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with contributions from

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Israel, the nations and the **VALLEY** **OF DECISION**



*"When the Son of
Man comes in His
glory ... all the nations
will be gathered before
Him ... and He will separate the
people one from another ... He will
put the sheep on His right and the goats
on His left." (Mat 25:31-33)*

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Harald Eckert

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FOREWORD

This book is intended for praying Christians, for intercessors, intercessory leaders, networks and movements! It is linked to a call—a call to prayer! It is a call to intercessors to pray for their respective nations—all over the world. **IT IS A GLOBAL PRAYER CALL!!!**

The key objective of this call to prayer is for you to pray for your own nations with regard to their relationship towards the Jewish people and towards Israel. In the spring of 2015—70 years after the end of the Holocaust and the end of World War II (in Europe)—the Holocaust will be widely commemorated: the attempts of Nazi Germany and her allies to annihilate European Jewry will once again be brought to the forefront of public attention.

For us, as European Christians, it is a painful memory: where was the Christian Church in Europe at that time? It grieves us deeply to have to say that we were mostly indifferent, at best, towards the fate of the Jews. Against this historical backdrop, our question today is this: **where is the Church now?**

Today, 70 years later, the Jewish people worldwide, and the state of Israel in particular, are once again threatened with annihilation; they are demonized, terrorized, isolated and treated with injustice—primarily by Islamic nations, networks and movements, but also, to varying degrees, by many others. And what about us as the

Church of today—are we indifferent once again, or have we learnt from history?

As Christians from Europe, we are launching this GLOBAL PRAYER CALL 2015—70 years after the end of the Holocaust—so that we might NEVER AGAIN be indifferent. And we challenge and encourage you to pray for your government, for your nation, and for the churches in your nation, to act fairly towards Israel, to swim against the tide where necessary, and to be a blessing to Israel as the Bible commands (Genesis 12:3). As we do so, God in turn will bless our nations—for all time and throughout eternity! Therefore: JOIN THE GLOBAL PRAYER CALL 2015!!!

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PART 1

Bible study

Introduction

What the Bible has to say about God's relationship with the nations is a matter of great and far-reaching importance. Unfortunately, it is an issue that is given far too little consideration by Christian believers. There are various reasons for this. Let us list a few of them here:

- Many Christians intuitively believe that God only speaks about (Israel and the) nations in the Old Testament. In the New Testament—as the prevailing opinion would have it—He only speaks about His intentions for individuals.
- In the course of Church history, there have been many widely differing—and in some cases highly bizarre—popularly held views on the biblical significance of nations, governments and collective groups.
- The Book of Revelation and other eschatological passages in the Old and New Testaments leave many Christians with more questions than answers. For many, the natural reaction is to give such topics a wide berth.

While these reasons may be understandable, they are all the more unjustified when one takes a closer look at the issues they address.

Jesus' parable of the judgement of the nations

Jesus' parable of the judgement of the nations, found in Matthew 25:31ff, should be enough to give us pause for thought. In the opening verses we read:

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.” (Matthew 25:31–33)

If we take these verses literally, and that is how they are meant to be taken, they suffice for us to conclude that:

1. For God, nations also have a role to play in the New Testament.
2. There is judgement not only over individuals, but also over nations.
3. This judgement is connected to the Second Coming of Jesus—i.e. it is still in the future.

If all this is true, can we, as Christians, remain indifferent to it? Can the future fate of our nation really leave us cold? Is it spiritually and humanly irrelevant whether our nation is one day counted among the “sheep” or the “goats”? If not, what can I do about it? What is my responsibility before God and man?

Two basic principles of the Bible study

In order to systematically address these questions, and the aforementioned reasons for the great uncertainty surrounding them, I would like to start off with a few introductory remarks regarding the methodology of this biblical investigation:

Firstly, when approaching one of the more complex themes of Holy Scripture, it is often very helpful to question where, and in what context, this topic is addressed for the first time and the last time in the Bible. Once one has identified the starting and finishing points of a line of revelation, it is often easier to relate the other points along the line to the overall biblical revelation. This is why the books of Genesis and Revelation are so important. Many of the themes that are introduced in Genesis, the first book of the Bible, reach their final revelational conclusion in Revelation, the last book of the Bible.

Secondly, there is a fundamental question regarding the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament: which lines of revelation are characterized by continuity throughout the whole Bible, and which lines exhibit discontinuity?

An example of discontinuity is the ritual of Temple sacrifice. Jesus foretold the destruction of the Temple and of all the rituals associated with it—and it all came to pass as He foretold. He offered an alternative for both the Temple and the offering of sacrifices: we, as believers, are the new Temple and He, as the Lamb of God, is the all-embracing and universally valid sacrifice.

Two examples of continuity are the enduring validity of the Old Testament revelation with regard to creation and with regard to the Ten Commandments centred on the commandment pertaining to love. Not much is mentioned about either in the New Testament, but the few confirmations that are given in the New Testament are sufficient to confirm the lasting significance of the Old Testament revelation regarding these topics and to indicate that it is to be taken for granted. This is not difficult for most of us to comprehend.

“Israel” as an example of biblical continuity

The same basic principle applies here to the topic of Israel. A few examples from the Epistle to the Romans:

In Romans 9:4–5, Paul lists eight gifts of grace given permanently by God to the people of Israel:

“... the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.”

In the same letter, chapter 15, verse 8, Paul says that one of the reasons why Jesus came to earth was to confirm God’s promises to the Jewish people:

“For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed ...”

That is why Paul was also able to state so clearly in Romans 11:28–29 that God had by no means rejected His people Israel, and that His gifts of grace to this people, and their calling, were of permanent validity, even in the New Testament:

“As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable. Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience ...”

These are just a few statements, but they suffice to make it quite clear that with regard to Israel’s calling, Israel’s gifts of grace and God’s promises to Israel, there is no room for doubt: these issues

exhibit continuity throughout the entire Bible. In these issues, there is no break between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

On the basis of these introductory considerations, we shall now commence our study of the topic of the nations with the following questions:

- a) Where does Scripture refer to the nations for the first time and for the last time?
- b) In relation to the Bible as a whole, is the topic of the nations one that displays continuity or discontinuity?
- c) Finally, what conclusions can we draw from the answers to these questions?

Beginning and end of biblical revelation with regard to the nations

When does the Bible mention nations for the first time? And for the last time? When I ask this question during presentations and open the floor for answers, the replies are often similar. The first question often receives the answer: “In the story of the Tower of Babel” (Genesis 11), while the answer to the second question is generally: “Somewhere in the Book of Revelation”. Both are close. Let us take an even closer look.

The establishment of the nations on the basis of the Noahic Covenant

The first appearance of the nations in the Bible is in Genesis 10. This chapter tells of how a total of 70 nations arose from the descendants of the three sons of Noah: Ham, Shem and Japheth. The number 70 has a particular significance in Hebrew. The number 7 stands for inner perfection, while the number 10 represents outer perfection or completeness. 7 times 10 or 10 x 7 is a combination of both dimensions. 70 is thus an indication of the totality of the nations descended from Noah.

“These are the clans of Noah’s sons, according to their lines of descent, within their nations. From these the nations spread out over the earth after the flood.” (Genesis 10:32)

At least as important as the numerical significance, however, is the story of what came before the establishment of the nations. This was preceded by the flood—the destruction of all human life—and the new beginning after the flood. This new beginning was characterized by numerous promises of God’s grace. God promised Noah that He would never again bring such a total judgement over mankind. He promised that He would respect and even watch over the laws of nature to keep people provided for.

“As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.” (Genesis 8:22)

And God sealed these promises of grace and goodness with the rainbow as a sign of His covenant.

“And God said, ‘This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.’” (Genesis 9:12–13)

The basis for the establishment of the nations was thus no less than God’s love and goodness, manifested in the Noahic Covenant—an eternal covenant of grace. That was the starting point for the history of God’s relationship with the nations of the world.

The healing of the nations from the perspective of eternity

The end of the story, as it is revealed to us, is found in the last chapter of the last book of the Bible. Here we have the final details

that Scripture reveals to us about the eternal age—the age of the new heaven, the new earth and the new Jerusalem that descends to earth from heaven. It is in this context, then, that we read the following about the nations (Revelation 22:1–2):

“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.”

There are many passages in the Book of Revelation that refer to nations, kings (rulers) and (anti-Christian) groups of nations. The ultimate anti-Christian realm is referred to as the Whore of Babylon, endowed with seductive beauty and wealth. These passages contain numerous dramatic descriptions of battle and judgement.

However, the last thing we are told about the nations, the very last thing, is completely different: this passage is all about life and healing. It conveys an image of peace and plenty in the story of the tree standing by the water of life whose leaves are used for the healing of the nations. A lot could be said about the symbolism of the images used here. The image of the tree reminds us of the two trees in Paradise. What started out at the very beginning with the creation of two people now ends with the healing of many nations. Here the Bible comes full circle. Salvation history, as revealed to us, reaches its final conclusion.

The beginning and the end of the history of the nations: God’s love!

The key point here is clear. The very first and the very last thing that the Bible tells us about the nations is this: God loves the nations! He wants to bless them. He makes sure that this will happen,

starting with the Noahic Covenant and finishing with the tree of life.

Just as we can assert with biblical certainty that every person is created in the image of God, and thus has an intrinsic individual dignity enabling him to understand that he is personally loved by God, so too can we ascertain that the same applies to the nations: God loves every nation! God has created an endless variety of individual forms of expression of the likeness of His image, and honours and loves each one of them. The same applies to the collective forms of expression of the likeness of His image. Each nation has its own collective personality, its own particular mentality, its collective temperament and its collective creativity. The biblical God is simultaneously the God of the microcosm and the macrocosm. The God of the Bible is the creator and God of each individual person and the creator and God of each individual nation.

That, then, is the basis for, and the stated goal of, the plan of salvation for the nations of the world: God's love! God's gracious providence! God's covenant in the sign of the rainbow. And God's promise of the tree of life.

I consider it very important to emphasize this central truth from the outset of our investigation. In the course of this study, we will be forced to deal at length with judgement and tragedy. Sometimes, in Christian circles, I encounter what can only be described as a secret (not to mention eerie) delight in the announcements of God's judgement.

This does not correspond to the character of God. He never judges willingly and never without a purpose: for as long as possible, all judgements are intended to lead to repentance. One day, however, God's last judgement will come. This judgement will be final. As we shall see, this applies to individuals and nations alike.

For as long as possible, however, there is nothing that God desires more for individuals and nations than that they should open themselves up to His love, goodness and mercy. He wants them to turn from their evil ways and shape their future in accordance with the love and mercy they have experienced from God.

The role of Israel in the plan of salvation for the nations

In order to understand the role of Israel in God's plans to bless the nations, we now need to return to the beginning. Chapters 8 and 9 of Genesis are primarily concerned with the Noahic Covenant. Chapter 10 then deals with the establishment of the nations from the descendants of Noah. For several generations, the nations lived under God's gracious providence and honoured Him for it. There came a point, however, when they felt the time was right to take their fate into their own hands—and this brings us to the biblical account of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11.

The Tower of Babel

In the story of the Tower of Babel, the nations turn “en masse” against God and against His good plans and designs for them. Until then, the nations had apparently lived together as good neighbours. They spoke a common language. They had flourished and grown numerous under the blessing of the Noahic Covenant. They had prospered and become strong. And yet, instead of thanking and honouring God for this blessing, they fell prey to pride and arrogance and rebelled against God and against His commandments,

which they misunderstood as heavy shackles. What had happened at an individual level in the Garden of Eden was now repeated at a collective level, with astonishing parallels, in the events surrounding the Tower of Babel.

“Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, ‘Come, let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly.’ They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise, we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth.’ But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. The Lord said, ‘If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.’ So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel—because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.”

The “spirit of Babel” in the history of the nations

The nations came together in pride, hubris and rebellion to assert their independence from God. They took their destiny into their own hands and pushed God away from themselves with something verging on hatred—the same God who had blessed them for generations, who was concerned with their welfare and had provided for it. They wanted to build a monument to their own creative genius, drive and will power. They shrugged off their attitude of gratitude and satisfaction with regard to what was intended for them in accordance with God’s blessing, becoming excessive and

greedy, filled with overweening pride and arrogance towards their God. They were seized by the spirit of Babel, a demonic spirit that spurred them on to strive for outstanding achievements—achievements without God, indeed achievements against God.

This Babylonian spirit, the spirit of hubris and rebellion, remains active to this very day. To this day, it symbolizes anti-God and anti-Christian ideologies and world powers that are pervaded by a spirit of pride and rebellion. As a German, I can say that my nation alone has experienced and suffered from two different expressions of this ideology: the Fascist variant under the Nazi dictatorship and the Communist variant that held half of Germany (East Germany, GDR) in its vice-like grip under the aegis of Stalin after the Second World War. The ideological colours change over the course of time, but the fundamental ideology and the underlying demonic inspiration remain the same.

Most of the major world powers of the past were permeated by this spirit—and Israel was confronted by it repeatedly throughout its history: the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans. The established Church of the Middle Ages also had Babylonian traits. Modern ideologies and groups are or were also at risk, from the militantly humanist Enlightenment to Communism and Fascism, and from rampant unbridled capitalism to radical (i.e. original) Islam. All these powers and movements are imbued in different ways with this Babylonian spirit of pride and rebellion against God and against His good commandments. The Bible prophesies that this tendency will escalate at the level of nations and world powers to culminate in a final anti-Christian climax before the final judgement—see Revelation 19—against the “Whore of Babylon” and the spirit it represents. This final judgement over “Babel” goes hand in hand with the (second) coming of the Messiah and the dawn of the Messianic kingdom, centred on Zion, as foretold with

astonishing precision and clarity by the psalmist, inspired by the Holy Spirit (Psalm 2):

“Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed, saying, ‘Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles.’ The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. He rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, ‘I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain.’ I will proclaim the Lord’s decree: He said to me, ‘You are my son; today I have become your father. Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will break them with a rod of iron; you will dash them to pieces like pottery.’ Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and celebrate his rule with trembling. Kiss his son, or he will be angry and your way will lead to your destruction, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.”

God’s answer to the Babylonian rebellion

How did God now respond to this first manifestation, this starting point and breakthrough of the Babylonian spirit? What was His answer? If we take a closer look at the events and the wider context, we find three reactions—two reactions of judgement and one reaction of grace:

1. God confused their language (Genesis 11:7)
2. God scattered them over all the earth (Genesis 11:8)
3. God called Abraham (Genesis 12:1–3)

At this point, let us take a closer look at the parallels between what happened in the Garden of Eden and the events surrounding

the Tower of Babel. To a certain extent, the events that unfolded at an individual level in the Garden of Eden were repeated at a collective level, that of the nations, in Babel.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve succumbed to the temptation of the serpent because of the appeal to their pride (“you will be like God”, Genesis 3:5). God’s response—two reactions of judgement and one reaction of grace:

1. He drove them out of the Garden of Eden, thus handing them over to sin and death (Genesis 3:23ff)
2. He laid a separate gender-specific curse on each of them, both man and woman (Genesis 3:16–20)
3. He gave them and their descendants the promise of a future redeemer (Genesis 3:15)

The amazing thing in both cases is that in the midst of man’s downfall and judgement, God was already opening up a path towards redemption. At the individual level, this was the promise of the “Son”—the Messiah and Saviour. At the collective level, the level of the nations, it was the calling of Abraham and, in connection with this, the unique calling of the Jewish people as summarized in Genesis 12:1–3:

“The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’”

Israel and the nations: called to be a mutual blessing

The key thing here is to understand God's primary reason, His core motive, for calling Abraham: He still desires to bless the nations!!! He is still appealing to the nations, who have risen up against Him in pride and rebellion, to put their faith in Him. He still loves the nations—but He has to set them a condition: they can only come back under His blessing if they are prepared to give up their pride, or to put it another way, if they are prepared to accept and “bless” God's choice, His Chosen People (Genesis 12:3a).

Humble acceptance of this choice would simultaneously mean acceptance of the unique calling of this people (to be a blessing for mankind) and the unique significance of the land that God had allotted to Abraham and his descendants. These three factors are inseparably linked in God's original calling of Abraham (Genesis 12:1–3), Isaac (Genesis 26:3–5) and Jacob (Genesis 28:13–14):

1. The birth as a nation
2. The land
3. The mission of Israel

Where Romans 11:29 says: “*God's gifts and his call are irrevocable*”, this refers to the original gifts and the original calling. Where Romans 15:8 says that one of the reasons for Christ's first coming to the earth was so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed, this refers to the original promises and the original calling. Acceptance of these three promises, sealed in the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 15:18) and confirmed by Paul (Romans 11) and Jesus (Romans 15:8), as a gift of blessing for mankind—that is the condition to which the nations must yield in order to be able to come back under God's blessing. The “*mishpacha*”, family,

clan, tribe or nation that blesses Israel comes under the blessing of the Almighty. Those collective units, on the other hand, that stubbornly cling on to pride, hubris and rebellion remain under God's judgement and curse.

The foundation for the plan of salvation is thus laid: Israel's challenge, on the basis of the Torah, that is, God's commandments communicated to Israel through Moses, is to heed God's voice and obey His commandments (see Deuteronomy 28). The challenge for the nations of the world is to recognize God's election and calling of Israel in humility, thankfulness and reverence. At the collective level, this sums up the basic message of the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 28 (for Israel) and Genesis 12 (for the nations) were the two core messages of all the Old Testament prophets.

Two further main themes gradually developed on this basis: a) the promise of the Messiah, and b) the partnership between believers (in the Messiah) from Israel and believers from the nations. This became the primary message of the New Testament—but without in any way calling into question, re-interpreting or cancelling the Old Testament foundations of God's plan of salvation.

Israel in the New Testament

There are some Christians who are of the opinion that the New Testament has nothing to say on the topic of “Israel”. This is not true. Those Christians who recognize that the New Testament does indeed refer to the topic of “Israel” roughly fall into three camps. The first group can quote a whole set of Bible passages prophesying judgement on Israel. The second group can quote a whole set of passages that have positive things to say about Israel. The third group is so confused by all this that they cannot decide which of the other two camps to side with.

To put it simply, both of the first two camps have strong arguments to back up their position. The Bible deals vehemently and intensively with God’s judgement on the Jewish people, but also speaks clearly of His enduring faithfulness and His promises towards Israel that remain valid. How does this fit together?

The key to a biblical understanding of Israel: God’s covenants with Israel

I have dedicated an entire book to this question (“Gottes Weg mit Israel”, published by Asaph-Verlag). Let us briefly summarize the most important points here:

It is my understanding, that there are four foundational covenants that God made with the Jewish people: the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 15), the Sinai Covenant (which reaches its climax in Deuteronomy 28), the covenant relating to the Messiah (2 Samuel 7) and the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31, Ezekiel 36, etc.). In terms of judgement and promise, it is the Abrahamic Covenant and the Sinai Covenant that are of relevance.

The Abrahamic Covenant is a unilateral, eternal, unconditional covenant. It is a covenant of grace for which God alone bears the responsibility. It is in this covenant that the original calling of Israel and the original promises to Israel, as given to the patriarchs (see above), are effectively sealed. God alone guarantees the fulfilment of these promises, irrespective of how Israel behaves. It was on the basis of this that Paul was able to make a deeply radical statement (Romans 11:28–29):

“As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable.”

It is important to distinguish this covenant from the Sinai Covenant which was offered to the children of Israel under Moses. Unlike the Abrahamic Covenant, this is a bilateral covenant, a conditional covenant, and—as we shall see—a covenant that is of limited duration. In Deuteronomy, the second generation of the children of Israel, who had meanwhile been travelling in the wilderness for 40 years, were essentially presented with a contract: *“If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands ... All these blessings will come on you ...”* (see Deuteronomy 28:1–2). Alternatively: *“if you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands ... all these curses (judgements) will come on you ...”* (see Deuteronomy 28:15).

Both covenants taken together form the basis for all further prophecies regarding Israel in both the Old and New Testaments. Both testaments are in continuity here and pursue the same line: if Israel is disobedient towards God, He must judge Israel—but only to a limited extent. His fundamental calling of Israel and His original promises to Israel remain unaffected by this on the basis of the Abrahamic Covenant. That is why every single one of the prophets, in addition to the often detailed prophecies of judgement, at least finishes on a positive note with a vision of hope for Israel. All New Testament passages relating to the judgement and salvation of Israel can be seen to follow this fundamental pattern, whereby the passages referring to salvation are generally eschatological in character.

Examples in the New Testament

The following is a typical example from the end-times teaching of Jesus (Luke 21:20, 24):

“When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. ... They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”

First of all, Jesus speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem and the worldwide scattering of the Jewish people. He specifies the precise circumstances under which this destruction will occur and gives His contemporaries clear instructions on how to behave when the situation arises. It was only about 40 years later that the majority of the early Church followed His advice to the letter and, on the basis of Jesus’ prophetic warning, took advantage of a break in hostilities to flee from Jerusalem and across the River Jordan to Pella in what is now Jordan. Following the crushing of the two Jewish Revolts that were put down in around 70–73 and 135 AD, the majority

of the Jewish inhabitants were indeed scattered throughout the known world and from there to the ends of the earth.

It is significant that in His prophecy of judgement and world-wide scattering, Jesus quotes the Old Testament—to be precise: a passage from Deuteronomy 28:64:

“Then the Lord will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other.”

If one takes a closer look at the more than 50 verses in which God speaks through Moses about what will happen in the case of Israel’s disobedience, one can see that the announcements of judgement become progressively more severe. The threat referred to above is found right at the end of this list. The worldwide scattering of the Jewish people is the most severe punishment threatened on the basis of the Sinai Covenant. And this is precisely what Jesus picks up on in Luke 21:24 and refers to being fulfilled in the (near) future, but only for a limited period of time! UNTIL ...

“They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” (Luke 21:24)

Here Jesus specifies a decisive turning point—a reversal of fortune for the Jewish people and for Jerusalem. He foretells the dawning of a new era in which non-Jewish rule over Jerusalem will come to an end and Jerusalem will return to Jewish sovereignty. This, incidentally, is also in accordance with what Moses had foretold: when Israel is scattered to the ends of the earth, a time will come in which God will gather them back again (Deuteronomy 30:4–5):

“Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the Lord your God will gather you and bring

you back. He will bring you to the land that belonged to your ancestors, and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your ancestors.”

This final promise of salvation, again, is based on the Abrahamic Covenant.

We also find this correlation of judgement and grace in other passages in the New Testament. Matthew reports the following statement of Jesus, also in the context of His end-times teaching. In the context of His second coming, He specifies a precondition for His return, namely that He will be greeted by the residents of Jerusalem as the Messiah (Mt. 23:39):

“For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

Here, once again, we see this end-times use of the word “until”!

Parallel to this, we can now consider Paul’s statement in Romans 11:25–26 which says:

“I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written: ‘The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob ...’

In other words, (to paraphrase) once the Great Commission has reached its goal among the nations, then “all Israel” will come to believe in Jesus the Messiah. The metaphorical “branches that were broken off” will be grafted back into the cultivated olive tree from which they came. This is because, despite all their disobedience, and despite all the (temporally limited) judgements, they remain “loved on account of the patriarchs” (Romans 11:28), in other

words, for the sake of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob with whom God made His unilateral, eternal covenant of grace.

In all these examples, we see the same pattern that recurs throughout Scripture. All the passages referring to judgement are based on the disobedience of the Jewish people and the associated consequences resulting from the Sinai Covenant. All the passages of ultimate salvation and all the lasting promises are based on the unconditional and eternally valid Abrahamic Covenant. Ultimately, the Abrahamic Covenant also includes the promise to Israel of the Messiah and the associated establishment of the New Covenant for Israel, as we can read in Romans 11:25ff from a New Testament perspective (with reference to important quotations from the Old Testament). As we have stated before, the Old and New Testaments display unbroken continuity in this respect.

