

ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH: TRAGEDY AND BLESSING

Part 4

Jews and Gentiles and the Sovereignty of God

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The Apostle Paul begins the eleventh chapter of Romans with a question that is the ultimate repudiation of replacement theology: “I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He?” Supersessionists typically ignore the question altogether or they redefine the word “people” to refer to the church.¹ Unfortunately they disregard the rest of the verse, that clarifies who is not being rejected:

“May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew” (Rom 11:1).

The supersessionist handling of this verse can be likened to approaching a stop sign on the street and redefining the word to “just slowing down a bit.” But the speed at which you reinterpret that word can get you into trouble. You are very welcome to explain to the police officer about your redefinition of stopping, but you will still get a ticket for breaking the law, which is very specific about the matter. In the same way, the words of Scripture must be understood within the precise parameters of language and the culture of the day when they were recorded.

An honest appraisal of the full context of Scripture affirms that that replacement theology is not a biblical concept and that God is not yet finished with the Jewish people. We might say, echoing Paul, that God has not rejected His people, but He has rejected replacement theology,

The relationship of believing Jews and Gentiles

We also need to recognize that there is something that we all can agree upon—God has included believing Gentiles in His promises and His plan of redemption. From a modern perspective, that seems undeniable. But in biblical times that was a radical concept. It is very evident from what we read in Scripture that salvation was considered to be the exclusive domain of Israel and that Gentiles were essentially excluded from that blessing, except on a limited basis.

But that all changed with the death of Yeshua, who, as fully man, represented all of humanity, and as fully divine, He could provide an all-inclusive atonement. As a result, many parts of the New Testament are corrective in nature. We see that demonstrated when God gave a vision to Peter with approval for eating ritually unclean animals, which he perceived as representing salvation being extended to the Gentiles (Acts 11:18). Likewise, in his letter to the Ephesians, Paul says about Gentiles:

¹ e.g. Octavius Winslow, Joel R. Beeke ed., “November 7,” in *Morning Thoughts: Daily Walking with God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2003), 671.

Remember that you were at that time separate from Messiah, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Messiah Yeshua you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Messiah (Eph 2:12,13).

He then goes on to describe the state of Jews and Gentiles after the atoning death of Yeshua –

... that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. And he came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household (vv. 15-19).

These terms are key for our understanding:

“One new man”

“One body”

“Fellow citizens”

“Of God's household”

There is another term that is not actually in this text, but accurately sums up all of these unifying phrases—“one people of God.” This all sounds agreeable and it is very true. But it doesn't tell you *how* it happens.

The same is true in Romans 11, which talks about God grafting believing Gentiles into the olive tree of Israel alongside believing Jews. It may be figurative language in that case, but again it is a description of the final result, not how it happens.

The Bible makes it clear that it is a legal matter when it comes to Gentiles being included in God's promises. Specifically it is done through the process of adoption:

“He predestined us to adoption as sons through Messiah Yeshua to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.” (Eph 1:5).

The Greek word translated as adoption is υἰοθεσία. (*huiiothesia*). It literally means “having the position of a son” or “an appointed son.” This word bears the same meaning as adoption in our contemporary culture. In each case adopted sons are loved the same as natural sons. The relationship between a parent and either an adopted or natural child is no different, as reflected in the intimacy conveyed in Rom 8:15 by the ability of adopted sons to cry, “Abba, Father.” And both adopted and natural sons are considered to have the same legal rights, including that of inheritance.

Huiiothesia is used five times in the New Testament, but it is not used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. So there is no equivalent word for adoption in the Hebrew language. But the concept is depicted there. The most detailed example of adoption is found in Genesis 48 where Jacob took the first two sons of Joseph as his own:²

“Now your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are” (Gen 48:5).

A bit of background is helpful to our understanding here. Reuben was the firstborn or oldest son of Jacob's first wife Leah. So he was customarily entitled to a double portion of inheritance according to the principle known as primogeniture.³ But Reuben fell out of favor by

² Another example is Mordecai's adoption of his niece Esther (Est 2:7,15).

