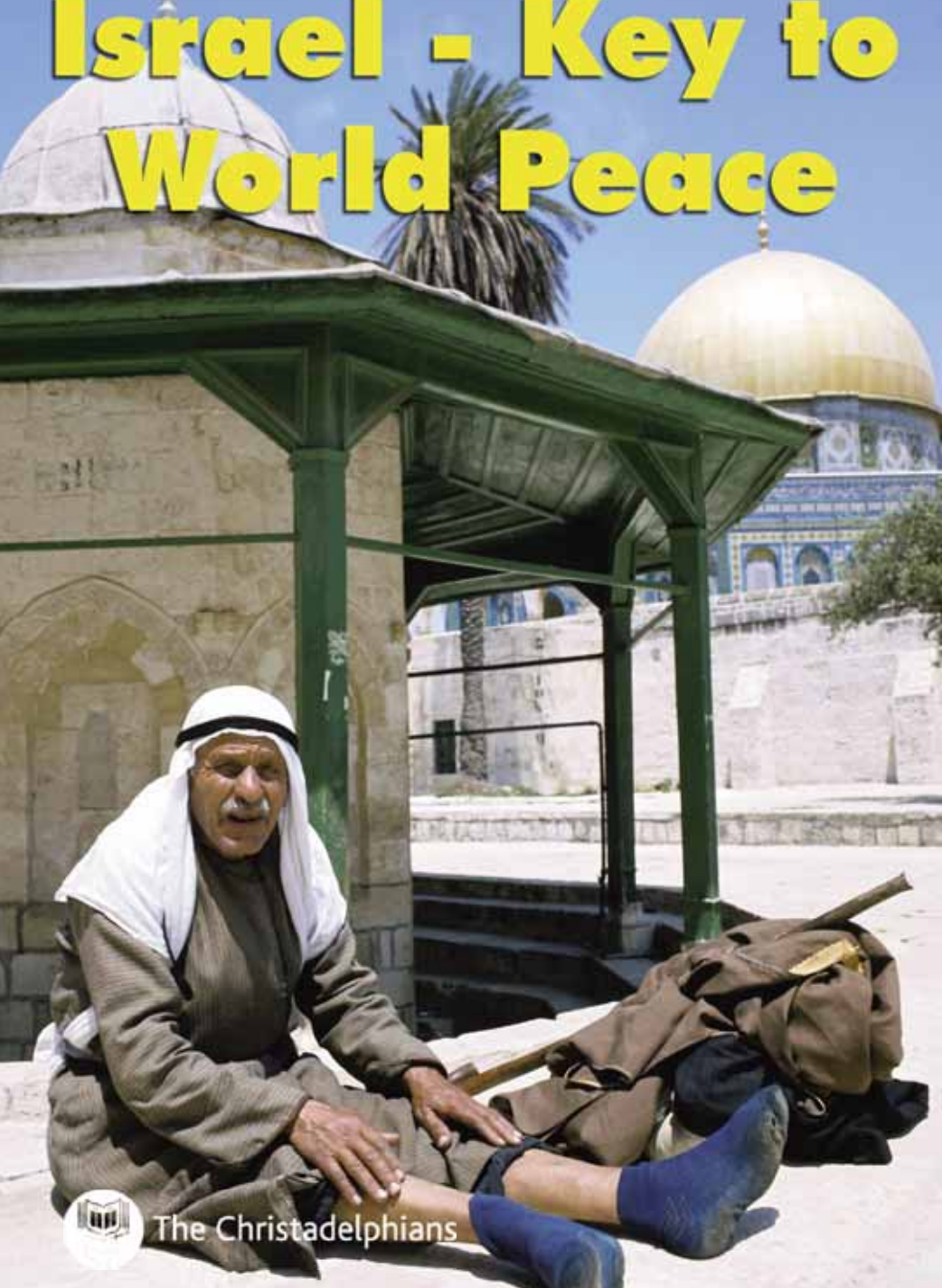


# Israel - Key to World Peace



The Christadelphians

# God Has a Plan

**One of the most reassuring things in the Bible is the message that God has a long-term plan for the world – one which will achieve worldwide peace.**

Surprisingly to some, that plan is centred on the nation of Israel but it is not just a peace plan for Israel. We can be part of it, too, if we want to be. Here are some vital aspects of God's peace plan –

- \* *The earth will abide forever (Psalm 125:1; Ephesians 3:21);*
- \* *It was formed to be inhabited by men and women (Isaiah 45:18); and*
- \* *One day the meek will inherit the earth, as an everlasting possession (Psalm 37:11).*



## The Old & the New

Many people who are unsure about the Bible as a whole have a high regard for the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. They might accept what he said, without being sure about some things said elsewhere, especially in the Old Testament. Yet, Jesus made constant reference back to existing Scriptures and, by doing so, showed that he fully endorsed them and believed them absolutely.

The promises earlier prophets had made were the promises Jesus made too. He once said that he had not come to destroy what had already been revealed about the purpose of God: he had come to fulfil it. He was the means by which these earlier promises could be fulfilled, for the Lord Jesus is right at

the centre of God's plan of salvation.