“I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written: ‘The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.’”

(Romans 11:25–27)

Which covenant is replaced by the New Covenant?

An important question to close with: which covenant is replaced by the New Covenant? Which covenant is the Old Covenant? The Abrahamic Covenant? The Sinai Covenant? Both?

If we read Jeremiah 31 or Hebrews, chapter 8, the answer is crystal clear: the Old Covenant that is replaced by the New Covenant is the Sinai Covenant—not the Abrahamic Covenant!

Jeremiah 31:31–33: *“‘The days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like **the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt**, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,’ declares the Lord. ‘This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,’ declares the Lord. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God ...’”*

Hebrews 8:6–9: *“But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises. For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. But God found fault with the people and said: ‘The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when **I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt**, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord.’”* At this point, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews quotes Jeremiah 31:31–33.

Whoever grasps this has understood the starting point and basis of God’s salvation history with Israel and the nations. This foundation remains valid today and will remain valid for ever.

What is of vital importance for us and our generation is the fact that we are clearly living in the middle of this biblically prophesied turning point in history: the Jewish people is being gathered from all the nations on earth (Jeremiah 31:1ff). Jerusalem is gradually coming back under the sovereignty of the Jewish people (Luke 21:24). The land is flourishing, the cities are being rebuilt and

repopulated, and agriculture is enjoying an extraordinary boom (Hesekiel 36:1ff). It is only a matter of time before “all Israel” is saved (Romans 11:26) and the residents of Jerusalem await and recognize Jesus as their Messiah (Matthew 23:39).

The important thing to note at this point is that the New Testament does indeed have a fair amount to say about “Israel”. Some of what it has to say appears contradictory, but can be identified and understood in the context of the two underlying covenants—the Abrahamic Covenant and the Sinai Covenant—in unbroken unity with the Old Testament.

CHAPTER 5

The nations in the New Testament

If it is already difficult for many Bible-reading Christians to discover “Israel” in the New Testament, it must certainly be difficult for even more to discover “the nations” in the New Testament—with the possible exception of the Great Commission. For me, it was a long process before I recognized the connections outlined below.

First of all, it is an astonishing discovery from the perspective of eternity that, according to Revelation 22, the last chapter of the Bible, there will still be nations. Some things, such as marriage, will no longer exist, but nations will. This raises a number of important questions. Will all the nations still exist, or just some of them? If only some of them, which ones will still be around and which will not? Will Germany be one of them? Will your country? Do you care???

Matthew 25:31ff and the parable of the good Samaritan

The parable of the judgement of the nations from Matthew 25:31ff takes on a key role against the backdrop of Revelation 22 and Genesis 12.

Traditionally, the interpretation of this parable has generally been similar to that of the parable of the good Samaritan. The believer is called upon to care for the welfare of his fellow man. The core message is this: “Love your neighbor as yourself”. This is one of the most central tenets of the New Testament!

However, if we read these two parables side by side, we cannot fail to notice that as well as having much in common, they also have significant differences:

- The parable of the good Samaritan is the story of an individual. The parable of the judgement of the nations is clearly about nations.
- In the parable of the good Samaritan, there is no indication of the time in which it is set. The parable of the judgement of the nations is clearly set at the time of the Lord’s return.

One does not generally consider these differences in greater detail. For our topic, however, they are of decisive importance.

Matthew 25:31ff and the context of Matthew 23–25

The verses from the end of Matthew 23 to the end of Matthew 25 deal with one main topic: the future. To be more precise, they cover the period between the first and second comings of Christ, i.e. the end times in both a narrower and a broader sense. Many theologians are agreed that the end times, in a broader sense, began with the events of Pentecost. More open to debate is the issue of when, from a biblical perspective, the end times begin in a narrower sense.

I have already dedicated another book to this topic (Times of Restoration, published by CVK-Verlag, Lübeck), so I do not wish to go into greater detail here. What is clear to me, however, is that

the simultaneous occurrence of the ingathering of the Jews and the restoration of Israel, in conjunction with the unprecedented growth of global Christian revival movements and a unique, dynamic move towards the fulfilment of the Great Commission, represent an accumulation of events that meet a wide range of biblical criteria, justifying the assumption that the Second Coming of Christ is fast approaching.

Most of the passage referred to above (end of chapter 23 to end of chapter 25) deals with these times, however long they may still last, and it is my belief that it refers to the times in which we are living.

If, with this background, we take a closer look at the three parables in Matthew 25, it becomes apparent that all three are dealing with the end times. All three parables are about the encounter with the Lord when He returns. That, then, is what these three parables have in common. However, in addition to this similarity, they also exhibit major differences. In particular, on closer inspection, it becomes clear that three different target groups are being addressed. On His return, the Lord appears to each of these three target groups in a different guise.

1. In the parable of the ten (!) virgins, Jesus returns as the bridegroom. Here, it is the bride, i.e. the Church, to whom He appears. This is also hinted at by the significance of the number ten, a number that refers to a collective (for example: in the Jewish religion, a quorum of at least ten (!) men is required to form a “minyan” or congregation). However, Jesus’ coming entails a judgement on the Church. Part of the Church is rejected. Part is accepted. The decisive criterion for this judgement is how the Church has handled the oil—a symbol here for the Holy Spirit.

2. In the parable of the talents, Jesus returns as Lord and master. He returns to His servants, to each one individually. Once again, there is a judgement. Two are accepted, one is rejected. The decisive criterion for this judgement of the individual is what we have done with the talents with which we have been entrusted.
3. The parable of the judgement of the nations is also about the return of Christ. This time, however, He does not come as a bridegroom to His bride, nor as a master to His servants, but as a king and judge over the nations. These, then, constitute the third target group in the context of His return. The decisive criterion for the judgement of the nations is merciful treatment of “the least of my brothers”.

Alongside the indications in the Book of Revelation, the Gospel of Matthew thus provides us with further evidence that the nations are still important to God in New Testament times. His desire to bless the nations is a continuous one. We can assume that His condition is also still the same—i.e. a readiness to recognize and accept God’s unique calling of the Jewish people with thankfulness and humility.

On the basis of this assumption, we can voice the supposition that the “least of Jesus’ brothers” refers to the Jewish people, and in particular that part of the Jewish people that has not yet recognized Jesus as the Messiah. This observation is reinforced by the manner in which, in Matthew 11, Jesus compares John the Baptist and the other believers of the Old Testament with the disciples who have come to faith in Him:

“As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: ‘What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man

dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings’ palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’ Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”

(Matthew 11:7–11)

Israel and the nations in Church history

Before we can continue, I would like to raise a question that has greatly preoccupied me and continues to do so: Why, as reformed Christians, and in particular as evangelical Christians, do we find it so difficult to grasp, that, in addition to the individual dimension of God's work of redemption, there is also a collective dimension that remains valid? Three thoughts on this issue:

God's promises to "all Israel" remain concealed to many

Since the times of the Church Fathers, i.e. since the 2nd to 5th centuries, the Church has denied that Israel has an enduring, positive significance before God. It was customary teaching that the Church had replaced Israel once and for all ("replacement theology").

From Augustine to Luther, and even to the young Karl Barth (who later revised his opinion), it was simply impossible to believe, let alone argue for, Paul's "mystery" in Romans 11:25ff, namely that "all Israel" will be saved. Individual Jews? Yes. But the whole

nation? Impossible! Many believers, Bible teachers and theologians are still confronted by the same problem.

This problem is often due to an uncertainty to understand the diverse characteristics of the Abrahamic Covenant and the Sinai Covenant: the Abrahamic Covenant is eternal and the Sinai Covenant is not. It will be replaced in God's timing by the New Covenant (Romans 11:25–27):

“I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written: ‘The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.’”

It is against this very backdrop that the Jews have suffered endless affliction, rejection, persecution and death in the so-called “Christian” Europe for more than 1500 years and culminating in the Holocaust. Those primarily responsible for persecuting the Jews were the Christians and the Christian Churches of Europe. There are studies that have found that, during these 1500 years in Europe, about the same number of Jews were killed as during the Holocaust: millions. One of the main reasons for this were the theologically problematical teachings in the times of the Church Fathers that set the course for generations of European Church history, with repercussions right down to the present day.

Where there was no vision for God's promises for “all Israel”, this was no longer seen as a permanently valid criterion for God's blessing or curse for the nations. This revelation was classified under “discontinuity” and assigned to the Old Testament without lasting relevance for the present and the future, i.e. without New Testament relevance.

The “Constantinian shift” and the millennial Kingdom

To this first “blind spot” was added a second. Augustine, one of the most significant Church Fathers and theologians of the Western Church (i.e. the Roman Catholic Church as opposed to the Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe), brought about a calamitous turning point in his famous work “The City of God”. He asserted that the victory of Christianity in the Roman Empire (beginning with Emperor Constantine at the start of the 4th century) had ushered in the “millennial Kingdom” foretold in the Bible.

Put simply, some of the devastating consequences of replacement theology are developed further here by Augustine: Israel has been replaced by the Church. The Messiah has been replaced by the Pope, and Jerusalem by Rome. Furthermore, the promises for the Messianic Kingdom are no longer reserved for the future—the time after the Second Coming of Jesus—but are applied to the present. That was the main reason why the medieval Catholic Church took on strong ideological, dictatorial and militant characteristics. The objective was to establish Paradise on earth without the Messiah and without redeemed Zion (Israel, Jerusalem).

One consequence of this was countless wars and conflicts in the Middle Ages, waged in the name of Christianity. This did not automatically cease everywhere after the Reformation. One need think no further than the disastrous Thirty Years' War, from 1618 to 1648, in which roughly one third of the population of Central Europe was killed—and this in a conflict between Catholic and Protestant states and rulers.

The legacy of Pietism

Against this background, it was perfectly understandable, not to mention spiritually and historically correct, that the Pietist revivals of the 16th to 18th centuries began by shifting the emphasis away from social and cultural pressures towards personal relationship between the individual and Jesus. There was great blessing in this. Many of the subsequent Christian revivals of the 19th and 20th centuries are characterized by this aspect of the legacy of Pietism. This was centred on individual salvation, of both the believer and his fellow man, hence the emphasis on evangelism, mission and a corresponding form of discipleship.

However, while this was all right and necessary as a spiritual and historical correction of what had gone before in Church history, the fact must not be overlooked that the “blind spot” with regard to Israel had not been overcome by the Reformation nor, to a large extent, by the Pietist revivals as a whole. There were a few notable exceptions, particularly in the areas of Calvinism and the Brethren movement, that went on to have a widespread influence in the New World (USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand). In Europe, however, such exceptions remained a minority—right up to the present day.

If we take these three factors together, then we begin to understand how the “Israel question” and the related question of the enduring relevance of God’s plan of salvation for the nations, i.e. the collective dimension of blessing and curse, came to be a closed book for many Christians in Europe (and others around the world who were strongly influenced by Europe) and has remained such.

CHAPTER 7

The judgement of the nations in the Old Testament— an introduction

Let us summarize what we have read so far, in order to use it as a springboard to dive deeper into the Old Testament.

Review and summary

First of all, we established just how much God loves the nations, from start to finish. He wants to bless them. However, just as Adam and Eve sinned on an individual level in the Garden of Eden, the nations sinned on a collective level with the construction of the Tower of Babel. Yet in the same way that, in the midst of judgement, God opened a door towards individual redemption—with the promise of the “Son”, the Messiah—so too did He open a door towards blessing for the nations in the midst of judgement: Israel. The nation that blesses Israel may count on God’s blessing. This is because Israel, the Jewish people, is called to be a blessing to all nations. By contrast, the nation that is not prepared to cast aside its pride and accept God’s sovereign election of the Jewish people in humility and thankfulness must count on God’s judgement.

We also looked at the two first covenants of God with the people of Israel: the Abrahamic Covenant and the Sinai Covenant. Neither covenant is intrinsically complete. The Abrahamic Covenant seals God's original promises and calling. Paul (Romans 11:28ff) and Jesus (Romans 15:8) confirm this. The Sinai Covenant, on the other hand, places a choice before the people of Israel: they can expect God's blessing in return for obedience, or (temporally limited) judgement in return for disobedience. According to Deuteronomy 28:64ff, the most wide-reaching judgement is the worldwide scattering which Jesus reiterates and updates in Luke 21:24 as an event set in the near future. This judgement is limited in time, however, "until ..." the promises of Deuteronomy 30:4ff and repeated by many of the prophets (Jeremiah 31, Ezekiel 36–37, etc.) are fulfilled: first the physical gathering of the Jewish people and then the saving of "all Israel" (Romans 11:25ff), the complete restoration of Jerusalem under Jewish sovereignty (Luke 21:24) and the acceptance of the Messiah by the residents of Jerusalem (Matthew 23:39) and finally, in conjunction with the return of Jesus, the last judgement of the nations in the end-times (Matthew 25:31ff)!

In the context of both the Old Testament and the New Testament, we discussed lines of revelation characterized by continuity and discontinuity. The Abrahamic Covenant and the Sinai Covenant (which, one day, will be replaced by the New Covenant for Israel at a collective level) are Old Testament foundations which, confirmed by Jesus and Paul, continue into New Testament times. They are lines of revelation with continuity. Wherever the New Testament picks up Old Testament lines of revelation, either taking their validity for granted or expressly confirming it, these are revelations and truths that have their starting point in the Old Testament, but continue unbroken in the New Testament. Since the emphasis of the New Testament is clearly on personal, individual redemption, relationship with God and discipleship of Jesus,

some of these continuous, supra-individual statements only occur sporadically in the New Testament. That is enough, however, to recognize and accept their continuity. Anyone wanting to find out more about these topics must look up the relevant Old Testament statements to receive a more complete picture.

The same applies to the teaching of the judgement of the nations in Matthew 25:31ff. There is no other passage in the New Testament that speaks so clearly of this event. This single passage is enough, however, to confirm the continuity of this Old Testament topic. Moreover, the context—the end-times teaching of Jesus and the three end-times parables with the three different target groups—allows a clear-cut identification of what it is about and gives it great importance. The same principle applies as before: if we want to know more about a topic that is of continuous significance, we have to turn to the Old Testament and search for further information on the same topic.

Judgement of the nations in the Old Testament

The topic of "judgement of the nations" is one that recurs repeatedly in the Old Testament. There are many different prophecies from many different prophets announcing judgement, some in very great detail, particularly concerning Israel's neighbors. Sometimes God invites them to act as instruments of judgement against Israel. Often, however, they themselves are judged, either because they have acted against Israel on their own initiative, or because they have far exceeded the amount of punishment God had planned.

A major challenge for Bible readers and teachers is distinguishing which announcements of judgement were intended to refer to the near future and which were intended to refer to the end times. The vast majority of announcements of judgement against

the nations referred to the near future, i.e. the time and generation in which the prophet and his audience lived, but by no means all. Some of the prophecies referring to judgement of the nations are eschatological in nature.

That such prophecies of judgement of the nations refer to the end times is indicated, for example, by reference to the “Day of the Lord”. Simplifying slightly, we can say that the “Day of the Lord” in the Old Testament corresponds to the “Day of the Lord’s return” in the New Testament, i.e. the Second Coming of Jesus.

In addition to or instead of this, other phenomena that are clearly related to the end times may be mentioned in connection with these passages. One such example would be end-times phenomena in the heavens, such as the shaking of the heavens, the discolouration of the sun and moon, or similar. The language employed here is very similar in the Old Testament and the New Testament, so that those familiar with the New Testament should be able to recognize these Old Testament passages.

The culmination of events in the end times

If we now look for prophetic warnings of judgement of the nations that can clearly be attributed to the end times, we find such warnings in many of the prophets. But not only there. We have Psalm 2, for example, that clearly deals with the rebellious nations of the world and the crucial role of the Messiah and of Zion. The nature of this passage is clearly identifiable with the end times. The Messiah is not described here as a gentle lamb, but as the “Lion of Judah”, roaring from Zion and cutting the nations down to size.

From the many hints and fragments relating to our topic “end-times judgement of the nations”, two prophets and their messages stand out from the rest like soaring peaks dominating a

wide mountain range: the message of the prophet Joel in chapter 3 and the message of the prophet Zechariah in chapters 12–14. The statements we find in these four chapters referring to our topic are so differentiated, and simultaneously so precise and dramatic in their clarity, that they suffice, for the purpose of this analysis, to complete, in an astonishing manner, the picture we are given in Matthew 25:31ff. We now turn to take a closer look at these chapters.

The end-times judgement of the nations in the book of the prophet Joel

We find an intensive, dramatic description of the end-times judgement of the nations in the third chapter of the book of the prophet Joel. Let us read verses 1–2 and 14–16:

“In those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will put them on trial for what they did to my inheritance, my people Israel, because they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land ...”

“Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the heavens will tremble. But the Lord will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel.”

The topic is specified at the start: God’s judgement with regard to Israel. The location is also named: the Valley of Jehoshaphat, which is referred to in verse 14 as the “Valley of Decision”.

The Valley of Decision

Scholars are undecided as to precisely which valley, which location, is meant here. Some believe that it refers to the Valley of Hinnom, directly below the Old City of Jerusalem. The hilly country terrain would provide too little space for large armies, however. Some associate this decisive battle with the battle of Armageddon (Har Megiddo—Mount Megiddo). Megiddo is situated in the Jezreel Valley (approx. 380 km²) in northern Israel, between the Mediterranean to the south of Haifa and the Sea of Galilee. This valley was often the scene of decisive battles in ancient times. Other scholars work on the assumption that this passage refers to the southern part of the Jordan Valley. It is not possible to say with certainty which place is meant, nor does the exact location matter. The fact remains that a battle will take place in “Eretz Israel”, the land of Israel, in the end times.

The timing

There are numerous clear indications in this chapter that this prophecy refers to a scenario that is to be fulfilled in the future. The most important such indications are as follows:

1. Verse 1a: *“In those days and at that time ...”*. We are entitled to ask what days and what time are meant here. The most obvious reference is the days and times mentioned immediately before in chapter two. This chapter refers to the days of the worldwide outpouring of the Holy Spirit (see Joel 2:28ff). According to Peter’s sermon at Pentecost, the fulfilment of this prophecy began with the outpouring at Pentecost:

“In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both

men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (Acts 2:17–21)

It started at Pentecost. But the final fulfilment will not be complete, however, until the Great Commission has been fulfilled among the nations and “all Israel” is finally saved. In any case, we know that “those days and that time” refer to New Testament days and New Testament times.

2. Verse 1b: *“... when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem ...”*. Here, the time is specified with significantly greater precision. When in New Testament times have the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem taken a general turn for the better? Certainly not in the almost two thousand years of the Jewish Diaspora. It is only in recent decades with the large-scale return of the Jews, the establishment of the State of Israel, the restoration of the people and the land on biblical and historical territory, with the restoration foretold by Jesus (and not yet completed) of Jerusalem under Jewish sovereignty, that a “restoration of fortunes” of historic proportions has occurred. Joel is thus referring to the end of the end times: the time referred to on several occasions in the New Testament with the word “until” as a far-reaching turning point in history.

3. The text surrounding this prophecy also contains references to other key terms or phenomena relating to the end times:

Joel 2:31: The Day of the Lord.

Joel 3:15: End-times phenomena in the heavens.

Joel 3:16: Particularly noteworthy, as in Psalm 2 and Matthew 25:31ff, is the fact that the Messiah springs into action, threatening the hostile nations from Zion.

To conclude, we can say that this passage contains numerous matching indications that the biblical–prophetic “Valley of Decision” refers to an event that is still in the future. In other words, at the given time, all nations will be faced with one last, eschatological, irrevocable decision regarding their relationship with Israel.

The three criteria of the judgement

The decisive criteria by which the judge of the world will pass judgement on the nations are specified in Joel 3:2–3:

“... I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will put them on trial for what they did to my inheritance, my people Israel, because they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land. They cast lots for my people and traded boys for prostitutes; they sold girls for wine to drink.”

1. *They scattered my people among the nations*: This occurred repeatedly in the course of Israel’s history. The Jews were violently uprooted from their land by foreign powers. This occurred under the Assyrians, Babylonians and Persians (who also oversaw the return from the Babylonian Exile, however), in a slightly different form under the Greeks and then, most decisively and with the longest consequences, under the Romans following the crushing of the two Jewish Revolts around 70 and 135 AD. Nor must it be forgotten that there were repeated violent expulsions of Jewish people in the Diaspora—albeit not from their own country, but from their respective homes. The greatest forced migration of this kind occurred in the time leading up to and during the Sec-

ond World War. Of the 12–13 million European Jews around 1940, approximately 6 million lost their lives. Almost all the others were forced to flee in one way or another.

2. *They divided up my land*: Here we hit upon a highly topical issue—the division by non–Jewish powers of the land that God allocated to the Jewish people. The League of Nations (between World Wars I and II), the United Nations (since World War II) and many individual nations, both Muslim and secular, have been guilty of wronging Israel and God in this way to this very day. Some have had evil motives, while others have acted in better faith. This does not change the fact, however, that the nation or government that fails to respect the unique status of the land as belonging spiritually and historically to the Jewish people is setting itself in opposition to God and His ordinances.

3. *They attached little value to Jewish life*: That is one way of summing up the verse referring to prostitutes and wine. Those nations that placed little value on Jewish life—no more than the price of a cheap whore or a bottle of cheap wine—must reckon with God’s judgement. In the course of European history, and certainly since the time of the Crusaders, this was unfortunately the case again and again. During the Holocaust, the lives of Jews were even more endangered! Furthermore, since the Founding of the State of Israel, if not before, Jewish life has been increasingly threatened and endangered in the Muslim world.

As far as these criteria for God’s judgement of the nations are concerned, we can make two observations:

Firstly: the three concerns that God explicitly places under His protection are those that correspond to God’s core calling of Abra-

ham, Isaac and Jacob. We are talking here 1) of the protection of the Jewish people, 2) the protection of the land and, in conjunction with this, the unique connection between the people and the land, and 3) God's election and calling of Israel as a source of blessing for the nations of the world. In other words, we are talking about the key features of the original calling of Abraham (Genesis 12), sealed by God in the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 15): the promise of the land, the promise of descendants, and the calling to be a blessing for the nations—in connection with the challenge to the nations, for their part, to honour and bless Israel.

Secondly: at the heart of it, the third criterion, the warning to the nations against holding Jewish life in contempt, corresponds to the central criterion specified in Matthew 25:31ff for the separation of the “sheep nations” from the “goat nations”. The nations that do not come to the aid of the “least of Jesus’ brothers” in times of affliction and hardship (or are even the cause of this affliction and hardship) will be rejected by the judge of the world—Jesus.

We can summarize by saying that, from the perspective provided by Joel, the information we receive from Matthew regarding the judgement of the nations is confirmed, made more concrete and slightly expanded. The scenario is painted even more graphically if we examine the last three chapters of the prophet Zechariah.

CHAPTER 9

Jerusalem takes centre stage in the conflict

The last three chapters of Zechariah complete, in a very significant way, the scenario that we have reconstructed so far. Bible scholars are divided as to whether the contents of the last three chapters form a single unit, or whether chapter 13 should be assigned to a different epoch or a different context. My assessment is that there is more evidence in favour of the view that the last three chapters belong together than against it. Put simply, chapters 12 and 14 describe the macro-perspective, while chapter 13 provides insights into the inner processes of the nation of Israel during this period. What we have here is thus two different ways of viewing the same events. So what information do these three chapters contain?

The centrality of Jerusalem to the events described here is already made clear in the first verses of chapter 12 and is reiterated through to the opening passage of chapter 14:

“A prophecy: The word of the Lord concerning Israel. The Lord, who stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth, and who forms the human spirit within a person, declares: ‘I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling.

Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem. On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves.’” (Zechariah 12:1–3)

“A day of the Lord is coming, Jerusalem, when your possessions will be plundered and divided up within your very walls. I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city. Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights on a day of battle.” (Zechariah 14:1–3)

If we look more closely, we recognize important details of this scenario.

Jerusalem as a “cup of reeling” for the surrounding nations

Zechariah 12:2 talks of the hostility of the surrounding nations towards Israel. In this description, Jerusalem is figuratively referred to as a “cup of reeling”. The term “cup of reeling” or “cup of wrath” is used frequently in the Old Testament and has a well-established history in the ancient world. First of all, it refers to a cup filled with a mixture of drugs and wine. This combination of drugs and wine is generally intended to put someone into a state of drunkenness and irrational behavior. Cases are also known of people taking their lives with an overdose of this mixture. The most famous example is Socrates. Furthermore, the image of the cup of reeling is often used in the Old Testament as an image of God’s wrath.

All these images and connotations are astoundingly topical. Particularly in the Muslim world, the Jewish repossession of Jerusa-

lem in 1948 and 1967 unleashed an unprecedented and fathomless wave of hatred towards the Jewish people and towards Israel. It is a hatred that is irrational and that, at its core, can only be described as demonic—comparable with the hatred that Hitler and the National Socialists had against the Jews. It is a hatred that cannot ultimately be overcome by means of reason and common tools of diplomacy available to the West.

We are reminded of Jesus’ statement in Luke 21:24 prophesying that Jerusalem would return fully under Jewish sovereignty—as soon as the “times of the Gentiles” were fulfilled. This prophecy is being fulfilled step by step and phase by phase. As we have said, one major step was taken in 1948. A second major step was taken in 1967. However, the Temple Mount is still under shared sovereignty: divided between the State of Israel and a Muslim authority (Waqf). In the view of many experts, this conflict is currently the greatest obstacle to a lasting and genuine peace in the Middle East. The issue at stake here is about more than land to live in, or a border conflict, or even the difficult humanitarian issue of the Palestinian refugees. It is all about the following question: Who is God? Allah or the God of Israel? Or—to introduce a future third alternative—the Antichrist? This is the deepest root of the Middle East conflict, and the Bible prophesies that there can and will be no genuine, lasting solution to this problem until the Messiah appears.

Jerusalem as an “immovable rock” for “all nations”

In Zechariah 12:3, we read that this conflict, initially regional in character, will develop into a conflict of global proportions. The passage refers to “all the nations”. A different image is used for Jerusalem this time—no longer the “cup of reeling”, but the “immovable rock” on which all who try to move it will injure themselves:

“On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves.” (Zechariah 12:3)

Here, once again, it is useful to investigate the imagery used by the prophet more closely. What is meant by the immovable rock that the nations have and that they wish to reposition? In the Old Testament, stones are frequently mentioned in conjunction with their function as border markers. The statement that the “immovable rock Jerusalem” is to be lifted and moved confirms this identification. It means that God has a specific function and purpose for Jerusalem.

This refers to a divine purpose that was already heralded by the meeting between Abraham and the priest-king Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18–20), a calling that witnessed its first Golden Age under King David—a city with a worldwide, priestly and royal mandate, a unique function that entered a new dimension with the first coming of Jesus, His ministry, His vicarious death as the Passover Lamb for all humanity and His resurrection in this city. A calling that will attain its ultimate fulfillment in the Messianic Age under the priestly and royal ministry of the Messiah. The “City of the Great King” as it is referred to in Psalm 48:3 and in Matthew 5:35. From God’s perspective, the status of Jerusalem encompasses all these features and more.

This status is not uncontested, however. Various groups of people have, or have had, different ideas about its status: the Greeks, the Romans, the Catholics (Crusaders), the Moslems and above all, in recent times, the United Nations, to name but a few. Ever since its founding after the Second World War, the United Nations have been working to promote their concept of an international (i.e. non-Jewish) Jerusalem.

If we include verse 9 of this chapter, it becomes apparent that all the nations of the world will be involved in the battle against (a Jewish) Jerusalem:

“On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem.” (Zechariah 12:9)

We can see, then, that the military campaign waged by the nations against Israel in the end times and referred to in chapter 3 of Joel is also what is being talked about here, with the added detail that the conflict will be centred on Jerusalem.

The last phase of the battle for Jerusalem

We now jump from Zechariah 12:9 to Zechariah 14:1–3. A further important facet of the scenario becomes the centre of attention in the intervening passages, and we shall be looking into that shortly. In chapter 14:1ff, however, the prophet turns his attention back to the battle for Jerusalem. We read again:

“A day of the Lord is coming, Jerusalem, when your possessions will be plundered and divided up within your very walls. I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city. Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights on a day of battle.” (Zechariah 14:1–3)

Hostilities are thus coming to a final, decisive climax. Half of Jerusalem will be conquered by the forces ranged against Israel. The cruel corollaries of war and violent conquest are mentioned, such as deadly turmoil, massive destruction and mass rape. Once again, Jerusalem seems to be irretrievably lost for the Jewish people, unless God himself intervenes in a more than astonishing manner. We will be discussing this in Chapter 11.

Against this backdrop, the prophet Isaiah's passionate call to pray for Jerusalem makes sense. Jerusalem is always deserving of our prayers of benediction. God's promises for Jerusalem, which are inseparably and comprehensively linked with God's promises, gifts of grace and callings for the Jewish people, need our prayers, i.e. the prayers of the believers from the nations, all the more so as the spiritual and visible conflict for Jerusalem heads towards its climactic finale: 1917 (conquest of Jerusalem at the end of the First World War by General Allenby and the British armed forces), 1948 and 1967 constitute the most important milestones in modern history on the road to the (violently contested) restoration of Jerusalem under Jewish sovereignty. The disputes surrounding the Temple Mount in conjunction with the current mixture of peace negotiations and threats from the neighboring countries, and increasingly also from "all nations", appear to be building up towards this end-times scenario in waves like "labour pains" (Matthew 24:8). We, as Christians from the nations, are invited to accompany these developments in prayer, as encouraged by Isaiah in chapter 62:1–7:

"For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her vindication shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch. The nations will see your vindication, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow. You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; for the Lord will take delight in you, and your land will be married. As a young man marries a young woman, so will your Builder marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you. I have posted watchmen on your walls, Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest,

and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth."
(Isaiah 62:1–7)

Israel will experience revival and salvation

While the march of the nations against Israel in general and the battle of the nations against Jerusalem in particular are getting ever more violent, amazing things will be happening to Israel and in Israel itself. The Holy Spirit will be poured out on the people. On a collective, national scale, the proverbial “veil” (2 Corinthians 3:14–16) will be removed from their eyes and they will recognize Jesus as their Messiah; as a people, they will go through a deep process of repentance and inner purification. Israel’s leading elites, in particular, will have difficulty with this, oppose it, and be confronted with God’s judgement. The battle will meanwhile continue raging, getting ever worse as it heads towards a decisive conclusion. And it is at precisely this moment, when the military conflict appears to be totally lost, that the Messiah himself joins the battle, returning with great power, setting foot on the Mount of Olives, judging Israel’s enemies, liberating the people—who have now come to faith in the Messiah—together with the city of Jerusalem and the whole of the Promised Land from enemy forces, and ushering in the Messianic Age. That is essentially a summary of Zechariah 12:10 to Zechariah 14:4! Let us take it step by step, however.

The spirit of grace and supplication

Two opposing developments are described in the passage between Zechariah 12:3 and 12:9. In verse 3 we read: “... *all the nations of the earth are gathered against her (Jerusalem)* ...” This is then followed by a description of how, on the one hand, the Lord himself takes measures against the enemy armies to weaken them, while simultaneously strengthening the inhabitants of Israel and the residents of Jerusalem by supernatural means. The climax of both developments is to be found in verses 9 and 10:

“On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem.” (Zechariah 12:9)

This is the first time in these three chapters that there is a hint of the impending destruction of the nations that have marched against Israel and Jerusalem.

“And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication.” (Zechariah 12:10a)

It is here, in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the form of a spirit “of grace and supplication”, that God’s increasing supernatural intervention on behalf of Israel and Jerusalem reaches its first climax. The choice of words here is significant. It indicates humility. The Holy Spirit reveals to the Jewish people their need for grace. As the following verses suggest, the “spirit of supplication” includes supplication for both inner salvation and outer rescue in equal measure. In any case, Jesus responds in the following way to both these needs: He first reveals himself to them as the one who was crucified (Zechariah 12:10) and then returns to Jerusalem as both king and military commander (Zechariah 14:4). These are the two concrete answers to the two dimensions of supplication for grace and salvation.

“... They will look on me, the one they have pierced ...”

Let us look first at the spiritual side of these events (Zechariah 12:10b):

“They will look on me, the one they have pierced ...”

The grammatical change at this key juncture is notable. As is customary in biblical prophecy, God communicates His message through the prophet, who acts as an intermediary and passes on the message in God’s name. At this point, however, God bypasses the prophet for a moment and speaks directly in the first person singular: “*They will look on me, the one they have pierced ...*”. All of a sudden, the speaker identifies himself in a way that is extremely surprising, particularly for Jewish listeners: it is the crucified one who is speaking here. To be more precise: the crucified Messiah. By identifying himself as the ultimate response to the prayers of supplication of the people of Israel for divine intervention from a gracious God, He initiates a revelation and a transformation, the scale of which is unprecedented in the history of the Jewish people.

In the language of Paul: “*All Israel will be saved*” (Romans 11:26).

From the perspective of Jesus, a central part of that which He had prophesied over the residents of Jerusalem is fulfilled here:

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’” (Matthew 23:37–39)

The proverbial veil over the people of Israel regarding the Messiah and the Gospel will be removed from their eyes: (2 Corinthi-

ans 3:16), or to use Paul's words again: they will be grafted back into the olive tree as Paul foretold:

"And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!"

(Romans 11:23–24)

National repentance, trauma and cleansing

The reaction of the people of Israel to this self-revelation of the one who was crucified is remarkable: they are profoundly shocked. It is as if their first and only son had suddenly died (see end of Zechariah 12). In the language of the Bible, this is the most profound human grief and trauma imaginable, comparable to that of Mary at the cross or of the Egyptians following the death of their firstborn in the final, decisive plague that led to the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt. For some of us, this profound trauma may be hard to comprehend. Others will have experienced it in a very similar way on conversion: the shock on becoming aware of the love of the one who was crucified, combined with the simultaneous shock of realization of one's own sin, of the infinite separation from God, of the abyss and darkness of one's sin on the one hand, contrasted with the immeasurable love and mercy of God in the Messiah that overcomes any abyss, as Paul describes it at the end of chapter 11 of Romans:

"Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all. Oh,

the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! 'Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor?' 'Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them?' For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen."

(Romans 11:30–36)

There are two incidents in Scripture that caused similar reactions of conviction and upheaval in Jewish people—albeit on a significantly smaller scale: one is the moment when Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, the other is the reaction of the 3,000 who came to faith in the Messiah following Peter's sermon at Pentecost in Jerusalem:

"Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, 'Have everyone leave my presence!' So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it. ... Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them."

(Genesis 45:1–2, 14–15a)

"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.' When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'"

(Acts 2:36–37)

On both occasions, the initial response to the revelation was one of shock: Joseph, whom they knew as the despotic ruler of enemy Egypt—their brother? Jesus, the troublemaker, the great disappointment whom they had handed over to the Romans for crucifixion just a few weeks ago—their Messiah? The one of whom the prophets had spoken to them over the centuries? HE

was the one they had failed to recognize, the one they had rejected and abandoned to the most ignominious of deaths?

Just as Joseph and his brothers wept—Joseph from love and joy, his brothers from shame and shock—and just as the inhabitants of Jerusalem were cut to the heart when they recognized just whom they had handed over to be nailed to the cross, so too do the families and tribes of Israel now respond when they recognize the one they had crucified. In the face of this traumatic turmoil, this grief at their own hardness of heart and wickedness, this conviction of their personal and collective failure, they experience the same cleansing of their hearts that each one of us has received after repenting sincerely of his own hardness of heart and wickedness: cleansing by the blood of the Passover Lamb who took the sin of all mankind upon himself:

“On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.”
(Zechariah 13:1)

The internal processes in the people of Israel following this revival, conviction and cleansing are described further in the rest of chapter 13: each person, each family, each social group is faced with the decision of whether to accept the revelation of the Messiah or to reject it. As was already the case to a certain extent at the time of Jesus and the early church of Jewish believers, these existential processes of division and separation take place simultaneously in all families, tribes and ethnic groups within Israel.

CHAPTER 11

“On that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives...”

At the start of chapter 14, the prophet once again turns his focus away from the internal processes taking place in the people of Israel and back onto the bigger picture and in particular on the battle for Jerusalem. Jewish Jerusalem has its back against the wall. Militarily, all appears lost. Half of Jerusalem is conquered and experiences once again what Jerusalem has experienced so often before over the course of three millennia: non-Jewish nations attacking, plundering, humiliating, pillaging, destroying, depopulating, infiltrating, despising and disenfranchising the city and its inhabitants—and aggressively opposing God’s election and calling of this city, and thus of the nation of Israel as a whole.

The Mount of Olives—at the centre of the action

This time, however, something unusual occurs. This time, against all probability and expectation, Jerusalem does not suffer the same fate that it has suffered so often in the past—at the hands of the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Moslems, Crusaders, regional Moslem rulers, Ottomans and British—the fate of conquest by non-Jewish nations and powers. This time,

Jesus himself intervenes: as the King of kings, Lord of lords, and Lord of the heavenly host:

"On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west..."
(Zechariah 14:4)

Jesus returns to precisely the same place from which He left the earth and to which the angel foretold that He would return:

"After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.' Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city."
(Acts 1:9–12)

He does not return as the Lamb of God, as at His first coming. This time, He returns as the Lion of Judah. He returns as:

- The deliverer from Zion (Romans 11:26)
- The one who roars from Zion (Joel 3:16–17) and judges the nations
- The king and son whom God has installed on Zion (Psalm 2:6–7)
- As the judge of the world who will separate the nations (Matthew 25:31ff)

Why? Because the prophets had foretold it—and because Jesus had confirmed it in accordance with the prophets. In Matthew 23:39, Jesus prophesies the spiritual transformation of the people

of Jerusalem. We discussed this in the last chapter. In Luke 21:24, if you will, Jesus speaks of the same thing on a political level. Jerusalem will be Jewish once again when the times of Gentile rule over Jerusalem have come to an end:

"They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled."
(Luke 21:24)

Once this age has dawned, nothing and no-one can turn back the clock, nothing and no-one can stop the labour pains once they have started, nothing and no-one can reverse the (gradual) establishment of the Jewish presence in the Promised Land and in the "City of the Great King" (Matthew 5:35). Or to put it in the words that God spoke through the prophet Zechariah: the confederation of nations that tries to do so will "injure themselves" (Zechariah 12:3).

Zechariah 14 and the return of Jesus

One last thought on this topic: the descriptions of the location and the events surrounding the return of Jesus, both geological and otherwise, are very precise and very "down to earth". The Mount of Olives is located to the east of the Old City of Jerusalem (the historic Jerusalem—until the mid-19th century, Jerusalem only consisted of the Old City). It is from here that Jesus ascended. It is here that He will return. And when He returns, this will trigger very tangible physical events: the earthquakes are very physical and concrete. The enemy soldiers and armies are very physical and concrete. Everything that then happens, in terms of judgement and the establishment of Jesus' rule, will be very physical and concrete.

These are all important indications that we should visualize these future events as being very concrete and very real. This ap-

plies not only to the part immediately before Jesus' visible intervention, but also to the part we can expect during and after His intervention.

Just how concretely this passage from the prophet Zechariah backs up Jesus' testimony can be seen by comparing Zechariah 14:5b and Matthew 25:31 with one another:

- "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him ..." (Matthew 25:31)
- "Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him." (Zechariah 14:5b)

We can assume that Jesus, in His teaching on the judgement of the nations, is directly influenced by Zechariah 14 or quoting passages from it. In this respect, the parable of Jesus should be considered as prophecy rather than as a parable.

With this background in mind, let us read Zechariah 14:4–11 in context before turning, in the next chapter, to the important questions surrounding the actual judgement of the nations itself.

"On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him. On that day there will be neither sunlight nor cold, frosty darkness. It will be a unique day—a day known only to the Lord—with no distinction between day and night. When evening comes, there will be light. On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half of it east to the Dead Sea and half of it west to the Mediterranean Sea, in summer and in win-

ter. The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name. The whole land, from Geba to Rimmon, south of Jerusalem, will become like the Arabah. But Jerusalem will be raised up high from the Benjamin Gate to the site of the First Gate, to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the royal vinepresses, and will remain in its place. It will be inhabited; never again will it be destroyed. Jerusalem will be secure." (Zechariah 14:4–11)

The final judgement of the nations

We have meanwhile seen copious evidence that the Old Testament and New Testament are in agreement with regard to a judgement of the nations in the end times. The primary criterion for this judgement is how the nations have behaved towards the Jewish people and Israel. The biblical starting point and the basis for this is the calling of Israel, through the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to be a blessing to the nations, and the condition given to the nations in order to receive this blessing: the nation that blesses you (Israel) will be blessed by me, whereas the nation that despises you (Israel) will come under my judgement. Let us briefly recapitulate the relevant biblical indications once again here:

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.” (Matthew 25:31–33)

“I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

(Genesis 12:3)

“In those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will put them on trial for what they did to my inheritance, my people Israel, because they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land ... Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the heavens will tremble. But the Lord will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel.”
(Joel 3:1–2, 14–16)

“I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling. Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem. On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves ... On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem.” (Zechariah 12:2–3, 9)

“Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights on a day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south ... This is the plague with which the Lord will strike all the nations that fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths.” (Zechariah 14:3–4, 12)

Blessing and judgement with the Second Coming of Jesus

When Jesus returns, He will establish His priestly and royal authority in Jerusalem and rule the entire world from there. That will be the fulfillment of all the promises given to the people of Israel

and the nations regarding this Messianic Age: *“The Lord will be king over the whole earth.”* (Zechariah 14:9).

In this transitional period leading into the start of the Messianic Age, in the midst of cataclysmic natural disasters, there will be two opposing developments: the nations that refrained from joining the anti-Christian march on Israel, and even helped the threatened Jewish people (the “least of Jesus’ brothers”) under difficult circumstances, will immediately experience liberation, an end to the threats and conflict, and the protection, care and attention of the Messiah:

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’” (Matthew 25:34–40)

“... The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the heavens will tremble. But the Lord will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel. Then you will know that I, the Lord your God, dwell in Zion, my holy hill.”
(Joel 3:16–17a)

“The whole land, from Geba to Rimmon, south of Jerusalem, will become like the Arabah. But Jerusalem will be raised up high from

the Benjamin Gate to the site of the First Gate, to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the royal winepresses, and will remain in its place. It will be inhabited; never again will it be destroyed. Jerusalem will be secure.” (Zechariah 14:10–11)

The other nations, however, will be judged in dramatic fashion by the returning Messiah:

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’ They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” (Matthew 25:41–46)

“This is the plague with which the Lord will strike all the nations that fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths. On that day people will be stricken by the Lord with great panic. They will seize each other by the hand and attack one another.” (Zechariah 14:12–13)

Joel also speaks classically of judgement in the passage referring to the “Valley of Decision”¹:

¹ This passage refers to the “surrounding nations”. Joel 3:2, on the other hand, refers to “all nations”. Zechariah 12:2–3 and 9 are similar. There may be two different phases and emphases, but the core message of a judgement of the nations on a global scale is certainly part of the overall picture in Zechariah, Joel and Matthew.

“...for there I will sit to judge all the nations on every side. Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow—so great is their wickedness!” Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.” (Joel 3:12b–14)

We can thus summarize by saying that the “Day of the Lord” as it is referred to in the Old Testament, or the “Day of the Lord’s return” as it is called in the New Testament, will be a time in which the nations that have heaped guilt upon themselves with regard to the Jewish people and Israel will be judged by the returning Messiah, Jesus. Conversely, the nations that have not taken part in the march against Israel, and have even stood by the Jewish people in difficult times, will not be affected by this judgement.

That, then, is the biblical scenario in our overview. It is a challenging scenario, and one of which many of us were unaware—at least as far as the scale and magnitude of it are concerned. When confronted with this aspect of biblical prophecy for the first time, it is often a challenge for us to come to terms with it and integrate it into our own notion of God and biblical world view and our associated expectations regarding the end of this age.

Three key questions

In many conversations resulting from this core message, three questions are raised. I would like to examine each of these three questions before we turn our attention to the consequences of this message:

Question 1: How should we visualize this judgement of the nations concretely?

Question 2: What happens to the individual believers and the Church in a specific nation that comes under the announced judgement?

Question 3: How can one reconcile the apparent discrepancy between “all nations” that come under God’s judgement in the end times and the “sheep” and the “goats”, i.e. a distinction between the different nations?

CHAPTER 13

What does the Bible say about the judgement of the nations?

How should we and can we visualize God’s judgement of the nations? What does Scripture have to say about it and, of that, what is of present and future relevance? When Matthew 25:31ff talks of nations being counted among the “goats” and prophesies, in New Testament terms, the worst form of judgement on them, what can this mean? Let us attempt to approach this question step by step.

Equal treatment of the nations and Israel in the judgement

In the introduction, we established that, put simply, there are two major themes in the Old Testament: one is how God deals with Israel in relation to its obedience or disobedience regarding the Torah. The other is how God deals with the nations in relation to their attitude towards Israel.

We find a first key to understanding how God deals with blessing or curse, benevolence or judgement, on the level of peoples and nations in the way He deals with Israel itself. There is no other chapter in the Bible that so clearly illustrates the significance of

curse or blessing in relation to Israel than Deuteronomy 28—14 verses of blessing, but 50 verses of judgement.

As we have already seen, closer examination of these 50 or so verses of judgement reveals a certain escalation in the measures relating to judgement: the worst judgement—the worldwide scattering of the Jewish people—constitutes the high point, or rather the low point, of God’s action of judgement on Israel. We have also seen that Jesus himself prophesied this last and most severe sanction as being a future event from His perspective (Luke 21:24).

Since Israel serves as an example to the nations—in good and bad, in blessing and curse—a first step in broaching this delicate issue is to assume that God’s treatment of the nations will be similar to His treatment of Israel, albeit the criteria for judgement are different.

God’s treatment of Israel and the nations with regard to blessing and curse is essentially similar, however: He loves Israel. He loves the nations. He is slow to anger, and His anger and judgement are stepped up gradually. But if Israel or the nations permanently fail to respond to the Lord’s increasing discipline and do not repent, judgement continues to increase until the climax is reached.

The worldwide Diaspora that lasted nearly two millennia was, in accordance with Deuteronomy 28, the ultimate judgement. The Holocaust at the end of these two thousand years also contained an element of judgement—the final escalation at the end of this seemingly never-ending time of Diaspora. If God does not refrain from punishing His first love, His deeply-loved people, then there is no reason for the other peoples and nations to think that God will simply overlook our transgressions with regard to the criterion that applies to us—our attitude towards the Jewish people and Israel. We have stressed this point so often before, but let us repeat

it once again here: this criterion and the resulting consequences for blessing or judgement have not changed in the slightest—they still apply today.

