

## ISRAEL: THE EPICENTER OF GOD'S PLAN WEEK 2

In our study – in any Bible study – we need to begin WITH GOD!

He has the plan. He has the answers – AND – they are in His word. When you have questions about Israel and the chaos that we see surrounding Israel – go to God's word. When you have questions about God's short leash on Israel through the Covenants that He made with Abraham, Moses, David – go to God's word. Observe the text, ask questions, find the answers IN THE BIBLE!

Israel's history appears bleak to us, doesn't it? Speaking of bleak, let's go back to Adam and Eve! Sin is the black backdrop for everything in this world. How much more does God's mercy, grace, and love shine against such a backdrop! Through God's dealings with Israel we see so CLEARLY God's faithfulness, His unconditional love, His longsuffering, His holiness!

With any study about Israel, I always want to pose this question:

How are we, believers in Jesus, to respond to GOD and to Jewish people? Is it just to be a response to Jewish people – or is God calling us to come alongside them?

“Mere human ingenuity could never begin to produce fictionally so absorbing, emotion-charged and exhilarating a drama as is being lived out in the story of the Jewish people.”

Israel is a study in God's sovereign choice, His sovereign purpose, and in SPIRITUAL WARFARE. There is chaos swirling around Israel because God loves Israel, Satan hates Israel, Jesus is returning to Jerusalem and will reign from Jerusalem!

How did this all happen?

After dealing with “mankind” for 2,000 years since the creation – when there were no Jewish people and no Gentiles – God began something new with Abram. (NOTE: this was not new to God; this was His plan). God told Abram that He would make of him a great nation. This is a new nation that was introduced by God. Abram's background was not Jewish. There were no Jews in Abram's lineage. Abram's father, Terah, served many gods (Josh. 24:2). Abram was a Hebrew in that he “crossed over” (Hebrew means “to cross over”) from his home to the land God was going to promise to Abram and his descendants.

Abram was not Jewish. We know from Scripture that those who are the children of Israel are the physical literal descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Isa. 43:1 supports that Jewish lineage begins with Jacob – the father of the 12 tribes of Israel. God created/formed Israel.

God definitely separated mankind between Jews and Gentiles at a point in time. God called Abram to be the father of God's chosen nation, Israel (Genesis 12). BUT, if Abraham was Jewish, Ishmael would then be Jewish – and Ishmael was not Jewish! Ishmael was not of the chosen line. Isaac was of the chosen line. Gen. 21:12 – “. . . in Isaac shall your seed be called.” The promise would come through Isaac. Isaac had

Jacob and Esau. The promise came through Jacob and not Esau. All the descendants of Jacob, through his 12 sons, were members of God's chosen nation, Israel. Each tribe received land. God had promised Abram's descendants land. Esau did not receive the blessing from his father Isaac. Esau was not the father of the 12 tribes of Israel. Jacob's name was changed to "Israel." This is all based on God's sovereign choice.

Genesis 12:2-3 – *"I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. 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."*

God promised Abram ("Exalted Father") that He would make of him a great name (changing his name to Abraham ("Father of Many Nations")) and a great nation.

God promised Abraham and his descendants:

Land (with physical boundaries [Gen. 15:18])

Seed (descendants and The Seed – the Messiah)

Blessing (salvation – which would be extended beyond Israel – to the world)

Gen. 18:18 – *"... Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him."*

SEED:

Gen. 3:15 – first Messianic prophecy.

God said that He would put hatred/enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of Satan. The seed of Satan would crush the heel of the seed of the woman (Satan did that in Jesus' crucifixion) but the seed of the woman would crush Satan's head. Here we see a death blow to Satan through the Messiah Who would come through the Jewish line! Therefore, Satan was bent on destroying the seed – the line through which the Messiah would come – Abraham's descendants.

NOTE that God promised He would bless those who bless Abraham and his descendants and He would curse him who curses Abraham and his descendants. Do you think God was serious? This promise has been borne out in history:

- Egypt - Pharaoh wanted to make it difficult for the Jews because they were growing in number and becoming more mighty (Ex. 1:9). Pharaoh told his people, *"Every son who is born<sup>[c]</sup> you shall cast into the river. . . ."* (Ex. 1:22). What happened to Egypt? God reversed the curse:
  - God sent plagues.
  - During Passover – within all the homes without the blood applied to the doorposts and lintel – the first born was killed.
  - The Egyptian army drowned in the Red Sea!