The Psalmist had said that:

*“Those who wait on the LORD, they shall inherit the earth ... the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace” (Psalm 37:9-11).*

Hundreds of years later the prospect of that happening seemed no more likely, for the earth continued to be dominated and controlled by the strong, the proud and the violent. But the Lord Jesus confirmed that it would happen, when he said:

*“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5).*

And, as part of the same set of teachings, Jesus described Jerusalem as *“the city of the great king” (5:35)*. He promised that God's Kingdom was coming on earth (6:10); and that only those who did his Father's will would enter that Kingdom when it is established (Matthew 7:13-14,21).

## Israel – a Key Location

Jesus lived in Israel, right at the centre of the earth's land masses, in the place that God had especially chosen. This is a strategic location, for it comprises a narrow strip of land bounded on one side by the Mediterranean and on the other by the vast Arabian Desert. It provides the only access from Asia to Africa and is readily accessible to Europeans as well, as many armies have discovered over the centuries. They often

tramped through Israel on their way north or south and the area was often a battleground. It's no wonder that it remains a fiercely contested part of the planet today. God's choice of this land was deliberate, for He said that it is:

*"A land for which the LORD your God cares; the eyes of the LORD your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the very end of the year" (Deuteronomy 11:11,12).*

## **Right at the Middle**

God chose a location at the centre of the earth where His people would live. For, through the Jewish people, God purposed to reveal His plan of salvation to all mankind. Its central component was the birth of His Son – the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus was not born in Washington or Moscow, but in the little town of Bethlehem near Jerusalem. He did not teach in the Universities of the First Century world, but on the hills of Galilee in Northern Israel, or in the courtyards of the Jewish Temple at Jerusalem. But from those places his message has spread worldwide, to Jew and non-Jew alike.

When Jesus was rejected as the Saviour whom God had sent, and was executed instead, the charge against him – *"This is Jesus of Nazareth: the King of the Jews"* – was written in Hebrew, Greek and Latin. When, some weeks later, the apostle Peter declared that Jesus had been killed, but that God had raised him from the dead, he spoke in Jerusalem to Jews who had come there to worship from all over Europe and Asia. There were:

*"Parthians and Medes and Elamites,*

*those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome ...Cretans and Arabs"* (Acts 2:9-11).

It was little wonder that Christianity spread so rapidly throughout Asia and into Europe: Israel was the ideal launchpad for that to happen, just as God had purposed. What happened in Israel was intended to be seen and thought about elsewhere. The great things that happened there did not occur in an obscure corner of the world. Jerusalem was right in the middle of other nations, so that they too could take notice and be informed that God's purpose had entered its crucial phase (Acts 26:26; Ezekiel 5:5).

## **All Eyes on Israel**

Nothing has changed over the last two thousand years in that respect, for everyone is still watching what happens in Israel with keen interest. For many people, getting things right in Israel – which includes sorting out the on-going dispute between the Israelis and the Palestinians – is the key to world peace. It certainly is!

Just as the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus took place at the centre of the earth, so the final phase of God's purpose will happen there – at the very place where he died and rose again. God's plan has such symmetry and such evident design.

Jesus and the Jews are scheduled to meet in Jerusalem, when they at last accept him as their Saviour and Messiah. He will then rescue them from all their troubles and make them once again a centrepiece of God's plan to save the world. God has a Plan and it is now in its final phase.



# Why is Israel the Key?

*Why should the nation of Israel be the Key to World Peace? The history of the Jewish people is unlike that of any other nation. Called to be the people of God, they have endured more turmoil and travail than any other people. So why has God persevered with a nation that often appeared unwilling to go along with His purpose?*

## Unique History

The people of Israel became a Nation whilst they were slaves in Egypt and were rescued from there by a Hebrew named Moses, who had been brought up as an Egyptian. After a traumatic period as refugees in the Sinai peninsula they conquered land on both sides of the River Jordan and established a nation which was governed by the law that God had given them in Sinai. They had a distinctive form of service, with priests and a sacred shrine, and in time they became a Kingdom.

God chose their kings and directed their national life, bringing them good or bad experiences according to the quality of their behaviour in His sight. When things were bad, He allowed their enemies to overrun them and eventually to deport them. First the northern tribes were deported to Assyria and then the southern ones to Babylon (modern-day Iraq).

The Kingdom ended then and was never re-established. For the remainder of their national existence during Bible times the Jews were a subject people – governed by Persians, Greeks and then by Romans. It was during the Roman occupation that the Lord Jesus was born – God’s “only begotten Son” (John

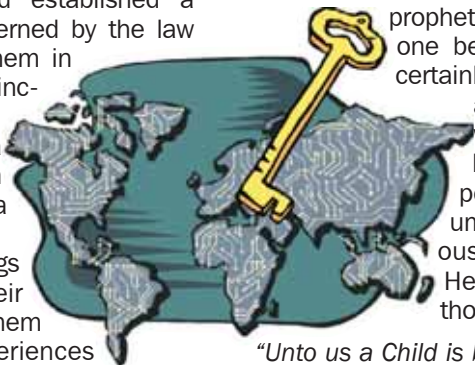
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## God-given Messiah

