

ISRAEL IN TARGET

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Aside from the hustling crowds and rush-hour traffic jams that define any international metropolis, Jerusalem astounds most of its tourists with how peaceful the city truly is. While the global media assaults readers with reports of nearby suicide bombings and young zealots throwing rocks across Jewish-Palestinian borders, those who live in Israel's capital city know a different story, a different reality. Theirs is one of surprising peace in a nation whose very existence symbolizes the dichotomy of "possessing the land" amid neighbors—both immediate and far away—who would rather see them dead.

To find the violent, conflict-filled story most incorrectly think is Israel's narrative, all you have to do is drive two or three hours toward virtually any nation surrounding the Holy Land today. Because although the West heralded the Arab Spring only three years ago as the dawning of democracy in nations ruled by tyrannous dictators, the fruit of these ongoing political uprisings has been anything but freedom and stability. For Israel, it's simply increased the shared nightmare most Jews live with each day: that they are staring down the barrel of a gun, no matter which direction they turn.

In Iran, anti-Semitic rhetoric flows from the mouths of its top leaders—whether current "moderate" President Hasan Rouhani, ousted madman Mahmoud Ahmadinejad or Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei—as they openly declare Israel to be a "cancerous tumor in the heart of the Islamic world" that "must be cleansed." Who can forget Ahmadinejad's defiant vow to the United Nations' General Assembly in September 2012 that Israel

would be “eliminated”?

In Egypt and Iraq, the ongoing instability and influence of the Muslim Brotherhood—yes, even after former Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi’s ousting—have propelled Salafist jihadist military campaigns, which are also bent on Israel’s total destruction, like never before.

Meanwhile, the rise of other extremist Islamic forces in Syria, Tunisia, Lebanon, Libya and Yemen merely strengthens what has become a resounding cry to see Israel wiped off the map. And among the few neighboring countries with whom Israel had established peace treaties—namely, Egypt, Jordan and Turkey—these relations have been frayed to a thread.

As Christians, we have a different script to follow—one in which we know who will return to reign physically over this global focal point that has been dominated with strife and violence since the days of Abraham. Why, then, should believers be so concerned over such a tiny speck of land? What does it really matter?

Why Israel Matters So Much

I am convinced one of Satan’s greatest tools that keeps the Western church in the dark concerning God’s end-time plan for our world is to minimize or negate the role Israel plays today. Tragically, rather than stand up for those whom God has called His people (Joel 2:18; 3:2; Jer. 50:6-7), we’d prefer to argue over the differences between supporting Israel as a state versus supporting the Jewish people.

Some within the church disregard Israel’s crisis in favor of the Palestinian plight (whom they argue have equal rights as “sons of Abraham”), while others have gone so far as to adopt a replacement theology perspective that believes the church, through Jesus Christ, has replaced Israel when it comes God’s purpose, plan and promises.

All of these viewpoints are not only misguided, they also come at the expense of Israel at a time when the church is called to be her strongest ally amid an emergence of nations possessing a demonically driven desire to see the Jewish people eradicated.

Given this, let's get a few foundational things straight.

Israel is a land about which God says uniquely, prophetically, redemptively and repeatedly in the Bible, "This is Mine" (Joel 1:6; Zech. 2:5-7; Gen. 35:10-15).

God refers to Israel as He does to no other land on earth. Israel was raised up to be a light to the Gentiles.

Perhaps the most pointed statement regarding the importance of the Jews is from the lips of our Lord and Savior Himself. In His conversation with the Samaritan woman, recorded in John 4:1-26, Jesus is very definitive: "Salvation is of the Jews" (v. 22). With these words He categorically points to the pathway by which the entirety of God's program of redemption was brought to earth and now is present in His Person.

Further, the church at its inception was virtually entirely Jewish, and it remained so until the gospel began to spread. Ultimately the gospel spread to Antioch, where the first Gentile congregation began and the base from which the gospel spread into all the world.

In Romans 9-11, the apostle Paul deals specifically with the question of the Jews' role in God's providence and purpose.

Within the whole of the Bible, these three chapters virtually stand alone as an elaboration of the theology of God's dealing with Jews.

The Jews were the "firstfruit"—the "first people" (through Abraham) to understand a covenant God. They then relayed the riches of that truth to the world, and through their agency,

the Messiah came into the world.

The Word of God calls Jews the “root” and Gentiles the “branches” (Rom. 11:16-27). We’re reminded that while “because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith,” we are not to become haughty but to fear: “For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either” (vv. 20-21). When the fullness of the Gentiles is completed, “all Israel will be saved” (v. 26)—that is, the present Church Age.

So why stand with Israel today?

8 Reasons to Stand With Israel

We are living in a sobering moment in history that calls us, as believers in Jesus Christ, to take a stand with Israel. Given that we live in a miraculous era that has seen the Jewish people regain political control of their own land, which they were without for more than 2,300 years, and once again become an official nation, we could be people of the last hour. Yet we are not to be passive in the face of prophecy; we are called to pray with passion, to intercede and to minister according to the words of the Savior who said it is not our task to speculate when the end will be. It is our responsibility to do “kingdom business” until He comes (Luke 19:13).