- In the Kingdom of Persia where many Jews remained in exile, Haman, who was the King's sidekick, hated Mordecai the Jew – in the book of Esther.
  - Haman constructed gallows to hang Mordecai.
  - Who was found swinging from the gallows? Haman
- Spanish Armada – a powerful fleet on the seas – at one time.
  - During the Inquisition – Spain persecuted the Jews.
  - There is no longer a Spanish Armada.
- British Empire - it was said of the British Empire due to all their territories worldwide, “the sun never set on the British Empire.”
  - The Balfour Declaration was proposed by Britain in 1917 – to create a homeland for the Jews.
  - During the 1930's a new Labour government came to power in Britain. They were not in favor with the Balfour Declaration. The Balfour Declaration and its provisions were overturned:
    - . . . the sun now sets on the British Empire!
- During the Holocaust, the Nazis sought out the Jews.
  - Following the Holocaust, the world sought out the Nazi war criminals.

*Joel 3:1-2 – “For behold, in those days and at that time, when I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem, 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..”*

CONFLICT! SPIRITUAL WARFARE!

Israel's history in the First Century through the Fifth Century:

- What was the center of belief in Jesus' day during the first century? Jerusalem!
- Christianity was at first considered a sect of Judaism (Nazarenes). The first believers in Jesus were Jewish. The early Church was Jewish.
  - The Church was birthed in Jerusalem at Pentecost (Jewish Feast of Shavuot) 50 days following Jesus' resurrection which occurred on the Jewish Feast of First Fruits).
  - As time passed, Christianity became known as a new “religion.” Jesus didn't come to begin a new religion; He came to fulfill the law. Nothing changed. God did not change His plans at the cross. Jesus' death on the cross was the ultimate sacrifice. Jesus' death was the culmination of what He had been teaching the Jewish people through the sacrificial system which He had given to Israel. What was written in the Old Covenant was a shadow – then fulfilled in Jesus Who was the substance (Col. 2:16) – Who is the Promised Messiah of Israel!
- 70 AD – what happened? The Temple was destroyed and there was a scattering of Jewish people – the beginning of the Diaspora. Some of the Jewish believers – when they saw Jerusalem surrounded – they remembered the words of Jesus (Matt. 24:15-

16 – when you see the abomination of desolation in the holy place – flee into the mountains. In Matt. 24, Jesus was speaking of the future Tribulation and the Antichrist.) However, these Jewish believers in 70 AD were watching as the Romans were converging upon Jerusalem and they thought the time was NOW. So, they fled.

- Some of the Jewish believers returned to Jerusalem after things settled down. There began to be a parting of the ways between Jewish believers in Jesus and Jewish non-believers. Jewish believers were looked upon as traitors.
- Another revolt against Rome occurred (132 AD – 135 AD) Rabbi Akiva proclaimed Simon Ben Kosiba, the general leading the revolt – “Bar Cochba” – “Son of Light” – the Messiah. Jewish believers could not fight under the banner of a false Messiah. Jewish believers didn’t remain with the Jewish non-believers in Jesus to fight against Rome. Jewish believers deserted.
  - The revolt was doomed. Bar Cochba was put to death along with Rabbi Akiva. Jerusalem was declared off limits to all Jews.
- Rome became the center of faith.
- The Roman Emperor Hadrian regained Jerusalem and banned the Jewish people from Jerusalem under the penalty of death.
  - Hadrian rebuilt and renamed Jerusalem: Aelia Capitolina. The land became known as Syria et Palaestina. This name change was in honor of the ancient enemies of the Jewish people – the Philistines. This was Hadrian’s attempt to wipe away all memory of the Jewish people.
  - The land was known as Palestine from approx. 135 AD until 1948. It is now known as the land of Israel. It was known as the land of Israel in Jesus’ day (Matt. 2:20).
- For the next 500 years – no Jews would be allowed in the city of Jerusalem – except for one day a year – the anniversary of the burning of the Temple! (Tisha B’Av – the ninth of Av [August]).
- As Jewish believers were scattered – they began taking the Gospel to Gentiles. More and more Gentiles were becoming believers in Jesus.
  - Without a background in Jewish history and Jewish life – the Gentiles didn’t understand why the Jewish believers wanted to continue to do the things they’d always done, i.e. Passover, the Feast of Tabernacles, etc.
- Constantine came upon the scene (4<sup>th</sup> C) and “Christianity” became the state religion. He moved the capital of the empire from Rome to Byzantium which he renamed Constantinople.
- 325 AD he also declared that nothing of a Jewish origin could be used in the worship of Jesus.
- An Iranian Rabbi said, “You took a Jewish Messiah from a Jewish homeland, brought Him to Rome, made Him a Gentile, and forced us to bow down and worship Him and when we didn’t, you killed us.”

Look at what has been reversed:

- During the first century the question was – can Gentiles be followers of Yeshua?
- Now – can Jews be followers of Yeshua?
- Instead of saying to Jewish people, “Hey, Jesus can be for you too” . . .
- We should be saying, “Thank you, thank you – because it’s through you that God sent the Jewish Messiah – and let me tell you about the Jewish Messiah, Jesus! He is the only way to eternal life!”

Jewish believers became more separated from Gentile believers.