All through their chequered history the nation had longed for a Deliverer who would save them out of their troubles. There were some such men, but all were mortal, so their influence was limited. It was left to the prophets to promise someone better and that they certainly did. They foretold a coming King who would reign in Israel for a long period and be triumphant and victorious in everything. Here’s just one of those promises:

***“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, Counsellor, 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” (Isaiah 9:6,7).***

Whenever they were in trouble, and that was quite often, Jews would turn to promises like these and they would look for their Messiah. They reckoned upon him being an all-conquering King and







Abraham - 2000

King David 1000

Jesus born 3 BC

Jews Expelled 70 AD

State Declared 1948

Jerusalem Captured 1967

Jesus to Return

Jewish Diaspora



there were occasions when this small nation defeated much mightier powers.

About 150 years before the birth of Christ there was a national revolt against the Greeks, who were then their overlords, and the Jews won! They established a religious state, run by the family of the Maccabees. When the Romans had taken control, they had another go at self-rule and declared a Jewish Republic, which had short-term success. Military prowess was something that elements of Jewish society were very keen to achieve and an all-powerful heavenly leader would have been very much to their liking.

## Deeper Problems

When he came, their Messiah had to deal with a bigger problem than that of national sovereignty or political independence. Jesus came to deal with the worldwide problem of Sin – the greatest enemy of all, and one which had defeated everyone. Unless that could be tackled and conquered nothing else was possible. If Jesus could overcome Sin, and its sidekick Death, then restoring God's Kingdom to Israel and reviving Israel's ancient heritage would be straightforward. But it was impossible to do the second without achieving the first objective.

Here lies a great paradox, one which completely defeated many of the people of Israel. Jesus came preaching that the Kingdom of God was now at hand; for

he was God's appointed King.

He had come to save the nation, indeed to save the world, from the rulership of Sin and Death – to offer a way of salvation that would bring freedom and liberty for all. But most of his contemporaries could only understand that opportunity in political terms. They wanted to be a free nation first and foremost and any talk of salvation through sacrifice came a long way down their national agenda. So they rejected God's Messiah and conspired to have him crucified by the Romans.

## Why Israel?

God knows the end from the beginning; nothing takes Him by surprise. So why did He choose this nation, rather than another which might have been more co-operative or more ready to accept His way of working?

We should not delude ourselves in that respect. The nation of Israel was representative of all mankind; what they did we too would have done, given the opportunity. For everyone puts their national and individual self-interest first. That's why the world is still at war.

Jewish people have been more exposed to prying eyes than have other nations, because of where they are located – at the centre of the earth. God called them to be different – to be a special, holy, priestly people – and those differences were intentional.

So why did he choose them, and not us – whatever our national identity? Here's the answer:

*“The LORD did not set his love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because he would keep the oath which he swore to your fathers ... Therefore know that the LORD your God, he is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love him and keep his commandments” (Deuteronomy 7:7-10)*

God chose Israel because:

- He loves them;
- He had sworn a solemn oath to their forefathers about their descendants;
- He had redeemed them from Egypt when they were slaves;
- He is a faithful covenant-keeping God;
- He demands love in return from His people.

## Covenant Promises

This is the way God reveals Himself in the Bible. He explains why He does things as well as what He has done and will do. That way we can get to know Him. As we follow the trail of divine explanation, we discover that God made great promises to a man named Abraham who became the father of the Jewish nation. He was called by God to come to the land of Canaan, as the land was then called. Seven times in all God made him promises about the future and, great man of faith that he was, Abram believed them and lived accord-

ingly. He put his entire trust and confidence in God.

The promises were about a nation who would be descended from Abram (Genesis 12:1-3) through which a blessing would come to mankind. They would possess the land of Canaan (12:7; 13:14-17). They were to be strangers there at first and would be made into a nation elsewhere (15:13-16 – that turned out to be in Egypt). And **they would have one special descendant who would bring victory over all their enemies** (22:15-18).

Those final promises were accompanied by an oath, for, when He made them, God swore to Abraham that it would be so, making this the most solemn of all the great things He had promised:



*Abraham and Isaac go together to sacrifice*

*“By myself I have sworn, says the LORD ... your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice” (Genesis 22:16-18).*

This is why God chose Israel – so that Abraham would have many descendants, some related by birth and others, from all nations, who would follow his faithful example. He was to become the father of all those who believe the promises of God (Romans 4:11). And, as the apostle Paul later explains, there would be One special descendant born of Abraham's line – the Lord Jesus Christ:

*“To Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed, who is Christ” (Galatians 3:16).*

# Whose Land is It?

*One of the big questions to be resolved in the Middle East is that of territory and land ownership. The question is the same for Gaza, the West Bank, Jerusalem and the entire land now known as Israel. Everybody is arguing about ownership and rights of occupation!*

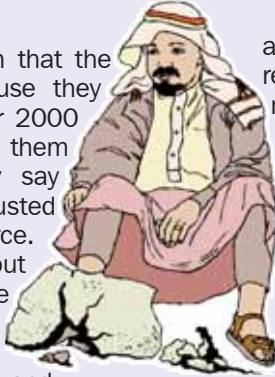
## Rival Claims

Palestinians maintain that the land is theirs because they have occupied it for 2000 years and that gives them absolute title. They say they have been ousted from their land by force.