This is not about politics; this is about the *Word of God*, but the *political ramifications are extremely dramatic*. Scripture declares there will come a time when all the nations of the world will turn against Israel (Zech. 12:1-14). Ongoing developments in the Middle East inescapably demonstrate the present moment and make it highly conceivable that this could happen in our time. Accordingly, it is critical that believers understand the specific reasons for why we should stand with Israel today.

1) Divine Order

Every believer is charged to make the Jews a priority in his or her value system. Why? Because God has. As a result, we are to render thanksgiving for God's work via them as a people.

Understanding the basis of the attention we give to the Jews has to do with understanding God's divine order and things He has said. This involves both a people and a land (the latter of which we will cover shortly in another reason).

Remember, the Lord first selected a people. He began by selecting a man named Abraham. The Lord said that through Abraham's seed (in relationship with his wife, Sarah, giving birth to the promised child, Isaac), all the nations would be blessed. Through this people, every human being would have access to the divine blessing of Almighty God.

In Genesis 12:3, the Lord says in the covenant He makes with Abraham, "I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Upon Jesus' return to earth, the Lord will judge nations and deal with them for their decisions, just as He does individuals. Yet He makes a specific promise of judgment—of being either blessed or cursed—related to Abraham's seed. It's vital that we see this relates not only to a people (Jews), but also to a land (Israel).

In Romans 9:4-5, we find a revealing passage that outlines the Lord's purposes for which He chose this people: "who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen."

God chose the Israelites to be the vessels for four overarching things:

- > The adoption: God's divine choice of the seed of Abraham as a people.
- > The glory: the manifest presence of God revealing Himself.
- > The covenants: the commitments that God makes. These are evident in three forms through Scripture:

The Abrahamic Covenant. In this foundational covenant, God essentially told Abraham, "I will give you a people and a land, and through this seed the nations of the earth will be blessed" (Gen. 17:2-8).

The Mosaic Covenant. Through Moses, God offered the revelation of the Law, given as a teaching means to lead us to Christ: redemption through the blood of the Lamb (Gal. 3:19-29).

The New Covenant. In Jeremiah and Ezekiel, God says in words almost parallel: "For the time will come that I will take My Law and I will make a new covenant with you, and I will put My Spirit within you" (Jer. 31:31-33; Ezek. 36:27).

- > The greatest gift: the wonder of the gift of Jesus to mankind. John 3:16 explains that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." He gave Him through the Jews, and He came as a Jew. Jesus Himself, speaking to the woman of Samaria, said, "Salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22).

So Scripture speaks to us very clearly: We're dealing with the root of everything that has to do with the revelation of God to humankind. The proof of this today is in the very existence of the Jews as a people and the fact that they've been recovered as a nation (Ezek. 37). And now, the modern-day struggle is over Jerusalem, over Israel and over the presence of Jews and their right to have a land. Almost every nation refuses to make an abiding commitment to stand by the Jews and Israel. Only a few remain, but the Bible says God will honor those who do.

2) Spiritual Link

Our place in God's present order inextricably links us with the Jews as a people, and thereby the land of Israel, according to the Word. When we put our faith in the Redeemer who came through the Jews, we enter into a line of those who have trusted God according to His revealed grace and purpose.

Scripture declares that, spiritually speaking, when you receive the Lord, you become a Jew (Rom. 2:28-29, Gal. 3:26-29). If you are a believer, you cannot be consistent with the whole of Scripture and take a position that is passive toward the Jews and Israel.

3) God's Promises Over the Land

God has made unique declarations regarding the land of Israel that have never been rescinded:

Leviticus 25:23—The land is the Lord's land, and it is His to assign and dispose of: "The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine."

Deuteronomy 32:43—"Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people ... He will provide atonement for His land and His people."

2 Chronicles 7:20—God says, "[If the people violate Me], I will uproot them from My land which I have given them."

Psalms 85:1-2—"Lord, You have been favorable to Your land; You have brought back the captivity of Jacob. You have forgiven the iniquity of Your people; You have covered all their sin."

Isaiah 8:8—This land belongs to Father God, and it is the land of His Messiah: "The stretching out of his wings will fill the breadth of Your land, O Immanuel."

Jeremiah 2:7—The Lord tells the people why there will come the loss—the destruction—of the city of Jerusalem: "I brought you into a bountiful country. ... But when you entered, you defiled

My land and made My heritage an abomination.”

Ezekiel 38:16—God is speaking to people in the end times who rise up against Israel, and He is speaking of a confrontation that will take place in His land: “You will come up against My people Israel. ... I will bring you against My land, so that the nations may know Me, when I am hallowed in you.”

Joel 1:6; 2:18; 3:2—Three times in this book, the land is referred to as belonging to the Lord: “For a nation has come up against My land” (1:6); “Then the Lord will be zealous for His land” (2:18); “I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will enter into judgment with them there on account of My people, My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; they have also divided up My land” (3:2).