All believers – Jews and Gentiles – should be united – one new man (Eph. 2:15ff). Paul rejoices in the unity of the Church, Jewish and Gentile believers within the body of Christ (Rom. 15:8-9). This is God’s plan!

At the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, Spain expelled Jews in their desire to make Spain a purely Catholic country. Many Jews came to Jerusalem at that time.

In the 1700’s, Western Europe began maneuvering for position in Israel. There was not so much a military interest. England and the US particularly saw the doors open to the land of the Bible. There was new zeal on the part of Christians as a result of revivals (Wesley brothers; Charles & John Wesley [early to late 1700’s])

In 1865 the Palestine Exploration Fund was established in London. The first explorers found the land much less romantic than they had thought. The terrain was desolate. Many of the inhabitants were nomadic. A survey of the entire country undertaken by the Fund – with T.E. Lawrence contributing his expertise – Lawrence of Arabia. Jerusalem began to blossom – influx of Europeans and Americans by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> C. Jewish people constituted nearly half of its population.

The first Aliyah (“ascent”) – 1882-1903 due to persecution in Russian and Eastern European countries (“the pogroms”). Jews were either killed, driven from their homes, or forced to convert.

Sir Moses Montefiore – a wealthy English banker, contributed his own money and energy to expand the concept of what it meant for Jews to live again in their own land. He and Edmund de Rothschild took the new arrivals into the land under their wing and funded the settlements. Most of the colonies were agricultural. However, factories were started as well.

From 1904, due to a larger pogrom, the second Aliyah – and much larger – occurred. The new garden suburb of Jaffa was set up which was to become the city of Tel Aviv. The same year – the first kibbutz (“collective”) was founded.

The concept of Zionism began to take shape. Zionism has come under fire. What is Zionism? It's Jewish nationalism - a passion for their own nation – for their own the land – for what God had given them.

\_\_\_\_\_ Isaiah 62:1 – God says, “For Zion’s sake, I will not hold My peace, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp *that* burns.”

Theodor Herzl – a Viennese playwright and journalist was in Paris and was confronted by anti-Semitism during the Dreyfus affair (1895) – when Captain Alfred Dreyfus, the only Jew serving on the French army general staff – had been accused, tried, and convicted – on what subsequently emerged to be fabricated evidence – of handing secrets to the Germans. Dreyfus was humiliated in public, stripped of his badges and sword. He cried out that he was innocent. The crowds began shouting “Death to Dreyfus. Death to the Jews.”

Less than 6 months later Herzl completed his draft of what gave birth to modern Zionism – *Der Judenstaat* – we know it as “The Jewish State” literally meant The Jew State. Herzl was placed at the helm of the World Zionist Organization.

1903 Britain offered the Organization territory in East Africa (Uganda). Herzl thought it was attractive, but died before anyone acted upon it. In 1905 The Zionist Congress rejected the offer and it was resolved that the Jewish state needed to be in “Palestine” since that is the land God had promised to the Jewish people.

Prime Minister Lloyd George assigned General Allenby to the EEF/Egyptian Expeditionary Force – intending to take Jerusalem.

Lloyd George saw Palestine as the strategic buffer to Egypt. He intended for Great Britain to control Egypt and the Suez Canal after the war was over – and he needed “Palestine”. But, he had to offer a loftier rationale – in the form of the Jewish people. He turned to Chaim Weizmann – chemist who successfully developed a process of fermentation which led to plentiful supplies of acetone – which aided in the production of cordite – an explosive – for the British Admiralty. Chaim Weizmann became a leading figure in the Zionist movement. He spoke of a “British protectorate over a Jewish homeland.” Chaim gained recognition of many evangelical Christians including Balfour. Balfour urged the Zionists to draw up a declaration.

The original draft handed to Balfour on July 18, 1917 contained 3 important elements:

1. The reconstitution of Palestine as a whole as the national home of the Jews.
2. Unrestricted right of Jewish immigration.
3. Jewish internal autonomy (right to govern themselves).

The draft was finally approved by the Cabinet October 31, 1917 – with substantial changes:

- It no longer equated Palestine with the national home (as a whole).
- It had no reference to unrestricted Jewish immigration or internal rule.

- It safeguarded the rights of the Arabs.

On Nov. 2, 1917 it was presented and the essential paragraph from Balfour to Lord Rothschild, President of the British Zionist Federation, read:

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which have been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet: "His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country." I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

A month after the Declaration was published, Allenby entered Jerusalem on foot and took the city. England was in control.

The Arabs were enraged by the Balfour Declaration and resorted to violence. They were determined to run both the Jews and the British out and set up an Arab state encompassing all of Palestine.

Meanwhile, in 1919, Haj Amin al-Husseini formed the Palestinian Society w/ a military arm to carry out actions against both the British and the Jews. Haj Amin immediately began leading demonstrations and protests against the British Mandate and the Balfour Declaration.