The difference between the nations and Israel in the judgement

As far as judgement is concerned, however, there is one crucial difference between how God deals with Israel and how He treats the nations. This difference relates to the final degree of escalation of God’s judgement. On the basis of the Abrahamic Covenant, God has promised the people of Israel that, even in the case of extreme disobedience, it will not be totally destroyed, and that God will fulfill His core calling of the Jewish people and His core promises to them. This is confirmed in the New Testament, both in the Gospels (Matthew 23:39, Luke 21:24, etc.) and by Paul. Let us once again read the most important passages relating to this in Romans:

“And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree! I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written: ‘The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.’ As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs ...”

(Romans 11:23–28)

“For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed ...”
(Romans 15:8)

God will fulfill His purpose with Israel. The basis for this is the covenant with the patriarchs. The path to its fulfillment goes via the Messiah, Jesus. Both of these are based on God’s mercy:

“Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God’s mercy to you. For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.”
(Romans 11:30–32)

And this brings us to the crucial point—the final, critical difference: These promises only apply to Israel. They do not apply to the other nations. And we know from the Old Testament that, as a final consequence of God’s judgement, a nation that refuses to relinquish its hostile attitude towards Israel and the Jewish people is threatened with extinction.

Against this background, we must come to terms with the possibility that there are nations today that will no longer exist in the Messianic Age.

CHAPTER 14

We Christians and the judgement of the nations

The next question that demands attention is whether, and if so how, God’s possible acts of judgement on a collective level, on the level of peoples and nations, affect the fate of individual Christian believers. This is a very important and legitimate question.

The short answer to this question is: “No!”. Our personal salvation is not dependent on whether our nation is counted among the “goat” nations. Even if it was, it is not this that decides our personal fate for eternity, but solely our relationship to Jesus and our attitude towards Him.

Now that we have clarified this point on the individual level, at least two further important aspects nevertheless remain to be considered: One is the question of the basic attitude that we should have as Christians towards the Jewish people and towards Israel, and the other is our responsibility as Christians for our own nation and its relationship to Israel.

Our attitude as Christians towards the Jewish people and Israel

Whole libraries of books have been written in recent decades regarding the relationship between us Christians and the Jews and Israel. For my part, I have dealt with this issue in greater detail in my two previous books referred to earlier. This is not the place for a detailed analysis. I only want to touch upon one aspect here—albeit a crucial one: the standard that was held up to the nations in Genesis 12:3 also applies categorically to the Church, to the Christian world.

In Genesis 12:3 we read:

“I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

The message in Romans 11:17–22 is very similar:

“If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, ‘Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.’ Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.”

Even if the majority of the Jewish people down through the ages, from the times of Jesus to the present day, has not come to faith in the Gospel or the Messiah, we should, nevertheless, ac-

cord them our lasting esteem, thankfulness and respect. We, the Christians from the nations, must not lose sight of the fact that it is not we who support the root, with its unique purpose in the plan of salvation, but the collective root “Israel”—through the Jewish Messiah, Jesus—that supports us!

We, as Christians from the Gentile nations, are called to honour the Jewish people as a whole—both the branches that remain grafted in (Messianic Jews as we call them today) AND the branches that were broken out—“all Israel” (see verse 26). Firstly, because they represent the root of salvation. Secondly, because God’s promises to them and the covenant with Abraham are still valid. If we fail in this respect, then we, as the Church, as Christendom, come under the same judgement of God as the nations of the world that look down on the Jewish people and Israel.

Our duty with regard to our own nation in relation to Israel

On this basis, the basis of our positive biblical attitude towards the Jewish people, rooted and founded in God’s love and mercy towards His people, we are called to be not only a blessing for the Jewish people, but also a prophetic voice towards our own nation with regard to the Jewish people and Israel—a prophetic voice with a biblical mandate. This mandate applies in particular to our times and to our generation—to the times in which the fortunes of the Jewish people are changing, in which the land and the people are being restored as foretold by God and prepared for the revelation of the Messiah. This is described in the book of the prophet Jeremiah, chapter 31.

First of all, the physical return and restoration of Israel are described:

“See, I will bring them from the land of the north and gather them from the ends of the earth. Among them will be the blind and the lame, expectant mothers and women in labour; a great throng will return. They will come with weeping; they will pray as I bring them back. I will lead them beside streams of water on a level path where they will not stumble, because I am Israel’s father, and Ephraim is my firstborn son.”
(Jeremiah 31:8–9)

The second half of the chapter covers the national revival and salvation of Israel when the New Covenant will comprehensively replace the Sinai Covenant:

“‘The days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,’ declares the Lord. ‘This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,’ declares the Lord. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.’”
(Jeremiah 31:31–33)

Embedded in the middle of this, right between two stages of God’s acts of grace towards Israel, comes a very precise call to the nations of the world:

“Hear the word of the Lord, you nations; proclaim it in distant coastlands: ‘He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over his flock like a shepherd.’”
(Jeremiah 31:10)

This verse actually consists of two commands: firstly, to listen and secondly, to speak. And what is the message? The message is the same God that was responsible for the sustained worldwide Diaspora, for the scattering of the Jews “among all nations” (Deuteronomy 28:64, Luke 21:24) as an act of judgement, who is now

behind the gathering of His people from every country, and who is holding His protective hand over them.

What group from among the nations of the world is in a position to carry this message to the nations of the world? Only those from among the nations of the world who believe this message, have taken it to heart, and are prepared to swim against the current to pass it on. And what group from among the nations of the world is intended to hear this message? The non-Christians. In particular, those who bear responsibility for their nation: those in government and parliament, opinion makers and disseminators of information. The message they are to hear is that we are living at a turning point in history, and that it is God himself, in His grace, who is behind this restoration of the fortunes of the Jewish people and Israel. It is because of this that we are to remind those in power of Genesis 12:3: “He who blesses Israel is blessed, whereas he who despises and humiliates Israel comes under the judgement of God.”

A question of credibility and authority

On the basis of Romans 11:17ff, we have already looked at the duty that God has placed on Christians, namely to show gratitude, esteem and respect towards the people of Israel—the root of our Christian faith and salvation. Otherwise, we too can be broken back out of the cultivated olive tree.

From Jeremiah 31:10, we now know that our mission of solidarity towards Israel, and towards our governments and rulers in our own nations, has a particular significance in the end times—the times where God, in His grace, restores the fortunes of His people.

Furthermore, in the New Testament, we read that we also have a calling—not dissimilar to Israel’s—to be a prophetic people to

the nations that do not know the God of Israel and His (and our) Messiah, Jesus:

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” (1 Peter 2:9)

As Christians, born in these times and in this generation by the will of God, this calling applies to us today in a way that is unique. We are called, first of all, to repent of the failings of Christianity in the past, and to set out, as the body of Christ, down an entirely new path: a path of esteem, love and mercy towards the Jewish people, and a path of vigilance and exhortation to maintain this attitude of respect towards the Jewish people in our governments, parliaments and so-called public opinion.

This is fundamental, but, particularly in these times in which we are living, it is a central part of what Jesus has called us to be: “salt and light” and a “town built on a hill”—in the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount, inwardly prepared to face rejection and persecution, hand in hand with our testimony for Jesus and for the good news of God’s Kingdom.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same

way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:10–16)

Our testimony for Jesus, our message of the good news of God’s Kingdom and our solidarity with the Jewish people, and our associated responsibility for and towards our own nation, go hand in hand in the end times. Only then can we have lasting credibility in the eyes of the outside world and acquire greater authority.

The Messiah of Israel and the God of Israel are one. The God of Israel, in the person of His Son, is not only our personal saviour, He is also the Lord of all history, the Lord of lords and the King of kings. He is simultaneously the Lamb of God and the Lion of Judah. We cannot and must not attempt to divide Jesus, we must not attempt to divide God and we must not attempt to divide the Bible. It may not jeopardize our personal salvation, but it will certainly jeopardize our shared mission, our effectiveness, and our authority as a Church and as Christianity as a whole.

Judgement of all nations or only some?

One question we need to consider with regard to the prophesied judgement in the end times arises from the fact that some passages refer to “all nations” (e.g. Zechariah 12:9, Joel 3:2), while others, particularly Matthew 25:31ff, make a distinction between those nations that acted mercifully towards Jesus’ people—the Jews, Israel—and those that were unmerciful: the “sheep nations” and the “goat nations”. How does this fit together?

Heading towards a one-world government

The Book of Revelation foretells a time in which there will be a single world ruler (the so-called “Antichrist”) presiding over some kind of world government. In this anti-Christian world government, the “spirit of Babel”, which we encountered before in the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11, will have its final manifestation:

“Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with

abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. The name written on her forehead was a mystery: babylon the great the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth.” (Revelation 17:3–5)

In the past 100 years of international cooperation and conflict, global structures have developed that were previously inconceivable. Following the First World War, the League of Nations was founded with its headquarters in London. Following the Second World War, the United Nations was founded with its headquarters in New York. The principal task of these institutions was, and is, to ensure the peaceful coexistence of nations. If we concentrate purely on the period since the Second World War, it is fair to say that the United Nations (UN) currently represents the worldwide family of nations. This is not yet a world government, but it is, nonetheless, a structure that makes it easy for us to imagine what form such a world government might one day take, and could be a kind of precursor of it. At the moment, 193 nations are represented in the UN—practically all internationally recognized nations with a corresponding government and diplomatic status.

Where the Bible speaks of “all nations”, an institution such as the UN would certainly fit the bill. When the UN gets involved in an issue, “all nations” are involved to a certain extent. It is by no means necessary, however, for every single nation to agree on the issue in question.

Example: Gulf War under the leadership of the USA in the early 1990s

There is only one example in modern history where the UN, applying the full scope of the instruments at its disposal, has militarily gone on the offensive. This was the so-called Gulf War, under the aegis of the USA, led by President Bush (Sr.), against the Iraq of Saddam Hussein that had recently invaded neighbouring Kuwait.

The military counterstrike was carried out with the approval of the Security Council and the required majority in the General Assembly.

The fact that is of significance to us here, however, is that by no means all nations were in consensus over the issue or active in the same way. Of the roughly 180 nations at the time, only 13 provided soldiers. Around 60 nations provided logistical support. In the General Assembly, many nations voted against an attack or abstained. “All nations” (the UN) became militarily active against Saddam Hussein and ultimately drove him out of Kuwait. This does not mean, however, that “all nations” were actively involved in, or even in favour of, this military operation.

It is thus not difficult to imagine a scenario in which the UN—or whatever this institution is called in the days of the Antichrist—comes to the point where it passes a resolution to the following effect: “The dispute regarding the status of Jerusalem is the final great obstacle to world peace. If the State of Israel does not concede to our demands, we will be forced to use military might to ensure that our demands are met!” The majority of nations go along with this resolution in one way or another—but, as we have seen, not necessarily all nations.

The crucial question is this: how will your nation act?

It takes courage to swim against the tide

One thing is clear: it will take courage to stand up against the majority view in an anti-Christian world. The government will need deep conviction and great courage. The population will also require courage to stand behind and encourage such a government. That is where we Christians come in as the body of Christ.

Without our intercession, without our convictions founded on the basis of the word of God, without the supernatural support of the Lamb of God and the Holy Spirit, without our courage

and clarity, our nations and our governments will probably not be able to find this courage either. We already read in Revelation 17:3–5 about the proverbial “Whore of Babylon” in the age of the Antichrist, and about her final, demonically-inspired heyday before the decisive fall. Let us now read the verses that precede this passage, which speak of the war between the “Lamb” (Jesus) and His followers on one side and the anti-Christian “beast” and His followers on the other:

“The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. They will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.’ Then the angel said to me, ‘The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages.’”

(Revelation 17:12–15)

The valleys before THE valley

Before the nations are confronted with the issue of how to behave in the final “Valley of Decision”, there will be many other “Valleys of Decision” along the way, building up to the grand finale of the end times. These “valleys” are moments of decision regarding policy choices that shine a spotlight on the momentary attitude of the nations towards the Jewish people and/or Israel.

In the immediate run-up to the Second World War, one such interim “Valley of Decision” was the Evian Conference in France in July 1938. More than 30 predominantly Western nations gathered at the best hotel in this picturesque town by Lake Geneva to decide the fate of the Jewish refugees fleeing from Germany. The result was shattering: with the exception of two smaller nations

(Dominican Republic and Madagascar) all other nations, including the largest and most influential, such as the USA, Great Britain and Canada, refused to accept anything more than token numbers of refugees, if that.

The history books report that this decision at Evian was the final encouragement that Hitler needed from the Western powers in order to set the gears in motion for the Holocaust. He now knew that almost nobody was really interested in the fate of the Jews. Kristallnacht came less than 6 months later in November 1938. Hundreds of synagogues were burnt down and thousands of Jewish shops and businesses were destroyed. Tens of thousands of Jews were sent to concentration camps and prisons. There were also many fatalities. The first chapter in the history of the Holocaust had been written.

Even today there are similar situations where decisions are made, at the UN for example. Roughly one third of all condemnatory UN resolutions that are passed are against the State of Israel. The remaining two thirds are divided between all other countries combined. The situation at the United Nations Human Rights Committee is similar. Or let us take the so-called “Durban Conferences”, named after the first conference of its kind held in the South African city of Durban in 2001. Officially, they were supposed to be conferences against racism. Instead, the primary de facto objective of these conferences was to pillory Israel as a supposedly particularly racist state.

One of the most prominent speakers at several of these conferences was the then Iranian president Ahmadinejad. It is difficult, at this point, not to become ironic or cynical. It is better, however, to compare the human rights standards of the Iranian regime with those of Israel as objectively as possible and then make a founded judgement regarding the moral legitimacy of someone like Ahmadinejad to preach to Israel about human rights.

Another recent situation in which such a significant decision had to be made was the vote in the UN General Assembly on 29th November 2012 regarding quasi recognition of the Palestinian Authority as a state with corresponding rights in the context of the UN. This passed despite the total failure to reach any negotiated settlement with Israel and was diametrically opposed to all key principles of the so-called Oslo Accords, the basic principle of which was the step-by-step exchange of “land for peace”. This decision of the General Assembly granted the PA government a major boost diplomatically, and in terms of worldwide public image—with no equivalent return consideration of any substance whatsoever for Israel. (138 nations voted in favour, with 9 against (including Israel), 41 abstentions and 5 that were not present.)

There are many other decisions of this nature that one could add, particularly if one also considers decisions at a national or continental level, such as those of the European Union or the African Union. I am convinced that it is high time that governments, parliaments and public opinion makers become more aware of the momentous scope of their decisions, acquired a greater sense of right and wrong, and were prepared, if necessary, to go against world opinion. As a matter of basic principle, it is just as necessary and right today to stand in solidarity with Israel against the global campaign of defamation and demonization as it would have been at Evian in 1938 to show solidarity and generosity towards the defamed and persecuted Jews of Germany.

It seems fair to assume that there will be many more situations in the future where such decisions have to be made. The more the nations prove their ability in these situations to treat Israel fairly, the greater the chances of as many nations as possible also voting and acting against the mainstream, and against majority opinion, in the final Valley of Decision.

CHAPTER 16

Prayer for our governments

We have heard much about God’s biblical perspective for Israel, the nations and the Christian believers from the nations. We have discovered fundamental biblical truths and the particular significance of the increase in challenging developments in the end times. The restoration of Israel is one of the clearest indications that we have reached the final stage of the end times—however long this stage may last. This biblical overview is intended to introduce a final consideration of the responsibility of worldwide Christianity—and in particular of the role and task of praying Christians among all peoples and nations.

“Prayers, intercession and thanksgiving ... for kings and all those in authority ...”

In the 1st letter to Timothy, Paul writes about the importance of prayer for our governments. If we pray for our government, and if, as the fruit of our prayers, the government fulfills its task in responsibility and godliness, this brings blessing for our people. As we have read, it is part of the responsibility of every government to treat Israel and the Jewish people with, at the very least, respect and fairness, and preferably with benevolence and esteem—just as they themselves would wish to be treated.

Here, then, is what Paul wrote:

“I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”

(1 Timothy 2:1–4)

Since the relationship of the nations to Israel is of deep spiritual significance, prayer is an overriding priority and a matter of particular urgency. It affects no less an issue than the fate of our nations—both in the here and now and for all eternity. All nations are on their way to the “Valley of Decision”. All nations will be divided by the returning Lord of lords and King of kings into the “sheep” and the “goats”. The “sheep nations” are characterized by their lamb-like nature towards Israel—by a humble and gentle attitude towards Israel. The “goats”, on the other hand, are characterized by the spirit of Babel—by a spirit of pride and rebellion which will escalate in the anti-Christian end times.

“Sheep” or “goats”?

We find an Old Testament description of an anti-godly goat in Daniel 8:8–12:

“The goat became very great, but at the height of its power the large horn was broken off, and in its place four prominent horns grew up toward the four winds of heaven. Out of one of them came another horn, which started small but grew in power to the south and to the east and toward the Beautiful Land. It grew until it reached the host of the heavens, and it threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them. It set itself up to be as great as the commander of the army of the Lord; it took away the daily sacrifice from the

Lord, and his sanctuary was thrown down. Because of rebellion, the Lord’s people and the daily sacrifice were given over to it. It prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground.”

The final character trait of the goat that is mentioned here is enlightening: “... and truth was thrown to the ground ...”. If we take a closer look at world opinion, the global media and even most governments with regard to their relationship with Israel, that is precisely what we observe: truth is thrown to the ground and trampled underfoot. In a biblical context, goats—in contrast to lambs—are associated with a stubborn, recalcitrant character. The horns of male goats often represent ungodly nations which, in many cases, rise up as if from nothing and attain great power and influence.

God’s gift of love to His own people

Our central motivation for our prayer should be God’s immanent love and mercy. We finally come full circle: God loves the nations. God loves Israel. God also loves His Church. He wants the best for all of us. However, the prerequisite for us all is that we adhere to His standards and rules.

For a long time, I myself had great difficulty in developing a positive identity as a German. I shall go into this in greater detail in my attached testimony. The fact is that, after my conversion, my heart was first of all filled with a deep love for the Church of Jesus, a longing for unity among Christians, for growth of the body of Christ, for revival and renewal. A few years after my conversion though, I had one particular key experience which filled my heart with a supernatural love for Israel. Doctrinal biblical foundations had already been laid, but it still took time before my heart was transformed. It was only afterwards, to a certain extent as the fruit of the love God had given me for the Jewish people and for Israel,

that I was gradually able to develop a love towards my own German people.

This process is still a work in progress. However, for more than a decade now, my love towards my own German people has reached a dimension that motivates me and enables me, with God's help, to dedicate a great deal of commitment towards it. Reaching out to discover God's plans of redemption for Germany, and committing myself to seeing them come to fruition, has become a central part of my life's work and my life's calling.

Let God open up our hearts

Let us finish with a question: Are we Christians prepared to let God open up our hearts? I would assume that most believing Christians reading this little book have a burning heart for the body of Christ, for revival, for the dissemination of the Gospel and for renewal of the Church. I would also assume that many of you, to differing degrees, will have received a biblical revelation and love from God for Israel and for the Jewish people. This is something for which we can only be thankful!

My question, and my prayer, is this: Are we prepared to allow God to woo us and work on us so that we make room in our hearts for our own nation? Is the fate of our nation important to us? Is God's blessing for our nation important to us? The next question is this: Do we care whether our nation is, remains, or becomes, a blessing for Israel? If we make room for this in our hearts, it would not surprise me if the love that God has given us for Israel and the love that He has given us for our own people interact in such a way that they both grow as a result.

2015—a key year

In 2015, we commemorate the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. The number 70 is of great biblical relevance. We already spoke of the Hebrew numerological significance of 7×10 . The number 70 was also of great significance to Jeremiah and Daniel in conjunction with the end of the Babylonian exile. This is brought home emphatically in Daniel 9 (verses 1–3):

“In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom—in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.”

As far as the Jewish people is concerned, what stands out here is the fact that the end of the Holocaust in Europe coincided with the end of the Second World War in Europe on 8th May. In addition to this, we have a second significant date: early in 2015 we commemorate the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz—a worldwide synonym for the Holocaust—which took place on January 27, 1945. This date, the 27th of January, was made the national Holocaust Memorial Day in Germany in 1995; in 2005 the EU made it the European Holocaust Remembrance Day and in 2006 the UN made it the International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Why do we need an international remembrance day? Because anti-Semitism and anti-Israelism, which until the Second World War were primarily a European phenomenon, have now become a global phenomenon.

There are almost exactly 100 days between 27th of January and 8th of May. We want to use this time window in 2015 to call

Christians of all nations and denominations to pray for Israel, but particularly to pray for their own nations and governments and their relationship with Israel. Additionally, wherever the Lord sends His grace, may this prayer be reinforced by fasting in some form or another (see Appendices).

The vision behind this initiative is that, during the preparation for these 100 days, throughout the realization of this concerted action, and in the period afterwards, many Christians, churches, prayer networks and other Christian movements and denominations might discover in their hearts the significance of Israel for the fate of their own nation, and intensify their prayers for their own government and nation accordingly—aided by the Holy Spirit.

May God grant each one of us His love and mercy!

PART 2

Appendices

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem

by Willem Glashouwer

Matthew tells us that the crowd that accompanied Jesus as He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey (an animal of peace) and not on a horse (in those days considered to be an animal of war) were shouting: *“Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!”* (Matthew 21:9). In Luke, the cry is *“Blessed is the king who comes in the Name of the Lord!”* (Luke 19:38). And John 12:13 says: *“Blessed is the King of Israel!”* Luke also reports that *“As He approached Jerusalem and saw the city, He wept over it and said, ‘If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes’”* (Luke 19:41–42). And when something is hidden from your eyes, you simply cannot see.

Jesus looks far past the cheering crowd surrounding Him: *“The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you”* (Luke 19:43–44).

Jesus knows that His entrance into Jerusalem is the way to the cross, not the way to the throne of His father David. He knows

that He will freely give His life, see John 10:17–18, so that as the true Prince of Peace He may establish true peace between God and men, by removing the stumbling block of sin. He knows this has to happen first, before He can usher in the Kingdom. But He also knows that one day in the future the crowds in Jerusalem will once again shout *“Blessed is He, who comes in the Name of the Lord.”*

In His mind’s eye He sees first the cross, then the resurrection and the ascension, then the terrible fall of the city of Jerusalem and then the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 by the Roman legions, followed by nearly two thousand years in which the great majority of the Jews are scattered all over the world, and then ... again, the city of Jerusalem, again a Jewish state, and again a triumphant entry, when yet again there will be the shout, *“Blessed is He, who comes in the Name of the Lord!”*

He did say, “You shall not see Me again, until ...” But He did NOT say, “From now on you shall *never* see Me again.” So Israel will not see Him again, UNTIL they greet Him as the great Son of David who shall ascend the throne of His father David in Jerusalem: “... until you say [again], *Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord!*” (Matthew 23:39). One day He shall enter into Jerusalem again and reign in the midst of Jacob—Israel, just as the angel Gabriel had announced to His mother Mary (Luke 1:31–33).

This is not a spiritual, heavenly reign. After His ascension into the heavens, He did not approach David in heaven and say: “With all respect, father David, I need to sit on your throne here in heaven now, to reign over Jacob upon your throne, so please move over.” Since His ascension, He has all power and authority in heaven and on earth, and He sits with His Father, the eternal God, on His throne (Matthew 28:18–20; Revelation 3:21, 4:2–3, 5:6–7). But only when He returns, He will sit on the throne of His father David in Jerusalem (Psalm 89:27–30, 36–38; 2 Samuel 7:12–16).

There will be a short period of darkness all over the world, and then that glorious time will come. Today the stage is being set in the Middle East with a re-established Jerusalem in a re-established Israel and a re-established Jewish people, surrounded by a new “Roman” empire and all the Old Testament enemies present under new names in the Arab countries.

