

Why Israel Matters

God began fulfilling Old Testament prophecies in 1948 when Israel became a nation. Today this special land is still a prophetic signpost.

For some time, churches across America have observed a unique group of Christians coming to worship services. They wear Jewish prayer shawls and Star of David jewelry, greet fellow congregants by saying, "Shalom", and stop people after the service, a ram's horn tucked under one arm, to explain why every believer needs to go to Israel.

I call them the "Israel people" – supporters of the Jews and their nation. Is there something they have grasped that the rest of us are missing? Most Christians support Israel theoretically, but in day-to-day life, the nation, her people and her concerns seem far off.

However, I believe the time has come for our outlook to change. Israel is rapidly evolving into what may become the most fundamental issue to face every Bible-believing Christian in the world.

Nations such as Iran are rising up and calling for the annihilation of Israel. An increasingly violent, militant Islam is poised to inflict global terror on all who stand with Zion. Historically Christian Europe is in demographic danger of becoming a Muslim continent.

Running through Jerusalem is a dividing line that becomes clearer with every passing day. When this reality hits us, we will be compelled to choose a side. Every committed Christian, I believe, will soon have no choice but to prepare for action.

Though you may not have actively supported this nation in the past, make no mistake: Israel matters to us. Here's why.

We represent Jesus

As followers of Jesus, one of our chief roles is to serve as His emissaries, representing Him to the world. Honoring and hallowing the Lord's name is central to our call as believers and our accountability before men. We therefore must understand how the testimony of our words and actions fashions a lens through which others will see God.

But through the centuries, the name of Jesus has been profaned and vilified by people claiming to be Christians. In the name of Christ, they have acted against the Jewish people in unspeakable ways. This has happened to such a drastic degree that the name of Jesus has become a figurative and literal curse to the Jewish people.

I find that many evangelicals are largely ignorant of the horrors committed against the Jews in the name of Jesus throughout church history and the resulting scars on the corporate soul of the Jewish people.

Again and again, generation after generation, in "Christian" city after "Christian" city, the Jewish people have been maligned, ostracized, tortured and even burned alive by Christians acting in Jesus' name. These crimes against humanity often occurred while other Christians—equally culpable in their indifference and inaction—allowed such atrocities to take place.

George B., my good friend from New York, a Jew who was raised

in Cleveland, experienced the results of anti-Semitism personally when he was a young boy. While walking to school through his mostly Catholic neighborhood, he was surrounded by a large group of older boys from the local Catholic school. "You killed Christ!" they screamed at him. "You put Jesus on the cross!" The boys then proceeded to surround young George, trapping him so that he could not escape while they urinated on him.

If we are truly concerned about preaching the gospel, if we are truly concerned about being a witness to the goodness of the name of Jesus, then the fame and honor and accurate representation of the character of Jesus must be at the forefront of our agenda. Despicable things for centuries have been perpetrated against the Jewish people in the name of Jesus. Israel matters because our support of her becomes a practical act of repentance for centuries of sin so black and grim that it has stained the soul of the church.

Our faith is founded upon Judaism

Christianity did not form in a vacuum. Our faith was generated from a consecrated place—Israel—and a chosen people—the Jews.

The gospel is a Jewish message about a Jewish Messiah given to Jewish disciples within a Jewish context. The Bible tells us that salvation is "of the Jews" (John 4:22, NKJV) and that to them "pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants ... 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" (Rom. 9:4-5).

To not understand where we have come from is to not be clear

about who we are, where we are and where we are going. To be true to the Bible, we have to understand the Jewish heart of the faith we are professing and the people and Scriptures through whom God gave us His Son.

Two things begin to happen when we understand the Jewishness of our faith. First, we start to appreciate and glean from all the rich truths that God taught His people through the Law and the feasts: the power of a true Sabbath, the beauty of redemption in Passover, the joy of harvest in Shavuot (Pentecost), the humility of Yom Kippur, the future hope in Sukkot (Tabernacles).

Second, we realize that these feasts have not ended. God said they were not only Israel's feasts but also "His feasts" and that they would endure forever. God has a calendar, and Israel is keeping it! And though we, as Gentile believers, are not bound by the Law, there is much we can learn from these powerful traditions.

The appointed feasts of the Lord received the stamp of eternity from Moses and King Solomon. "Behold, I am building a temple for the name of the Lord my God, to dedicate it to Him ... for the burnt offerings morning and evening, on the Sabbaths, on the New Moons, and on the set feasts of the Lord our God. This is an ordinance forever to Israel" (2 Chr. 2: 4).

Whenever God appointed and dedicated feasts for His name's sake, He intended for them to be celebrated perpetually. His promises are without compromise and without expiration. We owe a great debt to the Jewish people for maintaining, even to this day, the words and feasts of the Lord.