With sympathy toward the Arab population, Sir Herbert Samuel, England's First High Commissioner in Palestine, appointed Haj Amin as the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. Sir Herbert Samuel then influenced Winston Churchill to carve out a kingdom for Abdullah (leader of the Hashemite clan) by creating the Transjordan. 78% of the territory under the British Mandate/Balfour Declaration was severed from Palestine to create an exclusively Arab state!!! (See map on page following)

This was done via the Churchill White Paper which stated that the Jewish national home was restricted to the area west of the Jordan, that the Balfour Declaration had not meant to envision a predominately Jewish state, and that Jewish immigration should be limited to the economic capacity of the now much smaller country.

Another event occurred in 1929 – one that went unnoticed on the world scene – at that time – but one that had great repercussions for the future of Israel. A child was born to the Husseini clan – a distant relative of the Grand Mufti – Mohammed Abder Rauf Arafat Al-Kudwa al-Husseini. Nicknamed Yasser ("easy going").



By 1936 Britain was increasingly preoccupied with Hitler. Germany was trying to marshal the Arabs to their side. So what did England do (or continue to do) – become increasingly friendly toward the Arabs. They did this by continuing to impose restrictions on Jewish immigration.

During the 1930's a new Labour gov't came to power in Britain. They didn't have warm fuzzies about the Balfour Declaration. During the last half of the 1930's the Balfour Declaration and its provisions were overturned.

A commission under Lord Peel, reporting on July 7, 1937, recommended that Jewish immigration be reduced to 12,000 a year, and restrictions be placed on land purchases as well.

While the Jewish community was trying to persuade Britain to increase Jewish immigration, the Arabs were threatening to cut off access to Middle Eastern oil supplies if immigration was increased.

The Grand Mufti dropped in to see the German consul-general in Jerusalem. He conveyed how much he respected the Third Reich and told the consul-general that he would appreciate any and all help in his fight against the British and the Jews. Weapons were then delivered to the Grand Mufti from German manufacturers via Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

The Grand Mufti moved to Italy and became friends with Mussolini. (Eventually in 1941) he was the honored guest of Hitler. Both Hitler and Mussolini agreed, in a secret document, to “the abolition of the Jewish National Homeland in Palestine”

On Nov. 9, 1938 – history records Kristallnacht – so named because of the sound of shattered glass. Jewish shops in Germany were destroyed by Hitler's storm troopers. More than 260 synagogues were burned that night and 20,000 Jews were arrested. The Jewish community was fined \$400 million for damages inflicted by the soldiers to their property!

From that moment on Hitler began to speak of annihilating the Jews.

Britain published a new White Paper in 1939 reduced Jewish immigration to Palestine to zero – except with Arab agreement. The 1939 White Paper condemned millions of European Jews to the concentration camps. Britain was not alone. Other countries restricted the immigration of Jews to their shores. Shiploads of Jewish refugees from Europe perished on the seas or returned to Europe because they could find no safe harbor to receive them. Of Europe's 8 million Jews, only 1.5 million survived the war.

The Holocaust from the Greek *holokaustos*, literally means “burnt whole” referring to a sacrifice consumed by fire.

In October 1943 three men discussed a proposal for partitioning Palestine between the Arabs and the Jews – Winston Churchill, Chaim Weizmann, and Clement Attlee (leader of the Labour opposition in Britain’s parliament). The Morrison Plan established Jerusalem as a separate territory under a British high commissioner. The thought was to keep the Morrison plan secret until after the war. Churchill remarked, “When we have crushed Hitler, we shall have to establish the Jews in the position where they belong. I have an inheritance left to me by Balfour and I am not going to change. But there are dark forces working against us.”

In 1945 Churchill was forced out of office by a new Labourite gov’t led by Attlee. At war’s end, Palestine remained closed to all but a few thousand Jews per year. Ernest Bevin, Foreign Minister in the Attlee administration continued to limit immigration to Palestine. President Truman urged Britain to open Palestine and increase immigration. Bevin’s reply, “the Jews have waited 2000 years; they can wait a little longer.”

Thousands of Jewish people refused to wait a minute longer. They stuffed themselves in the holds of patched-together ships, only to be turned back at the harbor. They marched hundreds of miles on foot, only to be arrested at the border and sent to detention camps.

By 1947, the British had decided they wanted out. Bevin tossed the entire situation into the lap of the UN and announced that the British would be leaving soon – so the UN had to come up with a plan. The plan – partition – Jewish state and an Arab state. . . .

Chaim Weizmann appealed to the UN to support partition, “We realize that we cannot have the whole of Palestine. God may have promised Palestine to the Jews; it is up to the Almighty to keep His promise in His own time. Our business is to do what we can in a very imperfect human way.”