The Israelis point out that they were there first – from about 1400 B.C. until they were displaced in 70 and 132 A.D. And they claim to have purchased large tracts of the land from previous occupiers. They say they didn't just take it.

The position has been further complicated by several wars that have been fought over the last 50 years between Jew and Arab forces, so that some of the land now occupied is considered to be 'the spoils of war'. The United Nations, who voted in 1947 to partition the land between Jew and Arab, have tried to resolve this latter dispute and have ruled that Israel should withdraw to its former boundaries.

UN Security Council Resolution 242 was passed unanimously in November 1967, following the Six Day War, and sought to establish a just and lasting peace through the withdrawal of Israeli forces from occupied territories and by the acknowledgement of the sovereignty and political independence of every State in the area, including their right to live in peace.



The Israelis have not fully withdrawn and the Palestinians have been slow to recognise Israel's right to exist as a nation, whilst both sides have been involved in threats and acts of force against one another. Despite the prospect of peace talks and the possibility of a reducing level of violence, the position still seems as complicated and as dangerous as ever.

## Many-Sided Issue

Nobody can be sure how things will work out and what will happen next. Nor can anyone be entirely clear about the precise details of the past – the rights and wrongs of the various claims. And the right to occupy Jerusalem, which the Palestinians want to make the capital of their new state, is a continuing difficulty, for it is a sacred place to three religions – Jews, Muslims and Christians.

Many people have strong views about the question of land ownership and occupation, not just the Israelis and Palestinians who are in the front line. Nor are all Israelis or all Palestinians persuaded about the best course of action. Some are happy to coexist; some claim absolute rights and would deny others even the right to exist. Some Israelis want to withdraw from 'occupied territory'; others want to build further settlements in the occupied West Bank. A minority government has to tread carefully to remain in power. Meanwhile the new Palestinian govern-

ment has to keep the more militant elements on-side, whilst making political progress if it can.

## Whose Land?

In any political settlement that might be reached one consideration is likely to be overlooked. All land belongs to God: He formed it and He alone owns it. As the Psalmist observed:

*“The earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein” (Psalm 24:1).*

And, as the apostle Paul once said, God has given the nations a right of occupation, but not forever. All occupation is subject to God’s will and determination:

*“God, who made the world and everything in it ... has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, so that they should seek the Lord” (Acts 17:24-27).*

There is a time coming – and the indications are that it will come quite soon – when God will call all nations to account for the way they have misused the earth. We are told that God will *“destroy those who destroy the earth” (Revelation 11:18)*, when He sends His King to reign here.

Then the kingdoms of this world will become *“the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever!” (11:15).*

The allocation and occupation of land thereafter will be by divine decree and we know that the territory now being disputed between Israelis and Palestinians will be specif-

ically given to the LORD, his appointed Prince and the *“twelve tribes of Israel”* (see Ezekiel 45:1,7 and 47:13-48:9).

## Conditional Occupation

We have seen already that the things that happened in Israel were designed to be helpful and educational for all nations – which is why God chose land for His nation to occupy right in the centre of the earth. The laws God gave them clearly spelled out that theirs was a conditional right of possession, not an absolute one. They were not given the title deed of the land of Canaan as theirs to occupy for ever – as absolute owners.

Their right of possession was dependent upon their behaviour, just as it is true that our prospects for long-term survival in God’s Kingdom on earth are dependent upon our behaviour before God. The *“meek will inherit the earth”* when it pleases God to confer that inheritance. The proud and haughty will have nothing.

## Contractual Agreement

Israel’s right of possession, and later their rights to other privileges, depended upon obedience. It was as though they had entered into a contract or treaty with God to the effect that they would do what He had asked and He, in return, would let them continue in occupation. As it turned out, God was a very tolerant and longsuffering landlord and He accepted many of His tenants’ failures and breaches of covenant. But at any time He was able to refer them to the terms they had accepted when:

*“All the people answered with one voice and said, ‘All the words which the LORD has said we*



*When making a contract you need to read it very carefully*



will do” (Exodus 24:3).

## Blessing or Cursing?

In a solemn ceremony, right at the end of Moses’ life, Israel entered into a formal agreement with God – the sort that nations made with other nations, perhaps when a war had ended and peace terms were being agreed. Obedience would mean abundant blessing in every aspect of their national life:

*“Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country. Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds...” (Deuteronomy 28:3-6).*

Disobedience would bring disaster upon them. God did not punish them for minor acts of disobedience – He is much too long-suffering for that. But when they persistently disregarded Him, despite His prophets showing them the extreme folly of their ways, at last God exercised His undoubted right to expel the nation from His land. That had been one of the provisions in the agreement:

*“It shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all his commandments and his statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you ... you shall serve your enemies, whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in need of all things ... And it shall be, that just as the LORD rejoiced over you to do you good and multiply you, so the LORD*

*will rejoice over you to destroy you and bring you to nothing; and you shall be plucked from off the land which you go to possess” (Deuteronomy 28:15,48,52,62-63).*

## Overtaken by Judgements

Even when the situation seemed hopeless – when one Bible writer said there was “no remedy” for their spiritual sickness and sinfulness – God tried again and again to bring His people to their senses. They were deported – Northern Israel to Assyria; Southern Judah to Babylon for seventy years. When the next generation returned, God sent them more prophets and gave them great support in their attempts to re-establish a relationship with Him.