Israel's cause is just

After 15 years of studying, living in and traveling to Israel, I am thoroughly convinced that even if I were merely a moral person (and not a Christian), I would still be standing with the justice of Israel's cause.

Israel is not perfect, but she has shown incomparable restraint in dealing with her enemies in light of what her people have faced. There is no greater example in the world of godly tolerance and long-suffering than in this nation.

In 1947, United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181 internationally acknowledged Israel's right to exist. The battered Jews, many of them survivors of the Holocaust, quietly accepted a miniature portion of their ancestral homeland. Though the borderlines drawn up by the United Nations excluded from the Jews the city of Jerusalem, their spiritual capital for 3,000 years, the Israeli people still peacefully agreed to the limits of their new state.

The Arab states, on the other hand, did not accept them. In fact, they completely denied Israel's right to exist and began to take steps toward its destruction and the genocide of the Jews.

In May 1948, less than 24 hours after Israel officially accepted the U.N. borders and was recognized as a state, the regular armies of Egypt, Transjordan, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq all invaded the infant Jewish nation. In a war for independence that lasted more than a year, thousands of Jews were killed. Though Israel ultimately survived, the aggression did not end.

In 1967, surrounding Muslim nations again conspired to invade and destroy the Jewish state. But Israeli forces learned of the imminent Arab attack. Outnumbered in troop strength nearly six to one, Israel miraculously won the conflict—dubbed the “Six-Day War”—through a pre-emptive strike against Egypt to the south and defensive retaliation against Jordan and Syrian forces to the east and north.

Through the years, a major misconception has sprung up regarding the Israeli-Arab conflict that says both sides of the Middle East conflict are equally responsible for the unrest.

The reality is that it is not Israeli policy to initiate violence. Israel is continually forced into responding to the aggression of other nations. Now Israel is face to face with Hamas, a bloody, terrorist Arab-Palestinian government that is not calling for peace but for the total destruction of Israel.

Israel has longed for peace from the start. And with nations and people who desire peaceful co-existence, such as Egypt and Jordan, Israel has achieved it. But toward its aggressors, a posture of military defense has been necessary for her survival.

Take the Oslo Peace Process, for example. Israel accepted the terms calling for a withdrawal of forces from the West Bank and Gaza in an attempt to clear a way for Palestinian self-rule and an eventual “two-state solution.” Though the action meant increased risk that endangered Israel’s future, the country nevertheless began creating the financial infrastructure needed for Palestinian schools, hospitals, water works and electric generation. But in the end, hopes for peace were dashed when the Palestinian signatory of Oslo, Yasser Arafat, predictably reverted to his barbaric ways, ordering and financing terror attacks through Hamas, Islamic

Jihad and others.

Though many nations attack everything Israeli—from its religion to its politics, from its people to its very existence—this outnumbered and assaulted tiny nation endures the venom, courageously and consistently choosing peace over war.

Israel is the Middle East's only thriving democracy.

In a deeply troubled part of the world, in a place known for acts of terrorism and hate and fear, Israel shines at the center as a beacon of hope.

While husbands, fathers and brothers in many surrounding Muslim nations execute “honor killings,” murdering hundreds of women each year for alleged infidelity, Israel respects women and values their contributions to society. While in many Islamic societies women cannot vote, Israel encourages women in all civic services and even elected a female prime minister as far back as 1969. And while its neighbors demonstrate little or no tolerance for any religion but Islam, Israel affords its entire population religious freedom, a right extended to the more than 1 million Arabs currently living within Israel's borders.

All Arabs living inside Israel enjoy full and legal rights as citizens. The Arab population has representation in Israel's parliament, the Knesset, and an Arab holds a seat on the Supreme Court. Moreover, Arabic is an official language alongside Hebrew.

Arabs are also afforded freedoms of speech and expression, even when that means permitting rhetoric that calls for the

destruction of Israel, and even when that rhetoric inspires militant Islamists to commit suicidal murder.

Israel's right to continued existence as the only free society in a sea of religious tyranny and oppression is recognized by every major power in the world, certainly every free democracy. Yet radical Islam wants Israel to have not even a parcel of land. They will not be satisfied until the Jewish people are "driven into the sea," even though the actual land that Israel retains sovereignty over today, according to the Israel Hasbara Committee, comprises "much less than one-hundredth of the surrounding Arab land mass."

We know that a secular democracy will not be what saves Israel from its enemies. Nevertheless, we appreciate the enormous significance of a people with similar values standing on the front lines in the Middle East. Amid rocket attacks, hate-filled propaganda and suicide bombings, Israel continues to place the freedom of her citizens, even citizens sworn to her destruction, over the security of her statehood.

Jerusalem's future has prophetic significance

Let me admit: I don't fully understand the last days. And I have a growing suspicion that when they do play out all our theories will be a little bit right, but somewhat wrong, and we'll all be surprised by the wisdom and power of God. I am simply not certain how the end times will unfold.