The British Mandate was to end at 6 p.m. on May 14, 1948. As Britain withdrew – they turned their arms over to the Arabs. By midday Egyptian forces had massed in the Negev. Jordanian and Iraqi troops were stationed all along the river. Syrian forces were marching toward Palestine from the north.

At the UN the Arab states who had rejected partition were trying to force a vote on a last-minute resolution to prevent the creation of a Jewish state. Israel’s only hope was for the US to recognize the new nation. Finally, 11 min. after the British Mandate had officially expired, the US recognized the new state.

At midnight Jordanian troops crossed the Allenby Bridge and headed for Jerusalem. At 5 a.m. Tel Aviv was bombed by Egyptian aircraft. The War of Independence was on.

Haj Amin al Husseini, the Grand Mufti, declared, “The entire Jewish population in Palestine must be destroyed or driven into the sea. Allah has bestowed upon us the rare privilege of finishing what Hitler only began. Let the jihad begin. Murder the Jews. Murder them all!”

Forty-five million Arabs were intent on pushing 400,000 Jews, bunkered on a tiny strip of earth (one sixth of 1 percent of the 7.5 million miles of Arab lands), into the sea.

“It was never really a contest between the Arab world of 45 million people and 400,000 Jews struggling to become a nation. Those 45 million Arabs were going up against 400,000 Jews defended by the innumerable hosts of heaven.

Israel is a miracle of God!

Israel became a nation during a tiny window of opportunity. It happened at precisely the right moment – a moment so precise that it could not have been coincidence. We know it was GOD!

Had Israel declared independence when Franklin Roosevelt was President, it is highly unlikely that the US would’ve recognized Israel. Without the recognition by the US, the Jewish state would not have come into being. Roosevelt was anti-Zionist – he was against the formation of a Jewish state.

Truman would have been unlikely to go out on a limb to recognize Israel, had it not been for the intercession of an old business partner – a Jewish man – Eddie Jacobson. The two had endured bankruptcy together in Kansas City years before. Jacobson urged Truman to meet Chaim Weizmann – the Zionist leader. Truman agreed to meet Weizmann at the White House, making sure he entered by a side door, unnoticed by the press. He later referred to Weizmann as “a wonderful man, one of the wisest people I’ve ever met.” The meeting was cordial and Truman promised his support for the Jewish state.

Had Israel’s move for independence come a year or so later, the Cold War was underway – and the Soviets – who had recognized Israel following the US lead – were courting Arab interests and would not have sided with Israel.

As Paul Johnson has written, “Israel slipped into existence through a crack in the time continuum.”

We know God opened that crack!

Since the War of Independence:  
1956 – Sinai Campaign

1967 – Six Day War – when Jerusalem fell back into the hands of Israel.  
 1973 – Yom Kippur War

“Against all odds,” Israel won the victory because God fought for them (Ex. 14:14)

The land of Israel today: (Mitch Glaser) Many ask, “When does Israel have the right to take ownership of the land promised to them by God? Now, or when the Messiah returns to rule?” Whatever God’s timing may be, I don’t think this question determines the issue of Israel’s rightful boundaries. Whether the land will become Israel’s possession at the return of Jesus or prior to that time does not alter the truth that the land is deeded to Israel. The land of Israel was promised by God to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This includes what is commonly called the West Bank. In addition to this, the right of ownership to the Land of Promise began the moment God made His covenant with Abram. Therefore, the Jewish people have always had the right of ownership to the entire land of Israel, including all its biblical boundaries. However, that does not mean that the Jewish people will have peaceful possession of the land prior to the establishment of Messiah’s kingdom on earth.

This time of shalom to come is linked to Israel’s embracing the person of Jesus, as promised by the prophet Zechariah (12:10).

We might ask a further question: how long a lease did God establish with the Jewish people? The answer is made clear by the prophet Jeremiah, “They said, ‘Repent now everyone of his evil way and his evil doings, and dwell in the land that the Lord has given to you and your fathers forever and ever.’” Jer. 25:5.

The phrase “forever and ever” is used 13X in Scripture and most often refers to the nature of God. This time the prophet uses this unique double mention of the Hebrew term *olam* in reference to the nation of Israel to demonstrate that God’s promise of the land of Israel to the Jewish people would endure for all time.

The Bible could not be any clearer on this issue. This lease exists as long as the earth endures – in whatever form.

Whether or not the Jewish people live in the land in peace depends upon Israel’s obedience to God. But, Israel’s obedience or disobedience does not alter God’s unconditional promise of the land of Israel to the seed of the Patriarchs (Gen. 35:11-12; Psalm 135:12)”

## THE HOLOCAUST

In our discussion of the Holocaust, we need to be focused on the truth that God is omnipotent – He is all powerful; God is omniscient – He is all knowing; God is omnipresent – He is everywhere present/all is within His presence. God is eternal – He never had a beginning/He’ll never have an ending. God is loving, good, gracious, holy, faithful, just, merciful, unchanging. . . . These are a few of God’s attributes.