Four hundred years later there was an even greater chance to find a better way forward. In Bethlehem, near Jerusalem, God’s Son was born to the virgin Mary. It was the greatest opportunity ever given for Israel to come back to God. Jesus explained that he had come from God to bring them back to his Father.

*“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).*

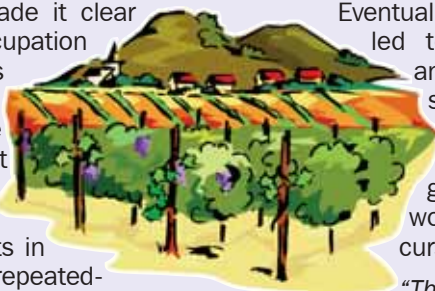
It was Israel’s best ever opportunity to come back to God by accepting Jesus as their Messiah. But they did not take it. Jesus was sent to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” but they did not recognise that they were lost. Instead they killed the shepherd, who gave his life to save those sheep that wanted to be in his safe-keeping (John 10:14-18).

As the time drew near when he was to be arrested



*Jesus – the only Way to eternal life*

and tried, Jesus made it clear that the Jewish occupation of the land was drawing to a close. In a parable that he told during the last week of his Ministry, he spoke about some tenants in a vineyard who had repeatedly failed to pay what was due to the landlord. Jesus said that a new tenancy was now to be given:



*“He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.” Jesus said to them ... I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it ... Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking of them” (Matthew 21:41-45).*

## **Ejected and Dispersed**

Thus it came about, exactly as Jesus foretold (see Luke 19:43,44), that some thirty years after his execution the Jewish people were overrun by the Romans – first the inhabitants of Galilee, then the rebel army in Jerusalem. The nation that had rejected God’s final appeal to them was now to learn from nearly two thousand years of deportation and dispersion.

Their exile scattered the Jews all over the world in search of refuge and recognition. More often than not they became the targets of jealousy and outright hatred. They were persecuted in more places than they were helped and their history is littered with place names where Jewish settlers were plundered and persecuted, and where many hundreds of them perished.

Eventually that trail of persecution led to concentration camps and death chambers where six million people perished, just because they were Jewish. It was the grimmest imaginable outworking of the ancient curse:

*“Then the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, which neither you nor your fathers have known – wood and stone. And among those nations you shall find no rest, nor shall the sole of your foot have a resting place; but there the LORD will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, and anguish of soul. Your life shall hang in doubt before you; you shall fear day and night, and have no assurance of life. In the morning you shall say, ‘Oh, that it were evening!’ And at evening you shall say, ‘Oh, that it were morning!’ because of the fear which terrifies your heart, and because of the sight which your eyes see” (Deuteronomy 28:64-67).*

## **Still Jews**

Yet this hopeless people somehow managed to retain their Jewish identity despite being dispersed all round the world. They had abandoned their ancient language and lost their ancient homeland. Humanly speaking, there was no way they could recover lost ground.

Yet today we see them back in that land in almost daily contention with its previous occupants, and the eyes of the world are still upon them. What is it that has happened to give them a further period of occupancy in God’s Land? And what will be the final act in this remarkable drama of Jewish history?

# The Return of the Jews

*In May 1948 David Ben Gurion stood up in the Library in Tel Aviv to declare the State of Israel re-established. It was the end of a remarkable process but, more amazingly still, it was the very thing that had been predicted by the prophets thousands of years before. The Jewish people were back in their ancient land.*

## First Things First

The prophets had foretold that after the Jews were scattered throughout the earth, into every nation, they would eventually return to a desolate and unfruitful land.

They were destined to inhabit it, and make the land fruitful and fertile once again. That was the Jewish destiny according to the prophets and it was a vital first step in a process that would herald the return of their King – the Jewish Messiah, who would now save them from their enemies.

This is the ultimate paradox in Jewish history. Some Jewish people have always related strongly to those prophecies, because of their unstinting desire through the ages for military and political success. But they have consistently overlooked the other things the prophets said – that before the Messiah could come as a *King*, he had to come as a *Saviour*, to save them from their greatest enemy – Sin and Death.

The Jews are now back in the land, just as God said, after an extraordinary history. The mechanisms that brought about their return have to do with political movements and national decisions. But their return is not the result of human actions alone. Everything that has happened was overseen and directed by God.



God never leaves Himself without people who witness to His purpose. Long ago He chose the Jewish people to be His witnesses to all nations, whether they wanted to be or not. This is what

the prophet Isaiah said about that, for the nation had willingly accepted the divine remit many generations before:

*“You are my witnesses,” says the LORD, “And my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me, and understand that I am he” (Isaiah 43:10 and see Joshua 24:22).*

## Jewish-Centred

In every generation from the time they were formed into a nation, the Jewish people witnessed to the purpose of God. The people who wrote the Bible were almost all Jewish; the events it depicts happen either in Israel or concern Jewish people in the dispersion. It is a Jewish-centred revelation from God.