The miracle of the national rebirth of these enemies is as great as that of Israel. Jesus had said, *“Look at the fig tree and ALL the trees”* (Luke 21:29). The whole forest is back in place in the form of Israel and the surrounding hostile nations. We are awaiting the arrival on the world stage of the main Actor who will bring this terrible phase of world history to a happy ending: happy for Israel as He comes to give her rest, and for the nations as they, too, will be given rest.

Finally, peace will flow forth from Jerusalem, as Isaiah 2:2–4 prophesied: *“In the last days the mountain of the LORD’s temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the Temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.’ The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.”*

Isn’t it remarkable that Jesus comes from Bethany on the Mount of Olives (Matthew 21:1), to the city and that Zechariah sees Him returning to the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:3), and from there entering the city? Ezekiel, too, saw God’s glory returning to the (third or fourth) Temple, entering from the east. The Shekinah Glory had left the Temple into the direction of the East, the Mount of Olives, leaving it behind as an empty shell, and then the Babylonians could

come and destroy the city and the building of the Temple (Ezekiel 10:18–19, 11:22–23). But one day the Shekinah Glory would come back from the East, from the Mount of Olives (Ezekiel 43:1–7).

The Times of the Gentiles

We are on our way to a glorious moment. The times of the Gentiles are coming to an end.

According to some, the times of the Gentiles have already ended. “Look,” they said, “at the re-establishment of the Jewish state in 1948.” In spite of all the problems, Israel was able to celebrate its 50th anniversary in 1998, the first year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:27) since the establishment of the State of Israel, even though the actual religious year of Jubilee was a few years later. “Surely,” they say, “the times of the Gentiles ended in 1967, when the city of Jerusalem was re-united and became the undivided capital of the State of Israel.”

In that year Israel freed East Jerusalem from the Jordanian occupation that part of the city had suffered since the proclamation of the Jewish state in 1948. In those 19 years, countless synagogues in East Jerusalem had been demolished or turned into public latrines. But those 19 years, a mere blip in Jerusalem’s three thousand year history, were the only time that the city was ever divided, and thus any Palestinian claim to a part of the city is historically invalid. Then Israel declared Jerusalem the undivided capital of the independent state of Israel. Those who argue that the end of the times of the Gentiles occurred in 1967 point to this event: “See for yourself,” they say, “Jerusalem is no longer under the feet of Gentiles.”

But is that really the case? Are there no Gentiles ruling in Jerusalem? What about the fact that Europe and the United Nations are telling Israel what to do with their own land and their own city

Jerusalem? The Arab world controls the most holy place in Jerusalem, the Temple Mount. The Vatican never did let go of their idea to make Jerusalem the city of “the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam”, but certainly not the capital of the independent Jewish State Israel. The Palestinians claim the city—or a part thereof—as the capital of a new Arab Moslem State that they call Palestine. And United Nations claim the right to declare the ultimate state of Jerusalem. So the nations are still trampling the City of Jerusalem under their feet.

And the heart of the City of Jerusalem, Mount Zion which is also Mount Moriah is still occupied territory by Gentiles. The Arab Muslims are in control.

The Scriptures also seem to indicate otherwise, for they state that the times of the Gentiles will only come to an end with the coming of the Messiah, the return of Christ, the Prince of Peace. We must not lose sight of the important fact that the holiest place in Jerusalem, in the heart of the city, is still closed to the Jews. Gentiles rule there. The Temple Mount is governed by the Islamic world. It is still *für Juden verboten* (forbidden to Jews).

World Powers

When did “the times of the Gentiles” begin? Some say it was when Solomon’s Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC. Since that time, Israel has never been totally independent. One kingdom after another has overrun it. Of course, there was the smaller, second Temple built in Jerusalem when a remnant of the Jews returned from the Babylonian exile, but Israel remained a part or a province of a much larger empire. Sometimes it enjoyed limited autonomy, and it was even sometimes moderately independent, but never again was it as powerful and independent as in the days of David and Solomon.

Daniel, the prophet at the court of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, was allowed by the Lord to tell the king what he had dreamed and interpret the king's dream for him. The king had dreamed of a statue with a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet that were partly of iron and partly of a mixture of iron and clay. He saw a stone roll down and strike the statue, pulverizing it. But the stone grew into a great mountain that filled the whole earth (Daniel 2).

Daniel explained that the different parts of the statue represented four or five successive kingdoms (the last kingdom being in a sense an extension or continuation of the fourth one). The golden head is interpreted as the Babylonian kingdom; the silver breast and arms as the empire of the Medes and Persians; and the belly and thighs of bronze represent the Greek Empire under Alexander the Great. The legs of iron represent the Roman Empire, which divided into the Eastern and Western Empires, the feet of iron and clay. The fifth and last kingdom appears to be a revival of the Roman Empire on a worldwide scale. In subsequent visions, more details were revealed to Daniel. Babylon, the golden head, is represented by a winged lion. The Medes and the Persians (the silver breast and arms) are seen as a bear with three ribs in its mouth (possibly representing Syria, Babylon, and Egypt, which it "devoured"). The Greek-Macedonian kingdom (the bronze belly) is seen as a leopard with four wings and four heads, representing the fact that after the death of Alexander his empire was divided into four kingdoms—Egypt, Syria, Macedonia, and Asia Minor—ruled by four of his generals. The fourth kingdom, the Roman Empire (the iron legs and feet) is seen as a monstrous beast with ten horns, from which a small horn emerges that takes over the whole earth, Daniel 7.

The coming of the Son of Man marks the end of this last and final kingdom of man, and the establishment of the eternal king-

dom of the Son of Man, because His Coming will destroy the whole statue, all the empires combined that are apparently present in the final Empire, "at the same time", Daniel 2:35. So it seems that in the end times the whole statue, that is, all of the empires it represents, will be revived and present on the world scene in some way or another, Daniel 8:1–7. The beasts that Daniel saw, reappear in the book of Revelation, chapter 13, in the form of one ultimate beast.

Between the fall of the Roman Empire and the arrival of that last kingdom, there have been numerous conquerors of the Promised Land, including Byzantines, Persians, Arabs, Crusaders, Mamelukes, Turks, French, and British. Many Gentile feet have trampled upon Jerusalem and the Holy Land. Among them Arabs and Palestinians. Today, the European Union is growing in a certain sense into a revived Roman empire (although this time it is part of a world in which there are more and larger power blocks than existed in the time of the writers of the Bible). Communism has collapsed in Russia (allowing the Jews there to return home), Jeremiah 16:14–15, and more and more the map of Europe looks like it did under the Romans. The United Nations, a kind of world parliament—though sometimes looking rather powerless—is gaining influence and the blue helmets of its peacekeepers are seen more often everywhere in the world. Increasingly economic developments, the energy and environmental crises, the financial crisis and the conflicts erupting all over the world demand a global response. Communication—systems have made the world into a global village. The arrival of the last world kingdom is fast approaching. World peace appears to be within our grasp, facilitated by computer and satellite systems, cable communication and mass media, and multinational, financial institutions and investments. The global village is becoming a reality. But let us beware of shouting "Peace, peace" where there is no peace, and keep alert!

Jerusalem and the everlasting covenant

Ezekiel 16:59–60, 62: “... *This is what the Sovereign Lord says: ‘I will deal with you as you deserve, because you have despised My oath by breaking the covenant. Yet I will remember the covenant I made with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you ... So I will establish My covenant with you, and you will know that I am the Lord’ ...*”

At the beginning of this chapter in the book of Ezekiel the Lord addresses Jerusalem, but He is not simply talking to bricks, mortar and Jerusalem–stone. He is speaking collectively to “Zion”—the city, the land and the people—the divinely ordered unity. This “marriage covenant” with Jerusalem encompasses most of the other covenants; the Abrahamic covenant, the Covenant of the Law, the Land covenant, the Davidic covenant and ultimately the New covenant.

Isaiah 4:2–5: “... *In that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel. Those who are left in Zion, will remain in Jerusalem, will be called holy, all who are recorded among the living in Jerusalem. The Lord will wash away the filth of the women of Zion; He will cleanse the bloodstains from Jerusalem by a Spirit of judgment and a Spirit of fire. Then the Lord will create over all of Mount Zion and over those who assemble there a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night; all over the Glory will be a canopy. It will be a shelter and shade from the heat of the day, and a refuge and hidden place from the storm and the rain ...*”

The Shekinah Glory of the Lord dwelt in the Temple which was built by King Salomon (2 Chronicles 7:1–2); Ezekiel saw the Shekinah Glory of the Lord depart from the Temple shortly before the Babylonians destroyed it (Ezekiel 10:3–5, 11:22–23), and it will return to the Temple as the permanent return of the pres-

ence of the LORD, the God of Israel, takes place to dwell among His ancient covenant people (Ezekiel 43:1–2, 4–7a). The book of Revelation tells us that the earthly reign of Messiah in Jerusalem will last a thousand years. As the only place in the Bible (Revelation 20:4–5) where a time limit is placed on the Messianic Age on planet earth, it seems to be at odds with most of the prophecies in the Bible concerning the Messianic Kingdom, which emphatically tell us that it will be an everlasting Kingdom. But so it will be. Only the theatre of the Messianic Kingdom will be moved from one stage to another.

The Jerusalem Covenant goes so far as to link the earthly city with the heavenly city (Isaiah 65:17–19, Revelation 21). Isaiah tells us here that in the New Jerusalem there will be no memory of the horror surrounding or associated with the previous city and the world in which it existed. The new heavens and the new earth will become the place of the eternal Messianic Kingdom. Just as the Abrahamic Covenant promises the .and of Israel and the earthly Jerusalem as the inheritance for all Jewish people for all times, whether they are living in the land or in the Diaspora, the New Testament promises the heavenly Jerusalem as the eternal inheritance for those whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life (Hebrews 12:22–24 and 13:14). That means all those who are partakers of the New Covenant; whether they are Jew or Gentile.

Just as Israel is on the way to her rest centred on an earthly Jerusalem, so the Church is on her way to rest in the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22–24). But one day that heavenly Jerusalem will descend to earth, when a new heaven and a new earth are formed, where righteousness will dwell (2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21–22:5). One can only speculate about the relationship between the two Jerusalems in the Messianic Kingdom of peace (Revelation 20:1–10; Zechariah 14:8–21).

What we can be sure of is that ultimately God will be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28). Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus! (Revelation 22:20; 1 Corinthians 16:22).

All of Israel will be saved (Romans 11:26), the law will go forth from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2–4; Zechariah 12:10–14), and the nations will no longer learn war (Micah 4:1–3). The power of Allah and Islam will be broken, for God loves the Arabs and the Palestinians. Jesus wants to set them free, too. The Bible says that a highway will be built from Egypt to Assyria (today's Iraq), and that Assyrians will go to Egypt and Egyptians to Assyria, and both will worship God together. They will worship not Allah, but YHWH, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In that day Israel will be included with Egypt and Assyria as a blessing in the midst of the earth, with the Lord of Hosts saying "... *Blessed be Egypt My people, Assyria My handiwork, and Israel My inheritance ...*" (Isaiah 19:19–25). Ishmael, Abraham's other son besides Isaac, the progenitor of the Arabs, has received great promises from God (Genesis 21:18, 17:20–22). The period of darkness that is coming over the whole world, including Israel and believers in Jesus Christ, is going to end in the glory of the kingdom after going through this ordeal. The **"until"** stands as a guarantee of the new age for all, including Israel and Jerusalem.

Do we realize that we are on our way there? Perhaps our tent pegs would not be anchored so securely in this world were we to realize that as believers and the spiritual seed of Abraham we are on our way to that Promised Land—to His eternal Kingdom.

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APPENDIX 2

Aliyah—the Return of the Jewish People to Israel

by Philip Holmberg

The Almighty forms a people ...

When God speaks about the beginnings of the Jewish people, he uses expressions like make, create and choose: *"Is he not your Father, who bought you? Has He not made you and established you?"* (Deuteronomy 32:6). Long before Israel became a people, the Lord started by calling one man, Abraham, and his wife, out from his country, from his kindred and from his father's house and promised to make him a great nation. And when they were too old to have a child, the Lord miraculously gave them Isaac!

Later, Isaac himself, and Rebekah, were unable to have children. Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, the Lord healed her, and gave her twins! Then God sovereignly chose Jacob, the younger, before Esau, the first-born, to receive the promise and covenant of Abraham and to have many descendants. Still later, the Lord used the amazing events in Joseph's life to save and protect Jacob's entire family by bringing them out of starvation to the fertile land of Goshen in Egypt.

There the children of Israel were *“fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land [Goshen] was filled with them.”* (Exodus 1:7). Eventually they became oppressed and enslaved, and groaned and cried out to God. *“So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.”* (Exodus 2:24)! Answering their prayers, God sent a deliverer, Moses, to bring them out of Egypt into the desert.

It is there in the desert, at the mountain, that they become a people as the Almighty reveals Himself as their God, their Creator and their Father who says: *“This people I have formed for Myself; They shall declare My praise.”* (Isaiah 43:21) and *“Israel is My son, My firstborn.”* (Exodus 4:22) and *“And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”* (Exodus 19:6)! So the Jewish people belongs to the Lord!

... and gives them a land

Even before God gave Abraham the promise to make him a great nation and made a covenant with him He gave him a command: *“Get out of your country ... to a land that I will show you”* (Genesis 12:1). Of course, a nation has to have a territory, and we can understand that the Lord wished to show Abraham the land which his descendants were going to populate. In fact, the Lord told Abraham to *“Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you.”* (Genesis 13:17). Before that the Lord emphatically stated that He was giving the land to Abraham and his descendants forever! (Genesis 13:15).

This promise is renewed to Isaac when God said to him: *“... to you and your descendants I give all these lands ...”* (Genesis 26:3). Again it is renewed to Jacob when he was fleeing from his brother Esau: *“... the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your descendants.”* (Genesis 28:13). When the people of Israel were on the

point of entering the promised land, the Lord reminds them He is fulfilling the promises and oaths He had given the patriarchs: *“So it shall be, when the Lord your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ...”* (Deuteronomy 6:10).

In the words of the Psalmist: *“He is the Lord our God; His judgments are in all the earth. He remembers His covenant forever, The word which He commanded, for a thousand generations, The covenant which He made with Abraham, And His oath to Isaac, And confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, To Israel as an everlasting covenant, Saying, ‘To you I will give the land of Canaan As the allotment of your inheritance’”* (Psalm 105:7–11).

The connection of the people to the land

From the Scriptures it is clear that it is impossible to separate God’s promise to bless Abraham and his descendants and to make them a nation from His promise to give the land to them forever; the land is an integral part of the covenant God made with the patriarchs and the people of Israel. The eternal covenant God made with the Jewish people includes the bestowing of the land to the descendants of Abraham as an indispensable part!

Indeed, it may very well be that the Lord, the Ancient of days, before the nations even existed, used Israel as a kind of measuring rod when He set the boundaries of the nations. This could mean that in the same way as the people of Israel is the firstborn son of God, so also the land of Israel is the first inheritance among all the lands of the peoples. *“When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, When He separated the sons of Adam, He set the boundaries of the peoples According to the number of the children of Israel. For the Lord’s portion is His people; Jacob is the place of His inheritance.”* (Deuteronomy 32:8–9). Paul says to the Athenians: *“And He 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 dwellings” (Acts 17:26).

The Lord has chosen to be known as “*the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob*” and says that this is His name forever (Exodus 3:15). He guarantees His promise of the land in the strongest possible way! He who is “*the God of Israel, the Holy One of Israel*” gives an assurance that the land belongs to His chosen people! And as the people belong to the Lord, so also, in the final analysis, does the land belong to Him!

Blessings and curses

When we study Deuteronomy chapter 28 it becomes clear that all the blessings and curses listed apply to a nation, a people living in a land of their own. We learn already in verse 1 what the result of obedience will be: “... *the Lord your God will set you high above all nations of the earth*”. Verse 8 goes on to say: “... *He will bless you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you*”. And in verse 9 we arrive at the climax: “*The Lord will establish you as a holy people to Himself*”.

The call and the mission of the Jewish people and the nation of Israel is to be the priest among the nations, representing the nations of the earth before God, and representing God before the nations. The result is described in verse 10: “*Then all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they shall be afraid of you*”.

Similarly, the consequence of disobedience is a long list of misfortunes and curses: drought, poverty, fear, disease, defeat, oppression, always in the land. Then the climax in verse 64: “*Then the Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other*”. The final curse is to be taken away from the land!

Into captivity ...

Before the Lord allowed His people to be brought into captivity to Assyria and Babylon He warned them repeatedly through His prophets. So many Scriptures witness about the Lord’s call to the kings, the leaders and the people to turn back to Him, to pray for forgiveness, and to be restored. But worship of the gods of the surrounding peoples and unrighteousness in the land continued. Already when He brought Israel out of Egypt, the Lord had said to Pharaoh through Moses: “*I will make a difference between My people and your people. ...*” (Exodus 8:23)—now there was no longer any difference between Israel and the nations.

In God’s view, even the land had been defiled: “*I brought you into a bountiful country, to eat its fruit and its goodness. But when you entered, you defiled My land and made My heritage an abomination.*” (Jeremiah 2:7). And worst of all, the Lord’s name was defiled: “... *they defiled My holy name by the abominations which they committed*” (Ezekiel 43:8)!

... to Assyria and Babylon

God used the great power of Assyria to defeat and carry away into captivity the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Some time later the Babylonians conquered Assyria. Then the Babylonians defeated the southern Kingdom of Judah, destroyed the first temple and carried away many of the people into captivity to Babylon. The prophet Jeremiah describes it thus: “*Israel is like scattered sheep; The lions have driven him away. First the king of Assyria devoured him; Now at last this Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon has broken his bones.*” (Jeremiah 50:17).

But the same prophet, Jeremiah, also received the Word of the Lord and prophesied that after seventy years the Lord would have

mercy on His people. Daniel, who was one of the captives, read this prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah. It motivated him to turn to the Lord, to humble himself before the Lord through fasting, to pray and ask the Lord to forgive his sins, the sins of his ancestors and the sins of the leaders of the people. He prayed for the restoration of the people and of Jerusalem for the sake of God's Holy Name! (Daniel 9).

The meaning of Aliyah

The Hebrew word aliyah means going up or ascent. It is used about the Jewish people going up to Jerusalem three times a year for the feasts of pesach, shavuot and succot. It is also used to refer to the immigration of Jews from the diaspora to Israel, their return to Zion.

The return of the Jews to the land of their fathers is central to Zionism. As Theodore Herzl said: "It goes without saying that the Jewish people can have no other goal than Palestine and that, whatever the fate of the proposition may be, our attitude toward the land of our fathers is and shall remain unchangeable." He also said: "If anyone thinks that Jews can steal into the land of their fathers, he is deceiving either himself or others. Nowhere is the coming of Jews so promptly noted as in the historic home of the Jews, for the very reason that it is the historic home." And: "Zionism demands a publicly recognized and legally secured homeland in Palestine for the Jewish people. This platform is unchangeable."

But Herzl and Zionism did not, of course, invent the idea of aliyah. Already in the Middle Ages, the Passover Seder included the words: "Next year in Jerusalem", which expressed the longing of the Jewish people to return to the promised land, the longing of a people scattered throughout the world to be a restored nation in their own land. And the Jews of the Middle Ages were inspired by

the Bible because God had promised that He would *"have mercy on Zion"* (Psalm 102:13). Through the prophet Jeremiah He promised: *"He who scattered Israel will gather him"* (Jeremiah 31:10).

I believe it is not a coincidence that the final verse in the final chapter of the final book of the common Hebrew Bible reads: *"Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May the Lord his God be with him, and let him go up!"* (2. Chronicles 36:23)!

There's always opposition to the return!

Cyrus allowed the Jews to return as a result of the prayers of Daniel and others like him and in obedience to the prophetic Word of God. However, everyone did not approve of their return. The books of Nehemiah and Ezra record the opposition the Jewish people encountered. Their adversaries ridiculed them and threatened them. Nehemiah describes how the Jews had to respond: *"Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon."* (Nehemiah 4:17).

Centuries before, Pharaoh had resisted the exodus of the children of Israel. So we see that the opposition can assume the form of not allowing the Jewish people to leave their exile as was the case with the refuseniks in the Soviet Union after 1967. But the opposition can also take the form of resisting the travel, entry and settlement in the land as has been the case since the 1930s onward. But the Lord has promised that He will protect and keep His people as they return to the land of their fathers!

Scattered ...

Jews had settled by choice in many parts of the Roman Empire as the book of Acts informs us. It is, however, reasonable to assume that the majority of the Jewish people lived in Palestine until the Jewish–Roman wars (66 – 135 AD). In these wars, perhaps as many as 1,5 million Jews were killed and massacred, about 100.000 Jews were sold as slaves and many Jews fled to foreign countries. The Emperor Hadrian changed the name of Jerusalem to Aelia Capitolina, the province of Judaea was renamed Syria Palaestina and all Jews were banished from Jerusalem.

... to the ends of the earth

Wherever the Jews came, sooner or later they suffered persecution and expulsion. I found one website which listed 109 locations whence Jews have been expelled from 250 AD until the birth of the modern nation of Israel, and I fear that this list only represents the tip of the iceberg. Most of the persecutions and expulsions have been crimes committed by the Christian Church, Christian nations and individual Christians. So the Jewish people were scattered all over the world.

“The Times of the Gentiles”

In a parallel to the dispersion of the Jews, the Gospel of the Kingdom of God was proclaimed, first in Jerusalem, then in Judaea, and Samaria, and then to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). This made it possible for the Gentiles to be ingrafted in the Jewish olive tree by grace! The blessing given to Abraham could also be received by the Gentiles! The Lord says: *“For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations”* (Mark 11:17). As the last unreached peoples are being reached by the Gospel, the times of the Gentiles are drawing to a close.

Coming back from the ends of the earth

Throughout the ages, the Jewish people have returned from exile to the land of Israel. But it is from the end of the 19th century that the Lord is bringing His people back on a large scale. Through the prophet Jeremiah the Lord speaks: *“Behold, I will gather them out of all countries where I have driven them in My anger, in My fury, and in great wrath; I will bring them back to this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely.”* (Jeremiah 32:37).

Jews have returned from more than 100 different countries. Hidden or forgotten tribes like the Ethiopian Jews and the B’nei Menashe in India have returned or are returning. The modern nation of Israel was born in 1948, as the national home of the Jewish people. Israel’s Law of Return states: *“Every Jew has the right to come to this country as an oleh [immigrant].”*

Waves of Aliyah

According to Wikipedia, article Aliyah, the following waves of aliyah have taken place since 1882:

• First aliyah	1882–1903	35.000 immigrants
• Second aliyah	1904–1914	35.000 immigrants
• Third aliyah	1919–1923	40.000 immigrants
• Fourth aliyah	1924–1929	82.000 immigrants
• Fifth aliyah	1929–1939	250.000 immigrants
• Aliyah Bet	1933–1948	110.000 immigrants
• Early Statehood I	1948–1951	674.000 immigrants
• Early Statehood II	1952–1960	289.000 immigrants
• 1960’s	1961–1971	443.000 immigrants
• 1970’s	1972–1979	284.000 immigrants
• 1980’s	1980–1989	239.000 immigrants
• 1990’s	1990–2001	1.243.000 immigrants

• 2000's	2002–2010	222.000 immigrants
• 2010's	2011–2013	53.000 immigrants

When the State of Israel was founded in 1948 there were 650.000 Jews in the country. In 2014 the number of Jews in Israel is almost tenfold. So far, the record number of immigrants in one year was 250.000 in 1949, but I believe we will see this record broken in the coming years! In March, 2013, the Daily Mail online reported that Israel overtook USA for the first time as the world's largest Jewish population centre.