Many times in life we do NOT know the “WHY?” – BUT GOD IS IN CONTROL – in this truth we have confidence. And, please let us remember that God promises RESTORATION!

When our Jewish friends and relatives and co-workers ask about the Holocaust, we can tell them, “I do not have the answers, but will you let me come alongside you and we’ll ask those questions and seek answers together?”

For believers, the Holocaust can present a dilemma. How can believers make the claims of the Gospel credible when the mass murder of 6 million Jewish people was allowed to take place under the nose of the rest of the “Christian” world? (“The Aryan Jesus”).

If there is any event in history that Jewish people point to as an illustration of why they cannot believe in Jesus, it is the Holocaust.

Common Holocaust -related questions Jewish people might ask – along with some suggested responses:

If there is a God, where was He during the Holocaust?

- The person asking this question is most likely asking it in one of two ways:
  - Assuming that the answer is self-evident: NOWHERE – God was nowhere. (response: God is NOW HERE!)
  - Sincerely attempting to come to grips with the truth of God’s unfailing goodness and the horrors of human history.
    - David cried out, “Why do You stand afar off, O Lord? Why do You hide in times of trouble?” (Psalm 10:1) For context purposes – need to read the entire Psalm!! The Psalmist always recognizes God’s NOT standing afar off (note vv. 14, 17, & 18)!
- The answer we might share:
  - God is holy. He is the source of all righteousness and justice.
  - Where was He? In the same position He occupied at Calvary.
    - Isaiah 63:9, “In all their affliction He was afflicted. . . .”
      - Our God suffers with us and for us.
  - God has created mankind with freedom of choice. Because of wrong choices made at the beginning, we live in a fallen world. We live with terrible consequences from sin. BUT GOD bears those consequences with us.
  - Because Satan is the God of this world (II Cor. 4:4) and is bent on destroying the Jewish people, we see in the Holocaust a fierce example of spiritual warfare!

Where was the Church?

- C.S. Lewis said, “When the Church has found its place in the world, then the world has found its place in the Church.” History tells us that after the early 4<sup>th</sup> C, Christianity became the preeminent faith of the Western world. It also became a powerful political force.
  - The Church became the authority – not Scripture.

- In many instances, there was corruption. Jesus had told us that the wheat and tares would grow together during the mystery kingdom – the Church age (Matthew 13).
- Corruption combined with anti-Semitism often encouraged by the Church (Constantine; comments made by early Church fathers) helped to create the environment that spawned the Holocaust.
- Read “The Aryan Jesus” by Susannah Heschel – re: the Church in Nazi Germany.
- However, there were notable exceptions. Corrie Ten Boom and her family along with other believers were willing to suffer and die alongside the Jewish people.
- Where are we today?

#### How can the Gospel be true if Christians killed six million Jews?

- Christians did not initiate the Holocaust – the Nazis did so. Again, many believers died in the Holocaust. Many risked their lives to help the Jewish people.
  - Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Jerusalem, has dedicated a part of its site to commemorate non-Jewish “rescuers” who helped Jewish people escape death at the hands of the Nazis.
- While it’s true that Christians, as a whole, did too little, too late, Scripture speaks to the truth that humanity is sinful and in need of forgiveness (Jer. 17:9).
- The Holocaust magnifies sin!
- And, again, we need to realize that spiritual warfare is at the root!
- God’s restoration – Israel was born out of the ashes of the Holocaust!

#### What will happen to the religious Jews who died during the Holocaust?

- As Scripture proclaims, salvation is found only in the Jewish Messiah, Jesus.
- We can state with confidence that a righteous and just God is far more righteous and just than we can ever be. “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25).
- No one knows the destiny of another. No one knows the lengths to which God will go to reveal Himself in the final moments of an earthly life. “Salvation belongs to the Lord.” (Psalm 3:8).
- We believe that only those who consciously trust in Jesus will be saved. We do not know what happens in the heart of individuals prior to their death. Only God knows. We must remain firm in holding onto the truth that salvation is only through Jesus.

We can blame the cause of the Holocaust on Hitler and the German people. However, we need to realize that a far darker cause underlies the attempted extermination of the Jewish people. It is Satan’s wrath!

And, perhaps, the awareness of sin – sinful mankind – a fallen world – can serve as the signpost that points to something far greater: the holiness and goodness of God and the

Messiah Who saves us! The destiny of the Jewish people is wrapped up in the Jewish Messiah, Jesus.

“Holocaust” means burnt offering.

On the Jewish calendar, Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, occurs after Passover. Passover is always on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan. Yom HaShoah is always on the 27<sup>th</sup> of Nisan.

Passover - the offering of the Passover lamb – as a substitution – in place of the people – the lamb dying in place of the people.