The whole of God’s purpose is bound up in the future of the Jewish people. The Lord Jesus made that plain and so too did his apostles, even the one who was specifically the apostle to the Gentiles:

*“We know what we worship”, Jesus once said, adding “for **salvation is of***

**the Jews**” (John 4:22). And the apostle Paul, who had been arrested because Jews wanted him to stop preaching about Jesus said: “for **the hope of Israel** I am bound with this chain” (Acts 28:20) and,

*“Now I stand and am judged for **the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers**. To this promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain” (26:6,7).*

## **Israel’s Choice and Ours**

It was not inevitable that the Jewish people should be deported and dispersed, so that they could be regathered. They were given the choice of how their national life would work out. They could either be obedient to God’s commandments and stay in the land; or be disobedient and be dispersed. They chose disobedience, as have all other peoples – for we have all broken the laws of God in many different ways and have failed to honour Him as we should (Romans 3:9,10).

The Jews are no worse than any of us; they are the same as us. What happened with them was that they were closer to God than were other nations and had a high calling to be his representatives on earth. They failed and in doing so defamed His holy name; so the consequences were grave. For nearly two thousand years they travelled the earth, never being accepted and never having a home they could call their own. And whilst they were away many other nations took possession of the land which became increasingly desolate and uninhabited. One Jewish writer

sums up the land’s occupation like this:

*“This country has passed through many hands. It has been conquered incessantly and incessantly abandoned. It has known the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Seljuks, the Crusaders, Mamelukes, Ottoman Turks and the British, apart from ourselves and the Canaanites before us. The Canaanites exist no more. Other than they and the Jews, the land has never been a home to anyone. It has been a battlefield, conquered territory, a place to plunder, a crossroads or a grazing ground” (David Ben-Gurion: “Recollections”).*

That assessment would be challenged by present day Palestinians, who see the reference to “a home” rather differently, but it helpfully summarises the way many nations possessed the land during the years when the Jews were elsewhere. It became largely a desolate and unfruitful place incapable of producing arable crops, stony, swampy and infertile. Yet the Bible said that it would not be like that forever.

## **Return and Restoration**

The prophet Jeremiah foretold the worldwide dispersion and the eventual regathering:

*‘Therefore do not fear, O my servant Jacob,’ says the LORD, ‘nor be dismayed, O Israel; for behold, I will save you from afar, and your seed from the land of their captivity. Jacob shall return, have rest and be quiet, and no one shall make him afraid. For I am with you,’ says the LORD, ‘to save you; though I make a full end of all nations where I have scat-*





tered you, yet I will not make a complete end of you. But I will correct you in justice, and will not let you go altogether unpunished' (Jeremiah 30:10,11).

The prophet Ezekiel predicted the changes that have now occurred to the productivity and development of the land:

*"But you, O mountains of Israel, you shall shoot forth your branches and yield your fruit to my people Israel, for they are about to come. For indeed I am for you, and I will turn to you, and you shall be tilled and sown. I will multiply men upon you, all the house of Israel, all of it; and the cities shall be inhabited and the ruins rebuilt. I will multiply upon you man and beast; and they shall increase and bear young; I will make you inhabited as in former times, and do better for you than at your beginnings. Then you shall know that I am the LORD" (Ezekiel 36:8-11).*

## **Nation at War**

The prophets describe the political environment that was to exist when the Jews returned to the land:

*"Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples, when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem. 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" (Zechariah 12:2,3).*

All those predictions have



*Jewish inmates in Buchenwald, hungry, sick and traumatized under Nazi persecution.*

come, or are coming, true. The Jews have returned to their ancient land after a period in the political and religious wilderness. They have been subjected to more pressure and difficulty than any other nation has experienced.

When the time was right they were allowed to return and they have indeed tilled

and sown the land, grown in number, built cities and settlements and made the land fruitful and fertile. All that time they have been under the scrutiny of the nations around them, most having resented and resisted their arrival.

From the Declaration of Independence in 1948 onwards, the Israelis have been under attack from the nations around and have had to fight to survive. As a result their military forces have become both strong and effective and they have reacted forcefully against anything and everything they perceived as a threat or a challenge to their sovereignty and independence.

But are they still the people of God? Or is God working through them to bring about His purpose despite them? Are they like scaffolding on a building – necessary for the construction phase but then to be dismantled and taken away when the work is completed?

How can a nation which is largely humanist and unbelieving – with only a minority who still believe in God and fewer still who accept the Lord Jesus – be called "the people of God"? What has to happen next?





# Still God's People?

*During the nineteenth century the dream of a Jewish return to their ancient land was revived and given political momentum. Theodor Herzl was an Austro-Hungarian Jew who was also a journalist, and he began to mobilize Jewish opinion by arranging a series of Zionist Conventions, the first in 1897 in Basle, Switzerland. It was his conviction that the time had come to marshal public opinion and persuade politicians that getting the Jews back home would be good for them and good for the world.*

## **The Jewish State**

In 1896 Herzl published *"The Jewish State"*. It was not a religious pamphlet – far from it! He declared the driving force that impelled him to be *"The misery of the Jews"* and urged his readers to see in this prospect the road to their freedom and happiness.