It is also worth noting that the number of Jews who were forced to leave (left, fled or expelled from) Muslim countries after Israel became independent in 1948–1970 was 900.000 which exceeds the about 700.000 Arabs who fled or were expelled in Israel's War of Independence. Israel absorbed the Jewish refugees while the Arab nations did not absorb the Arab refugees. This resulted in the creation of the Palestinian refugee camps and the establishment of UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East). According to a recent estimate, about 30.000 of the original Arab refugees are alive, but since UNRWA's definition of refugees includes descendants, the number of Palestinian refugees is now estimated to be around 5.000.000.

“With all my heart and with all my soul”

The Bible describes the Exodus out of Egypt as a mighty work of God which is referred to in many Scripture passages. But the Lord predicts through the prophet Jeremiah that He will do something even greater: *“Therefore behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord, “that it shall no more be said, »The Lord lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,« but, »The Lord lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from all the*

lands where He had driven them.« For I will bring them back into their land which I gave to their fathers.” (Jeremiah 16:14–15).

I believe we live in that time! The time has come when the Lord *“will arise and have mercy on Zion; For the time to favor her, Yes, the set time, has come.”* (Psalm 102:13)! In Jeremiah the Lord uses the strongest possible words to express what He is doing: *“Yes, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will assuredly plant them in this land, with all My heart and with all My soul.”* (Jeremiah 32:41)!

When God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt the Bible uses the expression: *“Because the Lord kept vigil that night to bring them out of Egypt”* (Exodus 12:42 NIV). And when He brings His scattered people back from the ends of the earth to plant them in the land with all His heart and with all His soul, I believe it is equivalent with the Lord keeping vigil to bring them out!

“When I have brought them back from the peoples and gathered them out of their enemies' lands, and I am hallowed in them in the sight of many nations, then they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who sent them into captivity among the nations, but also brought them back to their land, and left none of them captive any longer.” (Ezekiel 39:27–28)

As believers brought out from the Gentile nations and ingrafted as wild branches in the natural olive tree, called as a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, the Lord is calling us to pray, to comfort and to assist His first-born son, Israel, back to his ancient land. The Lord is preparing them for the Coming of their Messiah, and we can hasten this glorious event!

The power of collective fasting

by Derek Prince

I believe the greatest form of spiritual power available to God's people is the union of prayer with fasting. Not merely *individual* fasting, which is good; but it is the union of prayer with *collective* fasting which I believe is the summit of power.

The basis for biblical fasting

The word *fasting* can be defined in various ways, but on a scriptural basis I would say that fasting is “abstaining from food voluntarily for spiritual purposes.” Normally when we fast we do not eat, but we do drink. There are times in the Bible when people fasted without food or water. Moses did it twice. I believe Elijah did it once, for forty days. I would not recommend that anyone undertake a forty day fast without food or water unless they were in the same kind of relationship to God and in the supernatural condition in which Moses and Elijah were at that time. However, in the book of Esther, the fourth chapter, Esther and her maidens fasted three days and three nights without food or water—seventy-two hours. Personally, I have done that twice. That should be the limit that you ever go without liquid, unless, as I said, you are in a supernatural condition. To go beyond that *without liquid* is very dangerous physically.

However, it is not dangerous to fast for longer than three days *without food* if you have suitable preparations and safeguards. I speak from personal experience. The number of days I have fasted is not relevant, but there is no question that it is possible to go without food for forty days, or twenty-one days, and so on, if you are in the right physical and spiritual condition. I am not saying that the effectiveness of our fasting depends on the length of our fasting—it doesn't. It depends on being sensitive to the will of God and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

I would also mention this: I am personally convinced that if fasting is properly practiced it is also extremely beneficial to our physical health. In fact, I think it is a greatly neglected means of curing physical ailments.

The unique power of united fasting—the basics

I would like to comment on a few scriptural facts about fasting. The first point I want to make is that Christ expects His disciples to practice fasting. In the Sermon on the Mount, which is really the basic requirements for Christian discipleship, Jesus makes the following statements in Matthew 6:16–18:

“Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.”

I would like to point out a single section of the linguistics of this passage. Jesus did not say **if ye fast**, He said **when ye fast**. That language indicates that He expected all His disciples to fast. The question was not whether they would do it, but how they would

do it. Jesus then proceeded to lay down certain basic principles about fasting.

It is significant that Jesus referred to fasting in both the plural and the singular forms: *When ye fast, when thou fastest*. It is important to practice individual, private fasting, but when Jesus says, “When ye fast,” I believe He’s referring to collective fasting. Some people say, “Well, fasting must always be done in secret.” But I believe that’s the devil’s strategy. Jesus uses exactly the same language about prayer, so on that basis, prayer and fasting would always have to be hidden, done in secret. There would be no public prayer meeting or corporate fasting! Who wants that? The devil.

So there is individual praying and fasting done in secret, and then there is also collective praying and fasting which is done together, in public, publicly announced—a time and a place must be appointed for it.

Please note that in regard to the individual, private fast, Jesus essentially said, “If you do it in the right way, God will reward you.” So if you don’t fast, bear in mind that you are forfeiting a reward.

We then read more on fasting in Mark 2:18–20:

“And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast: and they come and say unto him [Jesus], Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not?”

It is important to understand that fasting was a normal part of religion in the time of Jesus. It was practiced by the Pharisees and by the disciples of John. In fact, fasting is a normal part of all serious religions in every culture and in every nation. Hindus fast, Buddhists fast, Moslems fast—all religionists that take their religions seriously practice fasting.

When I wrote *Shaping History through Prayer and Fasting*, a friend of mine did some research in the Library of Congress in the United States to see if there were any Christian books on fasting. Do you know what they discovered? Many books on fasting—by Moslems, Hindus, Buddhists and so on. There was not one book written by a Christian author in the entire Library of Congress on the subject of fasting. I think that is a reproach to us as Christians. Fasting is an integral part of all serious religion.

When the people of Jesus' time didn't see His disciples fasting, they said, "How come? Why not?" And here is the answer Jesus gave them, in verse 19:

"And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days."

Now, that is a parable, and, of course, we have to interpret the parable. I'll offer you my interpretation. Yours may not agree, but this is mine. I believe the bridegroom is Jesus Christ. I think there is no question about that. The children of the bridechamber are the disciples. Now Jesus said, at the present time when He was speaking, "The bridegroom is with them, they cannot fast." But then He said emphatically that the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, *"and then shall they fast in those days."*

If we ask ourselves: "Has the bridegroom been taken away from us?" My answer is, "Yes." We are all waiting the Bridegroom's return. Now, if we are waiting the Bridegroom's return, that is evidence He has been taken from us. So in the days between His presence on earth and His return again from heaven, Jesus says of

His disciples that in those days, "They shall fast." Therefore, in the days in which we live, fasting is a mark of Christian discipleship. If you don't have that mark, you miss one of the God-given marks of discipleship. Jesus expected all Christians to fast.

The unique power of corporate or collective fasting—New Testament examples

The next statement I want to make is that the New Testament church practiced group fasting—not merely individual fasting, but collective fasting. In Acts chapter 13 we read these words, beginning with verse 1 and following:

"Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; [five men are named. Verse 2,] As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them."

These men, leaders in the church, collectively ministered to the Lord in fasting. Ministering to the Lord is an important concept which the average Christian has little or no understanding of. Christians talk about ministering to people, but that is secondary. Ministering to the Lord is primary.

Ministering to the Lord includes fasting, waiting upon Him, worshiping Him, praying, seeking His mind and His council. That is ministering to the Lord, and when you minister to the Lord, the Lord reveals His purpose. Then you get an Isaac and not an Ishmael, because the initiative is with God.

We don't think up something we ought to do. We minister to the Lord until He shows us what He wants done. In the New Testament, ministering to the Lord came by collective waiting upon God in fasting and prayer. Then they received the revelation of God's purpose—"Separate me Barnabas and Saul."

Notice that fasting is mentioned again in verse 3:

“And when they had fasted and prayed, they laid their hands on them, and sent them away.”

The purpose of prayer and fasting the second time was to commission these two men who were being sent forth, to claim for them the grace, authority and power they would need, and to pray for doors to open in the area of ministry to which God was sending them. It's very significant that at the end of the 14th chapter, after they returned, they declared that God opened the door of faith to the Gentiles, and that the task to which they were sent was fulfilled. That was the result of collective prayer and fasting. Prayer and fasting opens doors which cannot be opened in any other way. Furthermore, work that originates in prayer and fasting, waiting upon God and then due commissioning, fulfills the task to which it is sent.

When I was a missionary in east Africa between 1957 and 1961, it was my practice in those days to fast regularly one day each week, together with my wife. We followed this practice for many years. Eventually I found myself in a new kind of position; I was the principal of a college. I had a tremendous number of more or less secular responsibilities, so I said to myself, “I'm too busy to fast.” And for a time I didn't do it; and I found that somehow my spiritual life was declining. I wasn't enjoying the blessing of God, I didn't have the anointing, I didn't have the faith and confidence I was used to. Eventually God showed me, “You've omitted the fasting.” So I went back to it, busy as I was, and the blessing and the anointing began to come back.

Then one day I said to myself, “I am here in east Africa for the next four or five years ... will I, at the end of this period, be able to say when I leave that I have fulfilled the task for which God

sent me?” I had read in the New Testament how those who were sent forth fulfilled the task. They got the job done. And God said very clearly, “If you want New Testament results, you must have New Testament methods.” Those who were sent forth fulfilled the task because it was originated in prayer and fasting. I believe that. I don't believe there is any other way to get New Testament results.

Now, in the course of their journeys to various cities they brought numbers of people to the Lord. These people became disciples, and then on their return journey they visited them again and constituted them into congregations. The means by which they brought congregations into being was the appointment of elders. This was very significant. When elders were appointed there was a transition from merely being a group of disciples to being churches. In Acts 14, verse 23 we read how they appointed the elders:

“And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.”

So we have on three occasions in the New Testament public, collective prayer and fasting on the part of the leaders of the early church;

- 1) First of all, to minister to God and to seek the revelation of His will.
- 2) Secondly, to commission apostles sent forth to fulfill a God-given task.
- 3) Thirdly, to appoint elders, leaders or shepherds in a local congregation.

In the New Testament Church all the primary responsibilities of Christian leadership were accompanied by prayer and fasting—the

seeking of the mind of God, the sending forth of apostles, and the appointing of elders. If you study church order and government, apostles and elders are the two great hinges on which order and government hangs. And notice, in the early church, both elders and apostles were the product of united prayer and fasting. In other words, the whole basis of church life and order was united prayer and fasting.

The unique power of corporate fasting—examples from Israel’s history

If we go back to the Old Testament, we will see that under the Old Covenant God required Israel to fast collectively each Day of Atonement. When this really came home to me, I could picture it in my mind. Think of an entire nation completely turning away from all food and all secular activities for one day every year and humbling themselves before Almighty God. And they did this by fasting.

We can see this very clearly in the Scriptures. In the 16th chapter of Leviticus, verses 29 through 31, we find the actual statement about the observation of the Day of Atonement. The Jews call the Day of Atonement “Yom Kippur.” The last war in Israel, the fourth war, broke out on that particularly sacred day. Perhaps you remember the news commentators pointing out that the majority of the Jewish soldiers went into battle fasting. Why? Because it was the Day of Atonement.

Let’s look at Leviticus 16:29 through 31:

“And this shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourneth among you: for on that day shall the priest make an

atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD. It shall be a sabbath of rest unto you, and ye shall afflict your souls, by a statute for ever.”

Before we come to the meaning of the phrase “afflict your souls,” notice that they were to make this a solemn day, set apart by a divine ordinance forever. How did they afflict their souls? The New Testament tells us that they did it by fasting. This is a very interesting correlation of Old and New Testament. In Acts 27:9 we have the account of the beginning of Paul’s journey by ship to Rome:

“Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, ...”

What does this verse mean by “the fast”? That was the New Testament word for the Day of Atonement. In what season of the year does the Day of Atonement come? It always comes either at the end of September or the beginning of October. What does “the fast was now already past ...” tell us? That it is nearly winter. In the biblical days they didn’t sail in winter—they only sailed in the summer. This is how we specifically know that the day referred to was the Day of Atonement—“the fast.” In other words, we have the evidence of the New Testament that the Jewish believers and the apostles themselves recognized that “to afflict their souls” was to fast. And on that day and that day only, the high priest went beyond the second veil into the Holy of Holies.

I believe that when that war broke out on Yom Kippur, God said, “This is the time on My clock.” I believe Israel is always the minute hand on God’s prophetic clock. And I believe God said, “The time has come for the church to humble their souls by collective fasting, and when the church does that the way will be open into the Holiest of All.” For years I knew that fasting was

effective—but God showed me it is more than that. It is the way. Afflicting your soul through fasting brings the elements of your nature that are in opposition to God under the control of the Holy Spirit.

The power of the cross, fasting and prayer

In closing I would like to quote 2 Chronicles 7:14.

“If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”

Notice, the healing of our land is not hindered by the sin of the unbelievers. It is hindered by the sin of the believers. That is what stands in the way of God doing what needs to be done for our land and for our nation. The church is the barrier.

You see, God works by divine order. The church is the body of Christ. Christ is His Son whom He honors. He will not bypass the church because it would be dishonoring His Son. So if God does anything of grace in the earth, it must be done through the church. If the church will submit and yield to God, then God can visit the world through the church, but if the church resists God, God cannot reach the world.

In the great revival in 1904 in Wales, the slogan of Evan Roberts, the God-given leader of this revival, was this: *Bend the Church and Bow the World*. (Bring the Church to its knees in prayer and the world will bow to the will of the Lord.) When you can bend the church there is no problem bowing the world. The problem with God is always with His stiff-necked, self-righteous, stubborn people.

God says, “If my people ...” What’s the first requirement? Not to pray, but to humble ourselves. “God resisteth the proud.” If you pray out of pride, your prayer gets nowhere. “But He gives grace to the humble.”

Interestingly, the word *humble* in the phrase *humble themselves* is the same word that is used in Leviticus 16:29 for *afflict*, in the phrase *afflict your souls*. If you trace that back in the concordance, there are two translations used in the King James—to afflict or to humble. Either of them is pretty good. So when God requires His people to humble themselves, He is telling them to fast collectively. This is His basic requirement. He says, “When you do that, and then pray and then seek My face and turn from your wicked ways, I will heal your land.” That is the thing that God is asking of His people at this time. Our part in restoration is to humble ourselves, pray, seek God’s face, and turn from our wicked ways. When we do that, God will heal our land.

(Please note: As far as fasting within the 100 Days is concerned, each individual should decide for themselves before the Lord, if, and in what way they want to commit to it.)

Israel and the UN

by Andrew Tucker

Since the Second World War, the United Nations has become the primary (but not sole) set of institutions within which international diplomacy is carried out. The UN institutions are being used by the nations of the world to place more and more pressure on Israel. One of the most pressing issues on the UN agenda is the creation of a Palestinian state. As proposed, this would result in the removal of Jews from Judea and Samaria (the Biblical heartland of Israel) and the division of Jerusalem. From a Biblical perspective, this is very significant.

Legitimacy of the state of Israel

The impression is often given that Israel was created as a result of the Shoah (Holocaust), and that it was established as a result of UN decisions. It is often stated that Palestine was a land that “belonged” to an Arab people called Palestinians, which was “invaded” by Jews.

These impressions are incorrect. Although the modern state of Israel was only officially established in May 1948, its origins long pre-date the creation of the United Nations in 1945. This histori-

cal context is often ignored when the legal status of Israel is under discussion. In fact, the legitimacy of the State of Israel under international law rests on two main pillars, both of which pre-date WWII and which are closely intertwined and interrelated:

- the inherent right of the Jewish people to self-determination under modern international law, based on the historical connection between the Jewish people and the land of Palestine for thousands of years—a connection more intimate and durable than any other identifiable people group—and their acknowledged right to re-establish their nation in the land; and
- the rights and title with respect to Palestine conferred on the Jewish people by the Allied Powers after the First World War (the “San Remo” resolution of April 1920) as recognized in the Mandate of Palestine implemented by the Council of the League of Nations in 1922.

These historical legal foundations subsequently found expression in the declaration of the State of Israel on 14th May 1948. While recognition as such is not required for the legitimacy of a State, it is significant that Israel was recognized by many States after its establishment and also that it was admitted in 1949 as a Member of the United Nations.

The UN and state sovereignty

The United Nations Charter is a treaty. States voluntarily have made commitments to comply with the provisions of the UN Charter and are bound by them. But the members of the UN have not abandoned their sovereignty. Provided they comply with the terms of the treaty, and international law generally, the member states of the UN remain—as a matter of international law—free in the choices they make when voting in the UN institutions.

This is an important point. It is often argued, for example, that states are bound by the previous decisions of the UN General Assembly or Security Council. This is not correct. States are only bound by international law. The most important sources of international law are treaties (including the UN Charter) and customary international law. Strictly speaking, while decisions of the UN institutions may constitute evidence of international law, the resolutions of the General Assembly and Security Council do not create international law and are non-binding.

The UN—a political body

The UN is basically a political body. Within the UN framework many alliances are formed and political choices made. There are 193 members of the UN. They all have the right to participate in meetings of the General Assembly. Discussions within the General Assembly (which may range over many issues, not all of them related to the core UN values of peace and security) usually result in resolutions. Each member has an equal vote in the General Assembly.

Non-member states are entitled to participate in meetings and maintain a mission. There are two officially-recognized non-member states: the Holy See and the “State of Palestine”. Neither of these non-member states is sympathetic to the state of Israel.

Many intergovernmental organizations are recognized as “permanent observers” meaning they have a right to participate as observers in meetings and maintain an office in the UN headquarters. Many UN resolutions are prepared within these multilateral institutions. Two of the most important are the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC).

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) has played a significant role within the UN. This is a movement that started in the early

1960s arising out of opposition to the Cold War, colonialism and western dominance. The 120 members of the NAM (mostly African and Asian–Arab nations) have tended to be especially critical of the US and Israel, and supportive of the Palestinian cause. It is indicative that the 16th annual summit of the NAM was held in Tehran in 2012.

The UN member states are unofficially divided into five geopolitical regional groups. What began as an informal means of sharing the distribution of posts for General Assembly committees has taken on a much more expansive role. Depending on the UN context, regional groups control elections to UN–related positions, on the basis of geographic representation, as well as coordinate substantive policy, and form common fronts for negotiations and voting. The groups are:

- the African Group (54 member states);
- the Asia–Pacific Group (53 member states);
- the Eastern European Group (23 member states);
- the Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC) (33 member states);
- the Western European and Others Group (WEOG) (28 member states). The WEOG includes Australia, NZ and Canada, with USA as Observer.

Israel is in an isolated position within the UN. Of the 193 UN member states, 22 do not even recognize Israel as a state: Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Brunei, Chad, Cuba, Indonesia, Iran, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, North Korea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

Although Israel is geographically in Asia, its membership in the Asia–Pacific Group has always been withheld due to the large ma-

jority of Muslim countries in the Asian block, which have refused to allow Israel's acceptance. This means that Israel has not been eligible for the most important UN positions. For example, Israel has never been a member of the Security Council. This may change now that (since December 2013) Israel has been admitted as a “temporary full member” of the Western European and Others Group.

The 2004 ICJ decision—an example of UN political processes

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) is a UN organ that was set up to arbitrate on disputes between UN member states, and to advise UN institutions on matters of law. The most important decision of the ICJ from Israel's perspective is the Advisory Opinion of 2004 concerning the security barrier. This decision is often cited as authority for the view that the Israeli settlements are “illegal”. This is alarming, given that the background and content of this Advisory Opinion demonstrate the unhappy intertwinement of law and politics. It contains many statements and conclusions of law and fact that are inaccurate, incomplete and over-simplified. It is astounding that there is so little discussion about the court's findings of fact and legal analysis. While, in general, decisions of the ICJ should be treated with the utmost respect; in this case, the advice of the ICJ should be treated with the greatest of caution.

The International Court of Justice has two roles. First, states may ask the ICJ to decide on a dispute between them, in accordance with international law (“contentious cases”). Such decisions are binding on the parties to the dispute. Second, organs of the United Nations or other specialized agencies may request the ICJ to **advise** them on **legal questions** (“advisory jurisdiction”). These are two completely different situations, and they should not

be confused. The advisory role of the ICJ should not be used to resolve a dispute between two parties. That is, however, in effect what has happened here. The PLO and Arab states could not invoke the contentious jurisdiction of the ICJ to solve their conflicts with Israel because, in the first place, the PLO is not a state; and secondly, Israel would not in any event consent to bring the conflicts before the Court. In contentious cases, only States are entitled to submit a case to the Court and the court only has jurisdiction in such cases if all of the States involved in the dispute consent to it having jurisdiction. A State cannot be compelled to submit to the jurisdiction of the Court. The PLO and Arab States basically used the UN advisory opinion procedure to create what is now referred to as a “decision” of the ICJ (it is in fact nothing more than an opinion), which in turn is being “used” by most other states as if it were a binding decision enforceable against Israel. In other words the advisory procedure was used to disguise a contentious case, which otherwise would never have been put before the court. That is a totally unacceptable misuse of the UN’s Advisory Opinion procedure.

Advisory Opinions are **non-binding**. The UN General Assembly is entitled to ask the ICJ for an opinion on a matter of law, in order to assist it in its own decision-making. The ICJ’s opinion must be treated with great respect, but the General Assembly is not entitled to treat the ICJ’s opinion as binding. The General Assembly (and all the UN Member States) have their own responsibility to make up their own mind about the legal matter concerned. They have an obligation to carefully and critically review the ICJ’s advice, both in terms of its statement of the relevant facts as well as its legal analysis and conclusions. In my view, the General Assembly and Member States that simply adopt the 2004 Opinion as if it were a binding dictate of international law are seriously neglecting this responsibility.

It is important to understand why the question of the international legal consequences of the Israeli security fence was submitted to the ICJ for advice. There are many fences in the world that have been built to protect one community from a neighboring population. The fence in the area of Kashmir is disputed by both India and Pakistan. Fences have been built by Morocco in the area that has been claimed (according to the UN, correctly) by Western Sahara, and by Saudi Arabia on land claimed by both Yemen and Saudi Arabia. None of these fences has been brought before the ICJ; why was the Israeli fence so special? The answer lies in the area of politics. A large number of the members of the UN General Assembly simply have more political interest to gain by having the ICJ determine the status of the Israeli security fence under international law than any of the other fences.

An examination of the background to this case, the process and the reasoning of the ICJ demonstrates clearly that the Arab Member States, together with the PLO, used this process as a political means to condemn Israel’s “occupation” of the West Bank and to seek a *de facto* decision on the legal significance of the 1949 Armistice lines (the so-called “Green Line”, or “pre-1967 border”).

The process was started by a group of 26 mainly Islamic states¹ that made a proposal to the General Assembly that the ICJ be asked to make an Advisory Opinion on the “legal consequences” of what they referred to as the “West Bank Separation Wall”. Fourteen of those 26 states do not even recognize Israel’s right of existence, and most of them have a very dubious reputation to say the least when it comes to upholding principles of democracy and the rule of law.

1) Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Comoros, Cuba, Djibouti, Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mauritania, Morocco, Namibia, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen and Palestine.

Each of these 26 states has a history of anti-Israel voting in the UN. The resolution to request the Advisory Opinion was adopted on 3rd December 2003 by only 90 States, which is less than half of the 191 members of the UN¹.

The Court is not obliged to render an opinion as requested by the General Assembly, but has the obligation to decide whether or not to comply with a request for advice². In this case the Court had every opportunity to refuse to render the requested Advice. In failing to reject the request for advice, the Court in effect allowed itself to become a player in the political processes surrounding the Israeli–Arab conflict.