Throughout the Tanakh, God told the children of Israel to REMEMBER Passover – His deliverance. He told them to LOOK FORWARD to the MESSIAH Who would be the fulfillment of Passover – Jesus is the PERFECT PASSOVER LAMB.

He is our perfect sacrifice for sin. For those who place their trust in Him, He delivers completely – He RESTORES!

AGAIN - the destiny of the Jewish people is wrapped up in the Jewish Messiah, Jesus.

It is a tragedy – a travesty – that Jesus’ crucifixion has produced anti-Semitism against the Jewish people.

A Christian author wrote, “Jesus Christ suffered unspeakably and died. So did Jews. I am not the first to link Calvary and the concentration camps – the suffering of Jesus Christ and the suffering of Jewish people.”

Elie Wiesel in his book, *Night*, which tells of his experience with his father in the concentration camps (Auschwitz, Buna, and Buchenwald), speaks of the threat of “the selection” – the taking away of the weak to be killed and burned in the ovens. Wiesel links Calvary and the camps. He tells of an old Rabbi, Akiba Dumer. “Akiba Dumer left us, a victim of the selection. Lately, he had wandered among us, his eyes glazed, telling everyone of his weakness: “I can’t go on. . . It’s all over. . . .” It was impossible to raise his morale. He didn’t listen to what we told him. He could only repeat that all was over for him, that he could no longer keep up the struggle, that he had no strength left, nor faith. Suddenly his eyes would become blank, nothing but two open wounds, two pits of terror.”

Then Wiesel makes this comment: “Poor Akiba Dumer, if he could have gone on believing in God, if he could have seen a proof of God in this Calvary, he would not have been taken by the selection.”

The Christian author states in his book that he does not know what Wiesel meant. But the question remains – why the link between Calvary and the camps?

The Christian author then goes on to talk – NOT of cause or blame – but of meaning and hope. “Is there a way that Jewish suffering may find, not its cause, but its final meaning in the suffering of Jesus Christ? Is it possible to think, not of Christ’s passion leading to Auschwitz, but of Auschwitz leading to an understanding of Christ’s passion? Is the link between Calvary and the camps a link of unfathomable empathy? Perhaps only Jesus in the end can know what happened during the ‘one long night’ of Jewish suffering. And perhaps a generation of Jewish people, whose grandparents endured their own noxious crucifixion, will be able, as no others, to grasp what happened

to the Son of God at Calvary. I leave it as a question. I do not know. But this I know: those ostensible ‘Christians’ who built the camps never knew the love that moved Jesus Christ toward Calvary. They never knew the Christ, Who, instead of killing to save a culture, died to save the world. But there are some Christians – the true Christians – who have seen the meaning of the passion of Jesus Christ, and have been broken and humbled by his suffering. Could it be that these, perhaps better than many, might be able to see and, at least, begin to fathom the suffering of the Jewish people?”

Alan Shore, CPM Missionary, in his testimony of coming to faith through Jesus said, “Jesus seemed to be the embodiment of Jewish experience for all time – destined to suffer at the hands of the world, yet finally to be vindicated by God.”

May Jewish people realize – perhaps through understanding Jesus’ suffering – that He is truly their Messiah!

## JEWISH BELIEFS

There is no uniform belief system in Judaism.

From “What Do Jews Believe?” by David S. Ariel

Judaism is not a religion of fixed doctrines or dogmas but a complex system of evolving beliefs. There is an overarching rubric that unites Jews – “sacred myths”. Sacred myths are articulations of our most deeply held beliefs that are NOT subject to verification for truth or falsehood. Relativism – what’s “truth” for you might not be truth for someone else.

Many Jews search for spiritual answers from a variety of religious traditions and sources.

The Bible teaches Biblical Judaism – from the OT – which begins with the free gift of forgiveness – when God killed an innocent animal to cover the sins of Adam and Eve; when God said He requires blood for the atonement of the soul; when God gave the Jewish people the sacrificial system and we see substitutionary atonement – a life for a life; when Abram believed in God alone (not on his good works) and God declared him righteous;

Rabbis today teach Rabbinic Judaism which is based on the Talmud – a collection of the oral law that they believe God gave to Moses (Scripture tells us that EVERYTHING that God gave Moses, Moses wrote. There is only the written word [Ex. 24:4; Josh. 8:34]) – and a commentary on the oral law.

Oral law – the explanation by the Rabbis of the 613 commandments God did indeed give to Israel in the Torah – the first five books of Moses.

Rabbis have taught that Judaism is a religion of deed; Christianity is a religion of creed. What an individual believes about God or the afterlife is not nearly as important as how one lives.

90 AD – after the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai, who had not come to faith in Jesus, called a council at Jamnia. Judaism became a “religion” based on four pillars: prayers, fasting, charitable giving and good deeds. The rules were changed from what God laid out in the Tanakh.