*"The Jews who wish for a State shall have it",* he wrote, but they had to make it happen. That was how Herzl saw things, for he was not a believer in God and was against a State in which religion played any part. There is no mention of God, or of the Biblical prophecies in his booklet. He urged his readers to fight unselfishly for the cause saying that *"whatever we attempt there to accomplish for our own welfare, will react powerfully and beneficially for the good of humanity."*

As things turned out the political struggle was an uphill one, but once the idea had taken firm root in the Jewish consciousness all sorts of things started to happen which moved things in the right direction.

- ✪ *Some very rich Jews purchased land in Palestine and encouraged Jews to settle there and farm the land. Some began to move back to the land as settlers.*
- ✪ *A Jewish chemist – Chaim Weissman – made a discovery which was a valuable contribution to British*

*military success in the First World War and was rewarded when the British Government made the "Balfour Declaration" in 1917 to say that they would support the re-establishment of a Jewish presence in Palestine.*

- ✪ *Anti-Jewish feelings continued to run high in many countries leading to Adolph Hitler's attempt to exterminate the entire race. When 6 million Jews perished in the gas chambers of Europe the consciousness of the world was stirred as never before.*
- ✪ *The United Nations voted to partition the Land between Jew and Arab, Russia and America agreeing that it was the best solution.*

## **God at Work**

None of that was obviously the work of God, but indeed it was! God works behind the scenes to accomplish His purpose and thus His ancient nation was reborn. Those who had once been His people began to resettle in His land in unbelief and complete ignorance of God's purpose. The Provisional Government which was brought into existence hastily in 1948, to conduct the War of Independence, that had to be fought at once, was a humanist and socialist one. There was no recognition of God's purpose: His prophets were seen merely as

part of ancient Jewish culture and their dreams and predictions merely the dreams and aspirations of Jewish people who loved the land.

How does all that fit in with the terms whereby God allowed Israel to possess the land in the first place? How could He allow a faithless people to regain possession when they had lost possession in the first place because of their faithlessness? The answer tells us a great deal about the God of the Bible and His marvellous kindness towards all people who are in great need of His help, even when they don't recognise that need.

## Leasehold Tenure

Even when the terms of occupation were being drawn up – like a lease to grant them occupation – God recognised that if the terms were broken He might still have to act to rescue the position, for their sake. The Jews were to obey His commands if they wanted to stay there; they would be expelled if they disobeyed and lost their faith, and then God added this provision:

*“The land also shall be left empty by them, and will enjoy its sabbaths while it lies desolate without them ... **Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, nor shall I abhor them, to utterly destroy them and break my covenant with them; for I am the LORD their God”** (Leviticus 26:43-44).*

The prophecies about the return to the land pick up the very same provision. God was acting, says the prophet Ezekiel, to recover the situation for His own sake. He was bringing His people back to occupy the land so that His pur-

pose could reach its final phase:

*“When they came to the nations, wherever they went, they profaned my holy name - when they said of them, ‘These are the people of the LORD, and yet they have gone out of his land.’ **But I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations wherever they went.** Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but **for my holy name’s sake”**” (Ezekiel 36:20-22).*

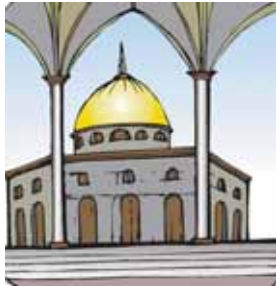
## God’s Holy Name

For nearly 2000 years God has waited and watched but now He is taking action. It is the first step in the process of retaking control of the world and its government. The Jews are back in their ancient land because Bible prophecy requires them to be there for the return from heaven of their King – the Lord Jesus Christ.

He was once asked to foretell the signs that would lead to His return as King at the end of the age. Jesus detailed the events that have happened since, over nearly 2000 years. You can

read it in Luke chapter 21 and you will at once recognise our world as one in which people fear for the future and worry about what disaster is coming next. But what did Jesus say about the Jewish people and their future?

*“There will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And **Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled”** (Luke 21:23,24).*



*The Mosque of Omar was built when the Jews were away from the land*

Jesus said that the time would come when Jews would be back in Jerusalem and, if you read on in the prophecy, you will see that has to happen before Jesus himself returns:

*“Men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (21:26,27).*



God” (John 1:11-13).

## Offer of Rebirth

There was an offer of rebirth but the nation as a whole did not respond, though many individuals gladly accepted Jesus as their Lord. That offer will come again to those who have returned to the land and who are due to become the people of God in every sense. That offer is open to us now.