However, one thing I do know—the King is coming! The clouds will roll back, the trumpet will sound, and the earth will once and for all receive the Lord.

I've always been overwhelmed by the thought of God sending His Son in human flesh. And the more we meditate on this glorious wonder, the more we understand that He sent His Son as a Jew, and His Son is returning as a Jew, the Jewish Messiah and the King of the nations.

So what is Israel's role in this epic, end-time drama? On that glorious day when the Lord of Lords does return to the earth, on which parcel of land will He first touch down?

According to Scripture, His feet will land on the Mount of Olives, in Jerusalem, the city of the King. "And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east," the Bible tells us in Zechariah 14:4.

He will reign in and from Jerusalem, and the Word of the Lord will go forth from the Holy City. With such a rich history and prophetic destiny, Jerusalem stands alone as the place where God has chosen to put His name: "'In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever'" (2 Kin. 21:7).

I also know this: We face a very uncertain future.

Militant Islam is dedicated to global conquest and the destruction of Israel and America. Its adherents are daily sacrificing their children as homicide bombers to accomplish their aim. A spiritually complacent Western church seems unaware or in denial regarding the twin threats to the future of Western civilization—radical Islam and secular humanism.

Lawlessness and natural disasters abound. Revivals and spiritual awakenings and signs and wonders are increasing and

will grow. The great and terrible day of the Lord is fast approaching.

As world powers rise and fall, and America struggles to find and walk in truth, Israel steps onto center stage. Now that the question of her significance has become unavoidable, the peoples of the earth are aligning for or against her.

Christians cannot afford to be ignorant or silent when this story, an essential part of our own story, reaches its climax. The name of Jesus is at stake. The lives of our children and grandchildren are at stake.

May we be found faithful. May we become one of the "Israel people," never again to be unclear or silent about where we stand.

Robert Stearns directs Eagles' Wings in New York. He serves as co-chairman with Jack Hayford of the Day of Prayer for the Peace of Jerusalem, held annually on the first Sunday in October. Log on at .

Standing With Israel

A cross section of Christian ministers have formed Christians United for Israel to rally evangelical support of the nation.

A diverse group of Christian leaders met in San Antonio February 7-8 to form Christians United for Israel (CUFI), a national organization to support Israel.

Hosted by John Hagee, pastor of Cornerstone Church and a long-time supporter of Israel, the 24-hour event drew more than 400

invitation-only attendees representing megachurches, television networks, businesses and international ministries. Participants included Benny Hinn, Matt Crouch, Kenneth Copeland, Jesse Duplantis and Charisma founder Stephen Strang, who also serves as regional director for CUFI.

The stated purpose of CUFI is “to provide a national organization through which every pro-Israel organization and ministry in America can speak and act with one voice in support of Israel in matters of biblical issues.”

In his introductory comments to the attendees, Hagee discussed recent threats to Israel’s security from surrounding nations and argued that it is the church’s responsibility not only to pray for the peace of Jerusalem but also to support it tangibly. “Support for Israel is part of being a Christian,” Hagee stated.

The organization is led by an executive board that comprises Hagee; George Morrison, pastor of Faith Bible Chapel in Denver; Gary Bauer, president of American Values; and Jerry Falwell, pastor of Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia. Two key roles of the executive board will be to send out e-mail alerts when Israel’s security is threatened and to buy advertising in national newspapers to show support for Israeli concerns.

“We want to be able to literally bury Washington, D.C., within a 24-hour time frame with support for Israel,” Hagee explained.

On July 18-19 CUFI plans to convene a summit in Washington, D.C., during which representatives will hold a press

conference and meet with elected representatives to promote pro-Israeli policy.

In February regional directors were appointed to assist in launching Nights to Honor Israel in various cities throughout the U.S. Since 1981, Cornerstone Church has hosted the events, which bring together Jews and Christians and raise funds for Jewish humanitarian causes.

Also attending the inaugural CUFI meeting were Jewish leaders, including San Antonio Rabbi Aryeh Scheinberg and author David Brog, who offered insight on the challenges surrounding the historical relationship of Jews and Christians.

“Christians have been responsible for centuries of discrimination, murder and massacre against the Jews,” said Brog, a practicing Jew and author of a new book, *Standing With Israel: Why Christians Support the Jewish State* (FrontLine). “But my hope is that you will continue in what you are doing, even if my community does not respond as it should.”

To engender the trust of the Jewish community, the organization is to be “non-conversionary” in its approach to Jews. Some attendees said this view will spark controversy among certain conservative church leaders.

Bauer, however, said he hopes Christians will not let theological concerns stop them from supporting the Jewish state.

“Sixty-five [percent] to 70 percent of Americans instinctively support Israel,” Bauer said. “Just think what we could do if we could turn that instinctive support into something that’s

grounded in faith. If we do that, we'll be able to put aside the things that divide us."

Matthew Green