Hosea 9:3—This refers to the scattering of Israel: “They shall not dwell in the Lord’s land, but Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and shall eat unclean things in Assyria.”

Zechariah 9:16—“The Lord their God will save them in that day, as the flock of His people. For they shall be like the jewels of a crown, lifted like a banner over His land.”

When we talk about Israel, we are dealing with: 1) a piece of property that God has made pronouncements about and 2) God’s people to whom He’s given the land. It is a major issue with the Creator of all things, and it is non-negotiable. Things that God has said uniquely about Israel have never been rescinded.

Not only does the land belong to God, but also God has committed the land to Abraham and his offspring via Isaac forever (Gen. 17:7-8). Isaiah 54:8-10 reaffirms this as the Lord said, “With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you. ... My kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace be removed.”

The loss of governance by Israel through sin and dispersion has not altered God's announced commitment to make it theirs forever. (If you doubt this, read Ezekiel 37.)

4) Media Misrepresentation

Virtually every news report on the conflict involving Israel today presents Israel as the aggressor, notwithstanding the fact that the hostilities were provoked by Palestinian or Hamas shellings or rocket fire, against which the nation had to take action in self-defense. For example, when Israel gave Gaza back as an effort to establish grounds for advancing the "peace process," within months the same area became a staging ground by the Palestinians for new unprovoked attacks on Israel.

This represents the futile efforts Israel has faced at every turn when attempting to negotiate peace, since the media reports consistently assign responsibility to Israel as the initiator of aggression, when in fact the action of the Israel Defense Forces is only to raise a shield of self-defense. Consequently, Israel's present conflict is neither by its initiative nor perpetuated by expansionism or racism on its part.

The general attitude of the world today regards the Palestinians as the underdog and the victim, but Israel is defending the land covenanted to them in 1917 and established by the United Nations Assembly in 1948. The Palestinian goal is not to secure a homeland but to drive Israel out altogether. For the sake of mounting public opinion against Israel, surrounding, well-resourced Arab nations have never offered refuge to the Palestinians. The majority of the world doesn't know this, and nobody is bothering to tell them because sympathies are so overridden by other forces.

Remember, this is not about politics, yet the ramifications of this struggle inevitably involve governments, which are

intended to represent people groups. And among Christians, this is where we often confuse the matter—which is why it's crucial that we understand ...

5) Arab Rights

To stand with Israel is not to oppose the Arab people as an entity, nor to oppose the rights of Arabs living in Israel to a peaceful, politically secure and prosperous life. God has no disposition against any human being, certainly not Arabs, who are the offspring of Ishmael, the other son of His chosen leader, Abraham. Standing for Israel doesn't require an anti-Arab stance and doesn't require us to be loveless toward other people.

Though the world may not understand this stance, we can defy their logic through Christ. As Jesus said, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

6) Spiritual Warfare

The relentless animosities of sectors of the Arab world are not merely political causes but are driven by spiritual powers that will not be satisfied until Israel ceases to exist.

Even unbelievers can recognize the uncanny patterns of vehement anti-Semitic rhetoric shared between the likes of Adolf Hitler and modern-day Arab leaders such as Ahmadinejad, Khamenei and their successors. The forces opposed to Israel are not simply those of people who don't like Jews. We are caught in the stream of spiritual forces greater than humanity, forces that cannot be overthrown politically or by the power of persuasion. These forces can only be broken by intercessory prayer where principalities and powers are cast down.

7) Shared Persecution

If we think Israelis are the only ones in the line of fire in this conflict, we're deceived. The same spirit driving these animosities is equally opposed to Christians as to Jews, and in time will eventually bring persecution to both.

Just as Scripture describes two witnesses that will be put to death in Jerusalem at the very end of time (Rev. 11), generally the "two witnesses" that have stood for the living God throughout history have been the Jews and the Christians. The presence of the entire Judeo-Christian ethic, values and testimony is the most assailed religious/spiritual testimony in today's world and is allowed to be persecuted with impunity. Too often we hear incidents where such "witness" exists where violated rights or outright brutality finds only a silent response from the U.N. or the world press.

The hostilities and animosities are just as leveled at believers as they are at Israel because there is a spirit of the world that is against "all that is called God" (2 Thess. 2:4) and all things testifying to His existence, love, worth and glory.

8) God's Summoning

A biblical assignment and a divine promise summon our stand in faith, our intercession with expectancy and our support with promise (Eph. 6:10-20).

We are called to stand with Israel today because we could be people of the last hour. The Lord has called us to be people with moral and biblical conviction, walking wisely and knowing His Word. He will honor those who make an abiding commitment to stand with the land He's called uniquely His.

Jack Hayford was the founding pastor of *The Church On The Way* in Van Nuys, California, and founder and chancellor of *The King's University*. Pastor Jack graduated to glory on January 8, 2023, at the age of 88.