When Jesus comes – to rescue Israel and all the world from trouble – he will invite the Israelis to accept him. And many will. By belief and baptism they will then become a cleansed and purified people, just as we can be now, if we put our trust and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and accept him as our Saviour and King:

*“I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then **they will look on me whom they have pierced; they will mourn for him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for him as one grieves for a firstborn ... In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness” (Zechariah 12:10; 13:1);***

## Not Yet!

It follows that whilst the Jews are a special people in God’s sight, and are still a people He loves and cares for, they are not yet fully back in His favour as the people through whom His great purpose will be accomplished. When they return to God, a new people will be constituted – from all nations, including Israel – who will be called the people of God. So out of Israel’s calamity will come great joy and rejoicing for all God’s people.

## Accepting Jesus

Long before Jesus had been born, and thus well before his Ministry to the Jews had begun, the prophets foretold that he would be rejected when he came. Nothing takes God by surprise. The Saviour, who would come to rescue mankind from sin and death, was destined to be rejected and to suffer a painful and public execution. Jesus came to his own people but they did not receive him, as the prophets said:

*“He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from him; he was despised, and we did not esteem him. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows” (Isaiah 53:3-4).*

That was just how it happened, as the New Testament confirms:

*“He came to his own, and his own did not receive him. But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of*

# Jerusalem – Future World Capital

**Unlikely as it might seem as things now stand, the future of the world is to be decided at Jerusalem. Because it is from there that the Lord Jesus Christ will reign as King.**

That was the promise the angel Gabriel made to Mary, the mother of Jesus, when she was told that she was to give birth to the Son of God:

*“Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call his name Jesus. 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 “*throne of David*” was in Jerusalem – it was from there that he reigned over Israel, about 1000 years B.C., having made that the capital of the newly united nation. From that city kings ruled for over 400 years until the kingdom was lost, but the prophets of God were insistent about two things, that:

- ☞ *The Kingdom will return to Jerusalem, and*
- ☞ *It will then be ruled over by a marvellous King.*

## **God’s Kingdom**

From its outset, Israel was no ordinary kingdom. Its kings were appointed by God, made subject to His law, asked to rule His people, in His land; and they could be deposed by Him if they broke

His commandments. There has never been such a kingdom on earth before or since. It was the Kingdom of God – God’s government on earth over the people he had chosen.

But it came to an end when a succession of kings blatantly disregarded what God commanded and the people remained disobedient and unwilling to respond to His Word. God terminated the arrangement. But, even as He did so, He made it clear that the Kingdom would return when there was a suitable successor descended from King David (see Ezekiel 21:26,27)

There is now no doubt about that successor. The Lord Jesus proved himself to be wholly obedient to God and an entirely worthy King. He always did the will of God His Father, so God raised him from the dead and gave him authority to rule for God on earth. When he returns, Jesus will make Jerusalem the centre of a world that will at last give praise and glory to God. The world will then become a fit place for God’s people to live in, as God has always purposed.

## **Jerusalem at Peace**

Just what that world will be like can be understood by piecing together the various pictures painted by the prophets who foretell Jerusalem’s glorious future. As you read them, bear in mind that ***if you want to be a part of this new age you have to do something about it now.***

The blessings of tomorrow are dependent upon the willingness we show today, by believing God’s promises

## ➤ The Kingdom to Return

*“You will arise and have mercy on Zion; for the time to favour her, yes, the set time, has come ... So the nations shall fear the name of the LORD, And all the kings of the earth your glory. For the LORD shall build up Zion; he shall appear in his glory” (Psalm 102:13-16; see also Acts 1:6; Micah 4:7-8).*

## ➤ The Throne of the Lord

*“At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the LORD, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem; they shall walk no more after the stubbornness of their evil heart” (Jeremiah 3:17; see also Matthew 19:28; Zechariah 6:13; Ezekiel 43:7).*

## ➤ World Government and Peace

*“Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (Isaiah 2:3,4; see also Psalm 72:8; Acts 17:31; Psalm 67:4; Revelation 11:15).*

## ➤ Centre of True Religion

*“It shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles” (Zechariah 14:16; see also Isaiah 2:1-2; Ezekiel 43:18-27; Psalm 51:18-19).*

## ➤ Jerusalem – at Peace

*“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls, prosperity within your palaces” (Psalm 122:6,7; see also Isaiah 33:20; 52:9; 62:3,6,7,12; 63:3,12).*

## ➤ Jews in Jerusalem

*“Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, “Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you”’” (Zech 8:22,23).*

## Key to the World’s Future

The nation of Israel and the city Jerusalem have a great future in store.

When the Jewish people realize their true destiny, and accept their God-given King – the Lord Jesus Christ – it will signal the very end of this age and the beginning of a new and better one. People who live

under the rulership of the Lord Jesus Christ will then be privileged to see the world run as it really should be.

Those who have prepared now for that coming time, and who have made their peace with God, in the way that he provides – by faith and baptism – will be given eternal life. Those who now sleep in the dust of death will come forth to join with them in the blessings of that age – living to glorify God and to exalt His appointed King.

Jew and Gentile are destined to find their true place together at the close of this age and the start of that which is to come. Be sure to be there by preparing for it now.





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*Cover Illustration by Photos.com*

*Text by Tecwyn Morgan, courtesy of "Glad Tidings" magazine*

*Published by Christadelphian ALS, PO Box 10817, Birmingham, B27 6ZR*