has shown that the majority of present-day Egyptians belong to the E-M78 haplogroup (associated with northeast Africa), which connects their DNA to the indigenous inhabitants of Egypt during the time of the Pharaohs and distinguishes them from predominantly Arab genetic groupings from the Levant (the general area of Israel and the Middle East). Roughly 15 percent of the current inhabitants of Egypt belong to the J1 haplogroup (from Asia and the Middle East), which means they have Arab rather than African DNA. But the other 85 percent don't. That's why Arabs and Egyptians are considered two distinct ethnicities hailing from the Levant and northeast Africa, respectively.³

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¹ In an attempt to bolster their claim on the ancient Land, some Palestinians have claimed to be direct descendants of the ancient Canaanites (or Philistines); however, the evidence simply does not bear this out. No ethnic group with identifiable Canaanite or Philistine ancestry has survived until modern times

² This (i.e., the ethnicity of Palestinians) is a controversial topic in Israel these days because there's been a concerted campaign by the Islamic League to forcibly sweep all Arabic-speaking groups in Israel and the territories (including the Bedouin) together under the Palestinian umbrella—and many Bedouin and Arabs (who come from ancestral traditions where allegiances were to individual tribes rather than to nation-states) aren't happy about it! See "Are Bedouin Palestinians?" by Moshe Arens in *HaAretz* (July 1, 2013), accessible at haaretz.com.

³ For an update on what genetics researchers are learning about the ethnic background of the current inhabitants of Egypt, see "Mummy DNA Unravels Ancient Egyptians' Ancestry" by Traci Watson in *Nature* magazine (May 30, 2017) at nature.com.

Fruit from the Harvest

by Violette Berger



Mardi Gras Outreach

Michelle Beadle, CJFM Southeast representative (New Orleans), and a team of trained volunteers, handed out **600 Gospel tracts** and shared the Good News with **21 people** on the streets of New Orleans during Mardi Gras. They praise God that **four** people prayed to receive Jesus as their Lord and Redeemer. After praying the sinner's prayer with one of the volunteers, a gentleman, who called himself a Christian and attended church regularly, confessed that he had never asked Jesus into his life. He commented: "My church never talks about the things you talked about." Praise God he heard and believed!

Michelle relates a discussion she had a number of years ago with the daughter of a born-again couple. The husband is a Gentile believer and the wife is a Jewish believer. The daughter was searching for truth but having serious difficulties understanding the Bible. It was apparent that her intellect was getting in the way. Michelle shared with her the four levels of interpretation that Jewish people use to understand the meaning of the text: *Peshat, Remez, Drush, and Sod* (according to Naftali Silberberg's article, "How Is the Torah Interpreted?"). After five years, she called Michelle—"out of the blue"—to tell her about a profound spiritual encounter she had with Jesus that brought her to repentance, His saving grace, and a transformed heart and life. She also told Michelle that she never forgot what Michelle had shared with her concerning the various ways to interpret biblical text. Now she is excited about starting a blog to share some insights from her study of Scripture. Michelle writes, "I hope you will join me in praying that her faith will deepen and that God will use her blog to reach many others with the truth that has been revealed to her."

"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

Who Has Believed My Report?

CJFM representative Eric Chabot (Columbus, OH) recently participated in an interfaith discussion with Rabbi Michael Cahana at Portland State University in Portland, Oregon. The event was organized by the Jewish Student Union and the Christian apologetics group at the university. This was not a debate, but an interfaith discussion. The video can be viewed at: vimeo.com/261038460. Specific, in-depth questions were discussed covering many aspects of Judaism and Christianity, including beliefs concerning God, Messiah, Jesus, sin, the afterlife, salvation, and a future temple. Eric personally found the last (closing) question to be of great importance: "What message for Christians/Jews would you wish to convey?" Although he has not received any feedback from the rabbi, many have said that Eric was the perfect person for the dialogue.

Pastor Rob Pryor from the Ambassadors Forum at Southwest Hills Baptist Church commented: "I think the event went great and pray Eric was able to plant some seeds for the sake of the Gospel. I also have someone I've been sharing with who describes herself as a 'confused Jew,' so tonight's event was helpful in that light."

Tender Hearts

Richard Hill, CJFM representative (Las Vegas) and pastor of Beth Yeshua Messianic Congregation, is blessed that his wife, Oanh, teaches the children's class while he preaches the sermon. Afterwards, Oanh shares with him what transpired in her class. Recently, after explaining the Good News to her class, Oanh had the privilege of leading a Jewish girl (her family members are already believers) and her friend to the Lord. Oanh said the girls' hearts were tender and ready to receive the Lord.

Rich writes about "Paul" (a Jewish man, not his real name) who visited *Beth Yeshua* a few times over the years and even came to a Yom Kippur service recently. Paul's heart, however, was far from the Lord and he could never say he believed in Jesus. One Friday night, Paul showed up at the service while Rich was teaching from John 20 about the Resurrection of Jesus. When Rich gave the invitation, Paul raised his hand confirming that he had prayed to receive Jesus. When Rich asked him why tonight was different, he said, "Well, Rich, everything you taught tonight finally made sense to me, and I received Yeshua!" Since some of Paul's friends attended the service with him, Rich suggested that he tell his friends. Paul walked up to his friends and told them, "I made my peace with God!" Like Rich, they were stunned, but it was true. Please pray for Paul's spiritual growth.

Cults on Campus

Although the Lord has blessed Rich Hill's campus ministry at UNLV, and he and his team have led many students to the Lord, their outreach is often attacked by the many cults on campus. The latest one to visit the campus is "The Mother of God" cult, which not only teaches false doctrine, but recently followed a new believer and chastised her for praying to receive Jesus. Rich writes, "Thank God the new believer didn't listen to them and instead returned to Rich and the team to confirm that she is indeed saved." Rich and his team have tried to minister to the members of the cult, but they refuse to listen and deceptively call themselves "Christians." Please pray for protection and that God would create obstacles for these cults to keep them off the campus.

"He who speaks truth declares righteousness, But a false witness, deceit" (Prov. 12:17).

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Like many cultures around the world (including ours here in the USA), the Arab culture suffers from varying degrees of latent racism. In the Arab world, “dirty people” (or “dirty Arab”) is a derogatory term for people of mixed ethnicity who are not considered pure Arabs. However, this is not widely known and they don’t like to discuss it with outsiders. That may be why your friend didn’t want to take the time to explain it. In Israel, people who live in the country’s many Arab villages generally don’t like to be called Palestinians. Sometimes they will correct you if you unwittingly commit this faux pas.

One more point (and it’s important): we shouldn’t associate all Palestinians with the extremists who hate Israel and the Jewish people. We have Palestinian friends in Israel. Some of them are colleagues—both Christian and Muslim—who help us with our tour ministry. Many Palestinians and Arabs recognize the advantages of a vibrant and prosperous Israel providing employment opportunities and other blessings (like healthcare and infrastructure). In Gaza and the West Bank, the Palestinians live under horrible conditions and they’ve been victimized by their own leaders who have enriched themselves at the peoples’ expense. It’s a shame. We should have compassion for them. 

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