The UN, Palestinian statehood and the division of Jerusalem

The UN member states have taken many measures since the 1967 Six Day War to implement an Arab Palestinian state situated in the territories recaptured by Israel in the 1967 Six Day War—the Gaza strip, the “West Bank” and the Golan Heights—often referred to as the “Occupied Palestinian Territories”. For example, in 1975 the UN General Assembly established the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP), and requested it to recommend a programme of implementation to enable the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights to self-determination without external interference, national independence and sovereignty; and to return to their homes and property from which they had been displaced.

1) 90 states voted in favor, 8 against (Australia, Ethiopia, Micronesia, Israel, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, United States), 74 abstentions, and 19 absentee members.

2) Article 65(1) of the Statutes of the Court provide that “[t]he Court **may** give an advisory opinion on any legal question at the request of” an authorized UN organ (emphasis added).

The Committee’s recommendations were endorsed by the Assembly, to which the Committee reports annually. The Assembly established the Division for Palestinian Rights as its secretariat and, throughout the years, has gradually expanded the Committee’s mandate. The CEIRPP has been instrumental in the creation of General Assembly resolutions criticizing Israel’s military administration in the “Occupied Territories” and promoting the position of the PLO and Palestinian Authority.

Since the early 1970s, countless General Assembly and Security Council resolutions have called for the establishment of a Palestinian state based on the “pre-1967 borders”, also known as the Green Line. The Green Line is in fact only a cease-fire line established at the conclusion of the 1947–9 war of independence—not recognized borders. Most recently, on 29th November 2012, the General Assembly adopted a resolution granting “Palestine” official non-member observer status in the UN institutions. This does not amount to full recognition of statehood, but comes very close. In addition, in 2011 the PLO submitted an application to the Security Council for admission of “Palestine” to the UN; as at the time of writing, no decision has yet been made in relation to that application (pending the outcome of the current Israeli–Palestinian negotiations).

It is important to appreciate that the Green Line runs through the heart of Jerusalem—cutting off the Old City and surrounding neighbourhoods from the Western parts of the city. Further, the so-called West Bank covers what is the Biblical and historical heartland of the Jewish people. Adopting the Green Line as a border would mean separating the Jewish people from cities and towns with which—with the exception of the 19 years of Jordanian occupation between 1948 and 1967, during which all Jews were expelled, and Jewish holy sites were destroyed—they have had a close and intimate connection for millennia.

These UN resolutions claim that Israeli settlements outside the Green Line are “illegal” and that an Arab state is “required” by international law. It is not at all clear that this is the case. In fact, it is strongly arguable that international law does not require the creation of a Palestinian state. The status of the territories outside the Green Line is disputed, and the legality of the settlements is a matter of debate. International law definitely does not require the enforcement of the pre-1967 lines as borders.

APPENDIX 5

Germany on the way to the Valley of Decision

by Harald Eckert

For me, as a Christian from Germany, the biblical background outlined above raises an obvious question: Where will Germany find itself on this road to the Valley of Decision in the end times? Where will Germany stand when the judge of the world returns to separate the nations into the “sheep” and the “goats”? Moreover, what influence—what responsibility—do we have as Christians in this respect?

Jews and Germans—a community of destiny

The German people and the Jewish people are interlinked in a unique way. As far as we know, the first Jews entered the territory of what is now southern and western Germany together with the Romans in around the first century AD. This coexistence of nearly two thousand years started to take a drastic turn for the worse, from the point of view of the Jews, around 900 years ago at the time of the Crusades. Thousands of Jews fell prey to the marauding Crusaders along the Rhine, the Danube and then further south.

The following centuries in Germany were characterized by a never-ending series of massacres, persecutions and expulsions, and all manner of discriminatory practices against the Jews living in Germany. The Reformation also failed to bring about more than perhaps a gradual change in this regard. Unlike in other countries (England, France, Spain, Portugal), however, there was never a total nationwide expulsion. This was primarily due to the highly fragmented nature of government in the German states and the fact that, until the 19th century, the central government was not generally strong enough to enforce such a comprehensive, nationwide measure.

Following the Napoleonic wars, secularization and a gradual liberalization of the social order, the Jews in Germany gradually began to obtain civil rights, culminating in equality before the law in the second half of the 19th century. From then on, there was a strong tendency among the Jews of Germany to free themselves to a large extent from their cultural isolation and adapt to the German culture and way of life. This led, in some cases, to total assimilation, with the result that many Jews had their children baptized, thus becoming formally integrated in Church and society.

Around the time of the First World War, a significant proportion of Jews considered themselves to be more German than Jewish, and many made distinctive, far-reaching contributions to German society as physicians, lawyers, intellectuals, scientists and artists. Until the Third Reich, there was no country in modern Europe (with the possible exception of Holland), where the Jews were so integrated and assimilated as in Germany—a situation which was comparable, perhaps, to that of the Jews in the USA today. Many Jews in Germany at the start of the 20th century saw themselves as loyal German patriots. Against this backdrop, the marginalization and expulsion of the Jews by the Nazi dictatorship, and then the

Holocaust during the Second World War, came as something totally unexpected, indeed inconceivable, for most Jews in Germany.

This brief overview of 2,000 years of German-Jewish history shows us that the link between the Germans and the Jews is a special one. During the build up to the Second World War a shroud of evil intent overshadowed this relationship—with the Holocaust being its devastating climax. And yet the affinity of the Jews to the Germans, as manifested particularly in the 19th century and early 20th century, was exceptional, and clearly different in nature from the relationships of the Jews to the Poles, the Russians and the peoples of the other parts of Europe in which Jews lived in large numbers. It is particularly—but not exclusively—against the background of the Holocaust that the relationship between the German people and the Jewish people can justifiably be described as exceptional, if not unique—a community of destiny.

Germany—the “worst of sinners”

The Holocaust is often described, and rightly so, as a singular outrage that cannot be compared with any other negative event in all of human history. It is my personal belief that this crime was not a coincidence or accident of history, but the unique harvest of a unique sowing.

The first layer of seeds was sown by the theology of the Church Fathers and the early Catholic Church, who essentially taught, Bible in hand, that God had damned and rejected the Jews once and for all because they had murdered Christ. Accordingly, the Church became the new Israel, Rome the new Jerusalem, and the Pope essentially replaced the Messiah; furthermore, Augustine claimed that the victory of Christianity in the Roman Empire had ushered in the biblically prophesied millennial Kingdom. Jews and heretics

were the greatest troublemakers in this supposedly paradisiacal era and thus had to be silenced or annihilated.

As we have already stated, the Reformation brought no significant improvement for the Jews of Germany in this respect. It was not until the secularization and liberalization of German society that a tangible improvement was felt and aroused in the Jews the hope of a fundamental and permanent turn for the better. Unfortunately, however, this hope would also turn out to be deceptive.

Nationalist currents spread the poison of anti-Semitism in the form of a warning against Jewish world domination. The labour movement, for its part, stoked the fires of anti-Semitism in the form of a warning against Jewish control over world finance. More liberal and academic circles warned against the Jews as the driving force behind a Communist revolutionary conspiracy. In the major Churches, anti-Semitism of both Catholic and Lutheran varieties lived on.

To summarize, we can say that for all the differences in German society at the start of the 20th century, there was one single, common unifier: anti-Semitism. Almost every major social current or group had its own form of envy, prejudice, fear or superiority toward “the Jews”. Throughout Europe—and beyond—no other people has experienced nearly two thousand years of anti-Semitism, the last 900 years of which (since the time of the Crusades) have repeatedly seen extremely violent and deadly forms; it is a phenomenon that has been embraced by all major areas of society in one form or another, from the traditional variants to more modern manifestations. In this respect, Germany in the first half of the 20th century was unique.

If we now consider this brief historical overview in the light of the biblical analysis contained in the first part of this book, there

is only one conclusion that can be drawn: with regard to our national attitude, and our associated behaviour towards the Jews—at least as far as the last 900 years are concerned—the German nation has, in the words of Paul, been the “worst of sinners”. If the Holocaust was the end of the story, then my nation would be the nation that was more deserving of this eschatological judgement than any other.

“Where sin increased, grace increased all the more” (Romans 5:20b)

Yes—Germany harvested a degree of judgement: the hail of bombs on Germany’s cities towards the end of the war, the death toll of soldiers and civilians alike, the revenge and humiliation by the victorious powers, particularly on the Russian front, the partition of the country—and much more besides.

But then we also have the other side of the coin: the establishment of a stable, free form of society in the western part of the divided country. This part of the country experienced the so-called “economic miracle”, increasing prosperity, gradual re-acceptance into the family of nations and the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel just 20 years after the end of the Holocaust (1965). The ultimate climax, totally unexpected by many, was the bloodless Reunification of Germany in 1989. What had we done to deserve that?

In the same way that it is difficult to find rational explanations for how such an unparalleled rupture in civilization as the Holocaust could have arisen in one of the leading, civilized nations of the world, Germany, so too is it difficult to find rational explanations for Germany’s rapid comeback and for the grace that allowed the bloodless Reunification. The biblical dimension helps us considerably, however, to evaluate and reconcile these events, that

appear irrational at first glance, from the perspective of the God of Israel and the “King of kings”.

Under the heading of “grace and judgement”, we perceive something that is at once very moving and astounding. There is a key trait in the character of God that manifests itself in the following manner: it is precisely where sin and the abysmal depths of human depravity appear to have won their greatest triumphs over God’s good intentions for mankind that the grace of God can manifest itself all the more powerfully. A few examples:

- Israel is described in the Old Testament (Obadiah 2) as a small nation. It was squeezed in between the major power of Egypt to the south and the major northern powers of Mesopotamia (Assyria, Babylon, Persia) or even further north (Greece, Rome and today Russia). Why does God choose for himself the smallest of nations? In order to demonstrate His love and power all the more (Ezekiel 36:22).
- Saul, later known as Paul, was one of the most fanatical persecutors of Christians of his generation. Following his conversion to Jesus, he refers to himself as the “worst of sinners” (1 Tim. 1:16)—and goes on to become one of Jesus’ most effective disciples as the Apostle to the Gentiles and one of the most important authors of the New Testament alongside the evangelists and Luke.
- Jesus himself opens up a way of forgiveness, reconciliation with God and life under God’s blessing to precisely those sinners who least appear to have deserved it: prostitutes, the avaricious, the unscrupulous, and even one of the two criminals crucified with Him. He provides an astonishing outlook in one of His parables: “the last will be first” (Matthew 20:16).

We could add further examples. All have one thing in common: precisely where guilt and injustice must surely be met with judgement and punishment, instead—against all human reason and expectation, and in the face of the generally applicable laws of history—God, in His grace, unfathomably announces a way out. For me, this characteristic of God, unfathomable for human understanding, is most starkly expressed in this one sentence from Romans 5:20b: “Where sin increased, grace increased all the more”.

Many Christians have experienced this at a personal level and can give the most amazing testimonies. In our context, the question that now arises is this: is it possible that this characteristic of God, that many of us have experienced at a personal level and in a life-changing way, wants to manifest itself at a collective, national level? Is it possible that the staggering history of Germany after the Second World War might have something to do with this trait of God’s character?

Germany on the way to the “Valley of Decision”

If we look at the history of the last 1,800 years (since the times of the Church Fathers), but in particular the history of the last 900 years (since the time of the Crusades), with the Holocaust as an unparalleled, demonic climax of our German sin against the Jewish people, then the answer to the question of the eschatological future of the German nation ought to be resoundingly clear: the German nation belongs, more than any other nation, on the side of the “goat nations”.

Why so much grace? Why so much favour? How is it possible, today, that official Israel calls Germany the best friend of Israel (alongside the USA)? Who could have imagined that as ever being possible 70, 60 or even 50 years ago? Just a few short decades ago, this development was just as generally inconceivable as the bloodless Reunification of Germany. Just like the Holocaust itself, both

events are unparalleled in human history. They defy intellectual and academic categories of analogy and comparability.

In order to interpret and classify these events appropriately, a different coordinate system is required: a biblical one. Based on this, we can assert that as far as the eschatological fate of Germany is concerned, from God's perspective, the last word has clearly not yet been spoken.

Could it possibly be God's objective that the very nation that has historically proved itself to be the "last" in terms of its relationship with the Jewish people could, and should, transform itself to become the "first", as the nations head towards the Valley of Decision in this final phase of human history before the Second Coming of Jesus? From the greatest enemy of the Jewish people to the greatest friend of the Jewish people? From Saul to Paul? From the most obvious "goat nation" to the most surprising "sheep nation"? To become a blessing for Israel, even though that means heading towards more difficult rather than easier times? And to be a sign to the nations of the world, all of which are heading towards this biblical Valley of Decision in the end times, and which might perhaps take encouragement from the example of Germany to leave the path of the "goats" and choose, instead, to set off down the path of the "sheep"—even if there is a high price to pay?

The Church and the "Valley of Decision"

In my view, the decision regarding which side Germany will be on in the end-times judgement when Jesus returns remains open. It is probably the most important question facing our nation: will we go against the increasingly anti-Christian and thus also anti-Semitic spirit of the age and stand by Israel, and bless Israel, in this difficult final phase of the end times? Or will we allow ourselves to be swept along by the anti-Semitic and anti-Christian powers and forces of our times?

To put it another way, will the forces that have been at work in the last 900 or 1,800 years of our history, and that celebrated their greatest triumph in the Holocaust, once again break through completely and regain dominance over the soul of our nation in this final epoch before the Second Coming of Jesus? Or, by God's grace, will the forces of sincere distress at our history, of repentance, change of heart, redemption and renewal of our relationship with the Jewish people have a decisive influence on our German nation?

From my point of view, the ultimate responsibility for how this question is answered lies not with the government, media, intelligentsia or chattering classes of Germany, but with the Church. If we are "priests and prophets" (1 Peter 2:9) for our German nation, and "salt and light" (Matthew 5:13ff) in the midst of our people, our relationship with the Jewish people and with Israel should and can serve as a role model, leading our nation by example along the path it should take in relation to Israel. If we fail to adopt and grow into this lifestyle, culture, credibility, power of prayer and authority, and make them our own, then we have no right to try pinning responsibility on other groups in our society.

With a few outstanding exceptions, it is patently obvious that we as Christians—as the Church—did not have this insight and power in the past, particularly in the first decades of the 20th century. Has there been any fundamental, radical change since then? If not, are we prepared to accept this challenge, this offer of God's grace, to allow ourselves to be changed and to take others with us? I consider this to be the most important question currently facing the Church in Germany if it is serious about the welfare and fate of our nation.

Three groundbreaking promises

One question that is asked time and time again is this: why, and for how much longer, must we go on dealing with the tragedy

of the Holocaust and our associated responsibility as Christians and as Germans? Given all that we have said in this book, there can really be only one possible answer: until Germany collectively comes down immovably on the side of Israel, on a historic scale, and adopts the following position until Jesus returns:

- When the “least of Jesus’ brothers”, the Jewish people, is in need: Germany helps.
- When the Promised Land is to be divided: Germany does not join in.
- When Jerusalem’s status as the Jewish capital is questioned: Germany does not go along with this.
- When Israel is isolated, demonized and slandered: Germany sees through the underlying agitation and manipulation and stands firm.

And Germany finds the strength to do all this because there is a Christian Church that is deeply purified, that prays accordingly and lives with this exemplary attitude towards Israel. In this way, they give those in government, those in positions of responsibility and the opinion makers in our nation the support, security and courage they need to swim against the current of increasingly anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli world opinion.

Let us finish by considering three biblical statements that can encourage us Christians as we face this daunting task and challenge:

- 1. God’s kindness leads to repentance** (Romans 2:4). The correct question is not “How often must I repent?”, but “How deeply may I repent?”. It is an immense gift of grace to be able to repent, to cleanse one’s conscience, to be liberated from the burden of our failings and errors and to be able

to set out down a new path without these chains, unburdened, and exhilarated at having experienced this grace. It is a huge gift, not a burdensome obligation! And if we consider God’s goodness and favour towards Germany in the past few decades, in particular the gracious gift of Reunification, then we can understand this as a tremendous, infinitely kind-hearted invitation. God is raising up our nation in grace because He has confidence in us, because He is working on the assumption that we will deal responsibly with this gift—responsibly in many respects, but first and foremost in relation to His people, to the Jewish people, to Israel.

- 2. Whoever has been forgiven much loves much** (Luke 7:47). There are many fruits of repentance, but the greatest and most precious fruit of repentance that Jesus mentions is love. When we repent of our indifference, arrogance and hardness of heart toward the Jewish people, and receive God’s forgiveness, our hearts are filled instead with love for God and with God’s love for His people. The dimension of the guilt and of the forgiveness indicate the magnitude of the love that God has planned for us. And this requires no less than the experience and certainty of God’s love for us, and God’s love in our hearts for the Jewish people.

- 3. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded** (Luke 12:48). If we understand the ever deeper experience of repentance and the ever deeper experience of forgiveness and God’s love as gifts that we can experience for ourselves, it becomes clear to us that God is sharing this immense grace with us because He has planned something special for us. He wants to make us, both as a Church and as a nation, a blessing for Israel. In so doing, He wants us to serve as a role model and as an incentive, at both

Church and national levels, for other nations. He is in the process of demonstrating His grace on a historic and world-wide scale, performing signs with a global impact. The first sign is manifested in Israel: the return of the Jewish people and the restoration of fertility and vitality to both the land and the people. But this is to be followed by a second sign of similar magnitude: the astonishing friendship between Germany and Israel. The role model and inspiration for this is to be the good example set by the Church. We must not misunderstand the favour and the grace that we Germans have experienced over the past few decades: it is neither something we should merely take for granted, nor is it an onerous, wearisome duty that is imposed upon us. It is a sign that God has great plans for us, in the same way that a father often has more confidence in his child's abilities than the child itself. This should not make us proud, but humble and thankful. At the same time, however, it should also motivate us to want to live up to this responsibility and the undeserved trust that has been put in us.

APPENDIX 6

The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood

**Rare phenomena in the heavens in 2014 and 2015—Thoughts
from Lance Lambert's Middle East Update, October 2012**

by Dr. Wolfgang Schuler

All the signs indicate that we are living in what the Bible calls the “end times”. The prophet foretells highly conspicuous signs for these times: “*The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.*” (Joel 2:31). Jesus himself refers to this prophecy in His end-times teaching in Luke 21:25–26. Peter also quotes the words of the prophet in His fiery sermon at Pentecost in Acts 2:20–21.

We are all familiar with solar eclipses, which still cause excitement in our day and age. But how can the moon turn to blood? In the popular science magazine “Wissenschaftsmagazin”, we read that “Blutmond” (German for “blood moon”) is a common name for a total lunar eclipse. We can read about this on the Internet under www.scinexx.de/dossier-detail-135-5.html.

Diffraction of the light rays in the earth's atmosphere causes the earth's umbra shadow on the surface of the moon to turn rusty brown to blood-red in colour during a total lunar eclipse. NASA has produced a short animated film that allows you to observe this natural phenomenon at home on your PC: www.bild.de/news/inland/mondfinsternis/blutmond-wo-kann-man-ihn-sehen-18378616.bild.html (please right-click on the arrow on the small image in the upper right-hand corner).

Right at the start of Genesis, we are told that the sun and moon were given to us for signs to understand the times (Genesis 1:14f). Jesus urgently exhorts us to recognize the signs of the age. According to NASA, there will be a remarkable accumulation of phenomena involving the sun and moon in the coming two to three years. In each of the years 2014 and 2015 there will be two blood-red moons in conjunction with total lunar eclipses, and all four of them will precisely coincide with two major Jewish holidays: 1st day of Passover 5774 (15th April 2014) and 1st day of Sukkot 5775 (9th October 2014), and then again 1st day of Passover 5775 (4th April 2015) and 1st day of Sukkot 5776 (29th September 2015). This is an extremely rare combination. The new Jewish year 5776 begins during this period on 13th September 2015. This is a sabbath year, or *shmitah*, a holy year that is celebrated every seven years and in which, according to scripture, all debts between the people of Israel are remitted. There will also be two solar eclipses around this turn of the year, both of which will again coincide with important Jewish festivals: 1st Nissan 5775, the start of the biblical year (20th March 2015), and Rosh Hashanah 5776, the modern Jewish New Year (13th September 2015). One will be a total solar eclipse, the other a partial eclipse. It will be centuries before such a combination recurs.

According to ancient rabbinical tradition, the moon tends to be more of a sign for the Jewish people, while the sun refers more

to the nations. The Jewish festivals and calendar are aligned with the moon, for example, while the calendars of the nations are predominantly solar-oriented.

The last time two blood-red moons occurred on Jewish high holidays in each of two successive years was in 1967/1968. That was the year in which Jerusalem came back into Jewish hands again, after nearly two thousand years, in an existential war that Israel did not want and the goal of which was the destruction of Israel. Surprisingly, however, Israel emerged as the victor. Furthermore, she won back Jerusalem, which was not something that Israel had planned. The same series of blood-red moons occurred in 1948/1949—the year in which the modern State of Israel was born. In the very night on which the State was founded, seven armies from the neighbouring Islamic countries attacked Israel in order to destroy her. However, against all expectations, the tiny new-born country, with a totally inadequate supply of arms, emerged victorious and even obtained more territory than the international community had granted the people of Israel.

The next time such “blood moons” fall on Jewish festivals, in 2014/2015, they are additionally accompanied by two solar eclipses, also on highly significant dates in the Jewish year. Moreover, this period coincides with the start of a sabbath year, or *shmitah*, that grants a general remission of debts for the Jewish people. All in all, this adds up to seven signs. Can this really be mere coincidence?

In the face of such an accumulation of signs, Lance Lambert raises the question as to whether this could possibly presage the imminent fulfillment of the ancient end-times prophecies of the prophet Joel for Israel and the nations, described in Joel 2:31ff, namely the complete restoration of Israel on the one hand, and the final judgment of God on the nations hostile to Israel on the other, i.e. those nations that either want to destroy Israel or that “only”

want to divide up the land that was promised to Israel, and also the holy city of Jerusalem (Joel 3:2).

It goes without saying that we know “neither the day nor the hour”. Not even the Son knows these, only the Father. However, we are called to test and recognize the “signs of the age”—signs that the Father established by His power that we might behave accordingly, in a similar way to the wise virgins in the parable of Jesus, and that we, like they, might be ready at all times for the coming of the bridegroom, today and every day!

Sources: CD “Israel, Middle-East Update”, October 2012 and January 2013, by Lance Lambert, Jerusalem, available via www.cfri.de (also in German translation); www.talmud.de/cms/Kalender.363.0.html.

APPENDIX 7

Testimony and Vision

by Harald Eckert

I grew up in a relatively “normal” German family. One of my grandfathers was an active and dedicated Nazi and soldier in the Wehrmacht. He died a few years after the war as the result of an injury sustained during the war. One of my grandmothers was a Christian believer and member of the Confessing Church (Bekennende Kirche). The Confessing Church saw itself as a Bible-believing counter-movement to the lutheran nazi-wing “German Christians” (“Deutsche Christen”) that was dominated by Nazi ideology. The Confessing Church was thus, in essence, a resistance movement. (Karl Barth, Martin Niemöller and Dietrich Bonhöffer were the most prominent representatives of the Confessing Church.) My other ancestors who lived then simply tried to get through those troubled times as unscathed as possible.

Childhood and youth

I myself grew up in a Lutheran family in the predominantly Catholic city of Munich. It was from my mother that I learnt to pray, while it was from my aforementioned Christian grandmother that I not only learnt many stories from the Bible, but also heard many testimonies about what she had lived through in 12 years of

Nazi Germany and nearly 15 years of Communism in East Germany. In my early teens in the mid-1970s, after several years of personal wandering and searching, I rediscovered my faith in Jesus, that had meant so much to me as a child, in the revivalist and spiritually dynamic surroundings of the so-called “Jesus People” movement.