Four branches within Rabbinic Judaism:

- Orthodox – adherence to the Law. The Ultra-Orthodox or Chassidim (Chassidic) – pious ones. While they are action-oriented, they seek to understand how their actions help them relate to God. These are the Jewish people who are more charismatic – who express joy in their worship.
- Reform – which came about due to a rebellion against Orthodoxy. They attempted to discard Hebrew traditions (1700’s)
- Conservative – took from Reform and from Orthodox. Conservative Judaism has joined the secular while conserving the Hebrew traditions. (1800’s)
- Reconstructionism (New Age) – took from the Reformed and New Age. God is not in the equation!

Beliefs within Rabbinic Judaism:

Re: the view of Scripture:

Reform Judaism – the Bible is a human document preserving the history, culture, legends, and hopes of a people. It is valuable for deriving moral and ethical insights. Revelation is an ongoing process.

Conservative Judaism – the Bible, both the Torah and the other books of the Hebrew Bible, is the word of God and man. It is not inspired in the traditional sense but is rather dynamically inspired (in one’s experience). Revelation is an ongoing process.

Orthodox Judaism – the teaching of Torah is truth. The Torah is from God and is awarded a higher place than the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Re: the view of God:

Reform Judaism – allows a varied interpretation of the “God concept” with wide latitude for naturalists, mystics, supernaturalists or religious humanists. It holds, “The truth is that we do not know the truth.”

Conservative Judaism – the concept of God is nondogmatic and flexible. There is less atheism in Conservative Judaism than in Reform; however, most often God is considered impersonal and ineffable (not describable).

Orthodox Judaism – God is spirit rather than form. He is a personal God, Who is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, eternal, and compassionate.

Re: the view of humankind:

Reform Judaism – humanity is basically good. Through education, encouragement, and evolution, a person can actualize the potential already existing within him or her.

Conservative Judaism – similar to the Reform view, though it is not as likely to espouse humanism. Perfectability can come through enlightenment. Humanity is “in partnership” with God.

Orthodox Judaism – humanity is morally neutral with a good and an evil inclination. A person can overcome his or her evil bent and be perfected by his or her own efforts in observance of the law.

Re: the view of the law:

Reform Judaism – the law is evolving, an ever-dynamic religious code that adapts to every age. It is maintained that if religious observances clash with the just demands of civilized society, they must be dropped.

Conservative Judaism – adaptation to contemporary situations is inevitable. The demands of morality are absolute; the specific laws are relative.

Orthodox Judaism – the law is the basis of Judaism. It is authoritative and gives structure and meaning to life. The life of total dedication to the body of Jewish law leads to a nearness to God.

Re: the view of sin:

Reform Judaism – they do not believe in “original sin.” Sin is interpreted as the ills of society. Humanity is sometimes held to have a “divine spark” within.

Conservative Judaism – they do not believe in “original sin.” The individual can sin by committing immoral or antisocial acts.

Orthodox Judaism – they do not believe in “original sin.” Instead, one commits sin by breaking the commandments of the law.”

Re: the view of salvation:

Reform Judaism – “salvation” is obtained through the betterment of self and society. It is social improvement.

Conservative Judaism – tends toward the Reform view, but includes the necessity of maintaining Jewish identity.

Orthodox Judaism – espouses repentance (belief in God’s mercy), prayer, and obedience to the law are necessary for a proper relationship with God.

Re: the view of the Messiah:

Reform Judaism – instead of belief in the Messiah as a person or divine being, they favor the concept of a Utopian age toward which humankind is progressing – sometimes called the “Messianic Age.”

Conservative Judaism – holds much the same view as the Reform.

Orthodox Judaism – the Messiah is a human being who is not divine. He will restore the Jewish kingdom and extend his righteous rule over the earth. He will execute judgment and right all wrongs.

Re: the view of life after death:

Reform Judaism – no concept of personal life after death. It is said that a person lives on in his or her accomplishments or in the minds of others. Some are influenced by varieties of Eastern mystical thought where souls merge into one great impersonal life force.

Conservative Judaism – tends toward the Reform view, but are less influenced by nontraditional ideas such as Eastern mysticism.

Orthodox Judaism – believes in a physical resurrection. The righteous will exist forever with God in the “world to come.” The unrighteous will suffer, but disagreement exists over their ultimate destiny.

We might think that Jewish identity MUST embrace a belief in God. However, for many Jewish people, belief in God is a major stumbling block (in relating to their Judaism). Jewish people today often seek scientific, political, economic, and psychological explanations for events and experiences in life.

“As children of the modern Enlightenment, we no longer look for explanations in heaven.”

Recommended Reading:

*History of the Jews* - Paul Johnson

*Jerusalem Betrayed* – Mike Evans

*Understanding the Arab-Israeli Conflict* – Michael Rydelnik