A short while later, still in the mid-70s, I got to know someone who became a great influence on my youth: the former philosophy scholar at the renowned Cambridge University, Derek Prince, who went on to become a world-famous Bible teacher. In the 1980s, I published a magazine of teaching with the title “*Wiederherstellung*” (Restoration), influenced by this Bible teacher. This magazine already focused on the issues of God’s promises to Israel and to the Church in the times leading up to the Second Coming of Jesus.

The question of a biblical perspective for the nations was also touched upon, taking into consideration both missionary aspects and the relationship of the nations to Israel. In the 1990s, an even closer cooperation and friendship with Derek Prince ensued. At the same time, I was also in the leadership team of “*Fürbitte für Deutschland*” (Intercession for Germany), a dynamic prayer movement in those days.

Early calling

It was already during these early years of my life that I had a number of experiences that hinted at, and prepared the way for, my subsequent calling that would go on to become ever clearer. I would like to describe three of them.

Due to my experiences of revival around the time of my conversion, prayer for revival in Germany was already a major concern for me from an early age. This was combined with my prayer for

unity among Christians, for growth of the “body of Christ” and similar concerns. The issue of God’s concern for our German nation was already discernible on the horizon, but by no means as central as it has become in recent years. The phenomenon of the Holocaust had also occupied me since my youth, but more as a gigantic question mark, as a permanent irritation with which I was unable to come to terms, either historically or spiritually. My parents had a weekend house to which I used to enjoy retreating for a few days to seek fellowship with the Lord.

I still remember clearly how, during one of these retreats, the following words from Romans 5:20b grabbed hold of me for the first time: “Where sin increased, grace increased all the more”. The astonishing thing was that while this Bible verse had gripped me during prayer for the “usual” concerns (revival, unity, body of Christ, etc.), I immediately understood that it had been placed in my heart in the context of the sins of the Germans against the Jews and with the promise that God has ways and means of transforming this tragic history into something positive. Moreover, I felt that He had not only the ways and means, but also the resolve to do so. This verse has accompanied me ever since with regard to the question of God’s plans of redemption for Germany. In the meantime that has been about 35 years now.

At about the same time, I had the opportunity to take part in a tour of Israel with a group led by Derek Prince. Some of those in the church I was then attending were interested. I was also interested, and was about to book a place. In a moment of prayer, however, I clearly felt that the Lord was advising me not to go. It was as if He wanted to tell me: “Wait until I open a special door to Israel for you. If you go through that door, it will lead you to your life’s calling.” That was at the end of the 1970s. My first visit to Israel was in 1992, but more about that later.

A few years later, in 1981 I believe, I went to London to visit some friends from my church. They had gone to London as a kind of pioneer team with the goal of founding a congregation there. After having lunch with an acquaintance from London, I had the leisure time to enjoy his beautiful London garden.

During this quiet hour, I had an extraordinary spiritual experience—of a kind that I had never yet experienced. I “heard” God’s Spirit speaking to me with a clarity that was new to me. He asked me the following question: “Harald, do you love My people?” This question triggered an instant response in me: “Of course, Lord, you know I do!” I was thinking of my passionate commitment to unity among Christians, the strengthening of the “body of Christ” and similar things.

After a brief moment of quiet, the question came again: “Harald, do you love My people?” The word “my” caught my particular attention this time, and I realized in an instant that God was referring to the Jewish people. My spontaneous, inner reaction this time was completely different. It was as if a film were running before my mind’s eye. A whole series of situations, scenes and fragments of memory all joined together with a common theme: the danger in which Christians had placed themselves by helping Jews and the price it had cost many of them, particularly under the Nazis. I thought of Corrie ten Boom, Dietrich Bonhöffer and others I had heard or read about in films and books. I was filled with fear—and I could not answer. I remained silent.

Finally, I heard the question a third time: “Harald, do you love My people?” This time, the question triggered something quite different, something totally unexpected. It was as if this question had removed a veil from my inner eye, or, to be more precise perhaps, from my heart. An overwhelming feeling of love and emotional affection and warmth suddenly flooded my heart. I knew

immediately what it was: it was God’s immanent love for His people, the Jewish people. He was giving me an insight into His heart. It was overwhelming. The fear and anxiety that, a moment before, had been so strong in me were washed away in an instant and replaced many times over by God’s love for the Jewish people. I heard myself praying: “Jesus, if your love for your people is so great, I want to ask you to plant a piece of that tremendous love in my heart.” And that is precisely what happened. Yet it was still to be about a decade before I finally made it to Israel for the first time. This again happened unexpectedly and in a way that I could never have imagined.

It was the autumn of 1991 and I was working for “*Fürbitte für Deutschland*” (Intercessors for Germany). One day, a young man of about my age came into our office. He told me that he had recently been in Israel with his father and brother. While there, he became aware that 20th January 1992 would mark the 50th anniversary of the infamous Wannsee Conference. I knew that the term “Wannsee Conference” was connected to the final stage of escalation in the Holocaust, to Auschwitz, and to the master plan to exterminate all 13 million European Jews. It was at this “Conference” that the button was pressed, so to speak, setting the gears in motion for this satanic master plan.

This young believer had the following idea and suggestion: “How about twelve Christians from the post-war generation meet up exactly 50 years later, on 20th January 1992, at the Holocaust memorial Yad Vashem, to repent for the sins of their fathers?” The Bible verse he quoted in reference to this was Isaiah 60:14: “The children of your oppressors will come bowing before you.” I immediately felt a strong, positive inner reaction and it quickly became clear: this was the door that the Lord had spoken to me about 12 or 13 years earlier.

Three people from our group addressed specific aspects of the sins of our fathers before the assembled Germans and Jews, including members of parliament, journalists, religious leaders and the then mayor of Jerusalem, Teddy Kollek. My topic was: “The guilt and failure of Christians in history and during the Third Reich.” Looking back, I can say that this implanted the “DNA” into the nucleus of what would develop into my calling. It was all about the relationship between Christians and Jews—but in a context that is also of central importance at the German–Israeli level. Both the religious dimension and the dimension of international relations would become significantly deeper and wider in the ensuing 20 years.

Struggle for Germany

Step by step I entered into this calling. Throughout the 1990s, the topics of Christians/Jews and Germany/Israel increasingly became the central focus of my heart and ministry—at both these levels. I preached and held lectures, I wrote, I supported and initiated projects and networks aimed both at strengthening the relationship of Christians to the Jewish people and at positively influencing German–Israeli relations. In the past ten years, the European–Israeli dimension has also come more sharply into focus. Moreover, in the past two or three years, new doors have also been opening up in Africa, Asia and beyond. The experiences in the spiritual and practical struggle for Germany also inspired other intercessors, religious leaders and Christians with influence at a political level in their respective countries around the world.

One particular component was the importance of fasting and prayer. From 2004 to 2010, a group of Christians adopted the spiritual strategy of dedicating the first 40 days of the year to fasting and prayer for the relationship of Germany towards Israel. The

degree of fasting was left open to each individual—but more and more believers were touched by the issue and found the strength and motivation to abstain from all solid food for the whole forty days. The vision that God wanted to demonstrate His power of redemption in a special way through Germany and through Germany’s relationship with Israel became a powerful vision and inspiration for ever more of us. During the last of these seven periods of fasting and prayer, in 2010, hundreds of house and prayer groups and thousands of Christians in Germany took up this invitation to collective fasting and prayer.

I am convinced that this is all still a long way from the dimension that God wants to open up for us as Christians in Germany and that is necessary in this colossal struggle for the destiny of our nation. And yet it is nonetheless a far greater degree of unity and shared spiritual commitment for this concern than was ever possible before at this level. This is encouraging, as it is bearing fruit and is a step in the right direction. May this considerable “snowball” develop into a spiritual avalanche that strengthens our nation in the end times, even more than before, in its role as a reliable and faithful friend of Israel, and may it place us collectively as a nation, in the moments of final decision, firmly on the side of the “sheep nations”—as a demonstration of His immeasurable grace! And may we be joined there by as many other peoples and nations as possible!

A Daniel Call concerning the “hinge years” of 2014–2015

by Rev. Rick Ridings

In our daily lives we all face the challenge of seeking to hear the voice of the Lord, in order to fulfill our destiny, and not just allowing ourselves to be ruled by “the tyranny of the urgent”. In the same way, we as prayer leaders must beware to not just pray into “the tyranny of the urgent”, and we must not just use a “shotgun” approach in this era of information overload.

Rather than just praying in response to the flood of news coming our way, we need to learn to enter into the “council of the Lord” like Daniel, one of the greatest intercessors of the Bible. Daniel was a man who “understood the times and the seasons”. Daniel appealed to the Lord for revelation, and was given that revelation in a way that caused kings to seek his counsel. He glorified His God, the God of Israel as the One Who “*changes times and seasons; He sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things; He knows what lies in darkness*” (Daniel 2:21–22).

I, and many others, see a convergence of three factors, which taken together, would seem to say that the Lord is drawing our at-

tention toward being alert and seeking His counsel as to how we should pray in these “hinge years” of 2014–2015.

Factor 1: Seventy years since the end of the Holocaust and World War II

Daniel rightly discerned through the prophecies of Jeremiah that the people of his nation were entering into a strategic moment at the end of the prophesied “seventy years” of exile (Daniel 9:2).

I felt recently that the Lord was impressing upon me that 2014–2015 are two “hinge years”, that is, years when events will take place that will greatly affect the nations, Israel, and the Church for many years afterward. We are entering into the biblically significant “seventy years” since the final battles, the final victory over great forces of evil in World War II, and the end of the Holocaust. Seventy is also the number representing the nations in Genesis 10.

Factor 2: Significant “signs in the heavens”

In addition to this strategic end of a “seventy year” season, we are seeing a convergence of “signs in the heavens” with four “blood moon” lunar eclipses falling on the beginning of both Passover and Succot (the “Feast of Tabernacles”) during both 2014 and 2015. According to research done by Pastor Mark Biltz, the last two times this happened were in the “hinge years” of 1949–1950 (the two years following the establishment of the modern nation state of Israel, and the establishment of many ministries greatly used in world-wide evangelism) and 1967–1968 (when Jerusalem was reunited in the six day war, and what many see as the beginnings of a world-wide outpouring of the Holy Spirit in all denominations, and more major initiatives in missions). Such a “tetrad” of lunar

eclipses coinciding with the start of major Jewish/biblical feasts will not happen again in this century. In addition, there are two solar eclipses falling on the significant dates of the biblical Hebrew calendar “new year’s day” of Adar 29/Nisan 1 on 20 March, 2015, and on the beginning of the Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah) 13 September, 2015. In Jewish tradition and interpretation of the Scriptures, lunar eclipses point to a season (not necessarily a specific date) of portentous events for Israel (which observes a lunar calendar) and solar eclipses point to a season of portentous events for the nations (most of whom follow a solar calendar). Please understand that I am not setting forth a date for the return of our Lord Jesus, or claiming what specific events will occur during 2014/2015. I am simply saying that we need to see this as one more factor pointing us toward being alert to the strategic importance of 2014/2015. We must not allow some who may make spurious predictions based on these “signs in the heavens” to keep us from the clear teaching of the Bible (see: Joel 2:31; Luke 21:11,25,28; Acts 2:20,21; Revelation 6:12) that the Lord will use “signs in the heavens” to draw our attention to a season where He will do major things, and wants us to seek His counsel on how to pray and prepare.

Factor 3: A convergence of major calls to prayer in and for Jerusalem and Israel; and for the nations’ alignments concerning Israel

I have only lived in Jerusalem for 15 years, but I have not seen such a convergence of outside ministries calling such great numbers to focused prayer in this regard.

As a board member of “The European Coalition for Israel”, I am part of their launching (initiated through my good friend, Harald Eckert) of a “Global Prayer Call 2015”, calling intercessors to 100 days of prayer (with seasons of fasting) from 27 January—8

May, 2015 concerning their nation's attitude and alignment with God's Word concerning the Jewish people and Israel.

In addition, I and other leaders in Israel have been asked to welcome and to participate in a large gathering 17 September, 2014 (where thousands of primarily Americans) will join in a Promise Keeper gathering in Jerusalem; another large gathering 10–14 November, 2014 where thousands of internationals (primarily Chinese) will join in an indoor stadium in Jerusalem to pray and worship; and the “Empowered21” event 20–25 May, where thousands of internationals (primarily Indonesian) will join in that same indoor stadium to seek the Lord in Jerusalem.

How should we respond to the convergence of these three factors?

I believe our response to the coming together of these three factors should be the same as that of the great, governmental intercessor Daniel when he realized that the end of their seventy year season of exile was approaching: “So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with Him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes” (Daniel 9:3).

We then see in Daniel 9:4–19, that Daniel pours out His heart on behalf of His nation and people, and His home city of Jerusalem. I believe that a confession of our sins and the sins of our fathers, and of our nation, is the right place to posture ourselves in this season. We need to confess the rebellion of our nations against God's choice of Israel and the Jewish people to play a unique role in His great plan to bring His salvation to the ends of the earth. We need to receive His heart, so that we might weep over our nations. It is so important that we do this during these two strategic “hinge years” of 2014–2015. We need to cry out while there is still hope, and before the hearts of our leaders are hardened.

What if we believe our nation or its leaders will not choose to align properly with God's Word and heart concerning Israel and the Jewish people? We need to realize that it is not for us to decide when it is too late for our nation or leaders. There may be great pressures from the “Babylonian” systems upon our nation and its leaders. But the Lord will always, in His justice, raise up prophetic voices like Daniel, so that those leaders may never say at the Great Judgment that they never heard the truth.

The Sovereign and Just King of Kings appointed Daniel to be such a voice right in the heart of Babylon. And even such a wicked and proud king as Nebuchadnezzar, after seven years of chastening through insanity (as predicted by Daniel in chapter 4), came to a place of repentance, and after his sanity was restored proclaimed: *“Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything He does is right and all His ways are just. And those who walk in pride He is able to humble”* (Daniel 4:37)

We are not called as intercessors into a “ministry” of criticism and complaining concerning our national leaders. Rather we are commanded *“that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority ...”* (1 Timothy 2:1–2a).

Praying for the sake of our nation

We need to pray that our nation will not stumble over the “rock of offense” of God's choice of Israel and the Jewish people to play a unique role in salvation history, even as we pray that they will not stumble over the “rock of offense” of the Cross of the Messiah.

This is true even for the nations that have been oppressed by Islam and taught to hate Israel and the Jewish people. I have ministered many times in Indonesia, and have seen first-hand that this

has been a major key to the great turnaround in their economy, and for millions of Muslims to come to salvation through Jesus.

In May 2012 I had the privilege of being part of a prayer meeting of about 120,000 intercessors in Jakarta, Indonesia. By video, they were linked with another estimated 2 million Indonesian intercessors. They started off this huge prayer meeting with the greeting “Shalom”, and blew over 200 shofars at a certain moment.

In November, I spoke at a meeting of about 7,000 pastors, elders, and deacons who are connected with a major church in Jakarta. Once again, they started the meeting with “Shalom”. In their prayer tower afterwards, I heard their intercessors weeping and crying out to the Lord for their nation of Indonesia and for Israel. Is it any wonder that their national economy is booming during a time when many in the West have greatly declined? Is it any wonder that great numbers of Moslems there are turning to Jesus as the Truth, the Life, and the Way, but also as the “Jewish Messiah”?

It is time we call our nations to align with the Genesis 12:3 mandate (reaffirmed, and applied specifically to Israel in Numbers 24:1–9) to bless the seed of Abraham.

Praying for the sake of God’s name

I believe that we are strongly called to pray for the blessing of our nations as they choose to align themselves with God in blessing Israel and the Jewish people. But we are also to go a step further, and pray in these ways for the sake of His Name. He has chosen to offend many by calling himself the “God of Israel”. Even as Daniel, we are to pray: *“O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because Your city and Your people bear Your name”* (Daniel 9:19).

May we hear the heart of the Lord in this season in His great desire to show mercy to our nations and to Israel. May His Name be greatly glorified in the nations and in Israel through our prayers.

Rev. Rick Ridings
Jerusalem, February 19, 2014
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OUTLOOK AND FURTHER INFORMATION

The „*Global Prayer Call*“ is a dynamic campaign in the process of growth and development. It is a call to Christians worldwide to pray for their own nation and its relationship to the Jewish people and Israel. The goal is to see God’s favor fall on our nations and not His judgment. The scope and long-term success of this “*Global Prayer Call*” is dependent on your involvement. There are two ways to “connect” with the campaign: a) Through the **website** and b) through the **newsletter**. Please visit the website and register to receive the newsletter. We will keep you updated as we work together for the Kingdom of God and the good of our nations.

On the financial side, we have a budget for the kick-off process. In order for this campaign to “snowball”, however, we are asking for further and ongoing financial support. Please see below for details.

Concerning translation of this book: One of our goals is to have this book translated into a good number of different languages. If you are willing and able to actively help in this area, please contact our campaign-office under the E-Mail-address below.

Please be aware that we are planning to kick-off the 100 days of Prayer with a global prayer conference on or around January 27, 2015 in Auschwitz/Krakaw (Poland). The end of the 100 days will be marked by a final global prayer-conference on or around

May 8/9, 2015 in Jerusalem (Israel). You will find further information on the website in due time.

Thank you for all your prayers, your financial support and your active cooperation to make this “*Global Prayer Call 2015*” a movement which will touch heaven, bless Israel and further God’s redemptive purposes for your nation.

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Harald Eckert was born in 1960. He is married and has four children. From 1982 to 1989, he published the magazine “Wiederherstellung” (“Restoration”). He was on the leadership team of *Fürbitte für Deutschland* (*Intercession for Germany*) from 1990 to 1994, and the Founder and Director of *Internationaler Bibeldienst* (*Derek Prince Ministries, Germany*). For some years now, he has been in charge of the work of *Christen an der Seite Israels* (*Christians for Israel*) in Germany, he is chairman of the Board of *Christians for Israel International* and he serves on the Board of the *European Coalition for Israel*. As a Bible teacher, spiritual pioneer, author and networker, he has not only provided critical impulses, but has also been actively involved in various trail-blazing initiatives and projects in Germany, Europe and Israel.



Rev. Willem J.J. Glashouwer

Rev. Willem J.J. Glashouwer is the President of *Christians for Israel International*. He is also an ordained minister of the *Dutch Reformed Church* and a former director of the *Evangelical Broadcasting Company* in the Netherlands. Rev. Glashouwer has played a key role in the establishment of the *Dutch Institute for Evangelical Higher Education* and in addition to several books, articles and Bible studies on Israel and the

Christian faith, has published a commentary on the Book of Revelation. His book *Why Israel* has been translated in over 30 languages to date. He is married to Marianne and they have 4 children.



Derek Prince

Derek Prince (1915–2003) was educated at Eton and Cambridge where he later held a fellowship in Philosophy. While serving with the British army in World War II, he experienced a life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ. He then devoted his life to the study of the Bible and became internationally recognized as a leading Bible teacher. Derek's main gift of explaining the Bible and its teaching in a clear and simple way has helped build a foundation of faith in millions of lives. His non-denominational, non-sectarian approach has made his teaching equally relevant and helpful to people from all racial and religious backgrounds. He is the author of over 50 books, 600 audio and 100 video teachings, many of which have been translated and published in more than 100 languages. His daily radio broadcast continues to touch lives around the world.



Rev. Rick Ridings

Rick and Patti Ridings are based in Jerusalem, where they lead *Succat Hallel*, a ministry that lifts up worship and intercession, 24 hours a day from their facility overlooking the Temple Mt. and Mt. Zion. They provide oversight to teams that have helped in the nurturing of new houses of prayer in Israel, Egypt, Turkey, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Iraq and United Arab Emirates. They also seek to serve the youth of Israel, and host the largest yearly youth confer-

ence there (several hundred youth, both Jewish messianic and Arab Christians). Rick is also a board member of the *European Coalition for Israel* (ECI). They are the parents of three grown daughters, all of whom are worship leaders, and have thirteen grandchildren.



Wolfgang C. Schuler, Dr. med.

Dr. Wolfgang Schuler is a retired medical doctor who worked in various hospitals and in private practise as a gynaecologist and obstetrician for many years. To his amazement, while still a non-believer and an agnostic, he discovered Biblical truths in both the Old and the New Testaments while researching alternative healing methods as practised by a young man from Israel—Jesus of Nazareth. The result? He surrendered his life to Jesus Christ and accepted Him as Saviour and Lord. Since his retirement from active medical practise, Dr. Schuler remains dedicated to learning more from Jesus and the Holy Scriptures about complete and (ever)-lasting godly healing—not only for individuals but for entire nations. A generous gift from God for those who will accept it.



Andrew Tucker

Andrew Tucker trained as a lawyer at the Universities of Melbourne and Oxford. He has worked for over twenty years in various areas of international and transnational law in Australia, UK and Netherlands. He currently serves as Executive Director of *Christians for Israel International* (based in the Netherlands) and Legal Counsel to the *European Coalition for Israel*. He writes and speaks regularly about the relationship between (international) law and the Bible.



Philip Holmberg

Philip Holmberg was born in India in 1949 to a Swedish missionary family. He trained as a teacher. He is married to Ulla and they have five children. Philip served as a missionary in Bhutan for five years and as a pastor in Sweden for five years. He worked as a school headmaster for about 25 years. He is National Director of Ebenezer Operation Exodus Sweden, Chairman of the Ebenezer Baltic-Nordic Regional Board and Ebenezer representative in the Core Group of the Global Prayer Call.



Harald Eckert

HARALD ECKERT was born in 1960. He is married and has four children. From 1982 to 1989, he published the magazine "Wiederherstellung" ("Restoration").

He was on the leadership team of *Fürbitte für Deutschland* (Intercession for Germany) from 1990 to 1994, and the Founder and Director of *Internationaler Bibellehrdienst* (Derek Prince Ministries, Germany). For some years now, he has been in charge of the work of *Christen an der Seite Israels* (Christians for Israel) in Germany, he is chairman of the Board of *Christians for Israel International*, and serves on the Board of the *European Coalition for Israel*. As a Bible teacher, spiritual pioneer, author and networker, he has not only provided critical impulses, but has also been actively involved in various trail-blazing initiatives and projects in Germany, Europe and Israel.

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Israel, the nations and the VALLEY OF DECISION

*"When the Son of Man comes in His glory,
and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His
glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered
before Him, and He will separate the people one
from another as a shepherd separates the sheep
from the goats. He will put the sheep on His
right and the goats on His left."*

(Matthew 25:31–33)

This book is intended for praying Christians, for intercessors, intercessory leaders, networks and movements! It is linked to a call—a call to prayer! It is a call to intercessors to pray for their respective nations—all over the world. **IT IS A GLOBAL PRAYER CALL!!!** The key objective of this call to prayer is for you to pray for your own nations with regard to their relationship towards the Jewish people and towards Israel.

In the spring of 2015—70 years after the end of the Holocaust and the end of World War II (in Europe)—the Holocaust will be widely commemorated: the attempts of Nazi Germany and her allies to annihilate European Jewry will once again be brought to the forefront of public attention ...

As Christians from Europe, we are launching this GLOBAL PRAYER CALL 2015—70 years after the end of the Holocaust—so that we might NEVER AGAIN be indifferent. And we challenge and encourage you to pray for your government, for your nation, and for the churches in your nation, to act fairly towards Israel, to swim against the tide where necessary, and to be a blessing to Israel as the Bible commands (Gen. 12:3). As we do so, God in turn will bless our nations—for all time and throughout eternity! Therefore: JOIN THE GLOBAL PRAYER CALL 2015!!! (From the Foreword)



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