³ This common but not universal practice in the Ancient Near East is described in Deut. 21:15-17.

his father because of immorality (Gen 35:22; cf. 1 Chr 5:1). So Jacob decided to give that extra blessing to Joseph, who was the firstborn of his second wife Rachel. But rather than simply giving it directly to Joseph, he gave it to Joseph's first two sons. And in order to make it legal, he had to adopt them, which Genesis 48 describes in a fair amount of detail.

The adoptive act was symbolized by Jacob placing the two young men on his knees (v. 12). A similar act took place in Genesis 30 when Rachel claimed the son (Dan) of her handmaiden Bilhah as her own by having Bilhah give birth on the knees of Rachel. This particular posture was a commonly understood Near Eastern ritual to indicate the taking of a child as your own.⁴

When the adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh was completed, each of them did in fact receive full shares of inheritance, even though they were not sons by birth (v. 22). So whenever you read about the allotment of the land for the tribes of Israel (Jos 16,17) or you see maps of the allocation, it refers to Ephraim and Manasseh, the adopted sons of Jacob.

In a similar fashion, adopted children in contemporary culture are considered to have full entitlement as heirs to their parents' estate. And, in a spiritual sense, we see this precisely declared regarding the inheritance of believing Gentiles:

“If you belong to Messiah, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise” (Gal 3:29).

This is the fulfillment of the promise that “all the families of the earth will be blessed” through Abraham (Gen 12:3) by way of his descendant Yeshua. Now to be clear, it is a reference to the last stipulation of the Abrahamic Covenant—the blessing of salvation. Paul brings that out resolutely in his epistle to the Ephesians, saying:

“to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Messiah Yeshua through the gospel (Eph 3:6).

And the gospel is the good news of salvation through faith in Yeshua (Rom 10:15-17). Paul echoes the precise nature of the inheritance in his letter to Titus: “so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Tit 3:7).

So here we have the legal justification for the inclusion of Gentiles in the Abrahamic Covenant. The irony is that entitlement to this blessing is part of the objective of replacement theology. But you don't have to replace Israel by allegorizing Scripture in order to get there. Instead, God does it legally by the basis of adoption.

Our relationship to Israel is an indicator of our acceptance of God's sovereignty

God's sovereignty applies to every situation in the universe—from the prosperity we may or may not have to the length of our days on earth, the illnesses and tragedies we face, and the very soil we walk upon. He is the King of the universe with no higher authority. There is no one that He has to give an answer regarding any of His decisions. As Paul asks rhetorically, “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor?” (Rom 11:34; cf. Isa 40:13).

It would not be popular to claim to have such supreme qualifications. But deep down

⁴ See Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis, The JPS Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 324-329; Isaac Mendelsohn, “A Ugaritic Parallel to the Adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 9 (1959), 180-3; and Shalom M. Paul, “Adoption Formulae: A Study of Cuneiform and Biblical Legal Clauses,” in *Divrei Shalom, Collected Studies of Shalom M. Paul on the Bible and the Ancient Near East, 1967-2005* (Boston: Brill, 20015), 109-119.

inside, do we really allow God to reign over us fully, trusting in His Word and His wisdom, not our own? So it is important to identify indicators that reveal our trust in His sovereignty. When tragedy comes upon us, our response is such an indicator. The same is true when God appears to be silent on a matter. If you are unable to accept not getting the answer to prayer that you want to hear from God, it likely indicates you have a problem with His sovereignty over your life. And another indicator is our acceptance of His promises to Israel. For if we can agree with a declaration by God that does not benefit us directly, it is a true indicator of acceptance of His sovereignty.

Within the “one new man” or the “one people of God,” distinctions still exist. While all believers share in the greatest blessing of everlasting life through Messiah, God grants different temporal blessings to individuals. This concept is difficult for supporters of tolerance in our world who want every behavior to be acceptable and fair. Perhaps that explains, in part, why replacement theology has become so popular in America, because it denies special consideration for any people group.

Proponents of replacement theology frequently point to Paul’s teaching in Galatians 3:28 that “there is neither Jew nor Greek” as proof that one’s physical ancestry no longer matters.⁵ But they fail to address the rest of the verse, which reads “. . . there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Messiah Yeshua.” Certainly Paul was not suggesting that the slaves who were part of that culture were free to run away without consequences. On the contrary, in the book of Colossians he exhorts slaves to obey their masters (Col 3:22). Likewise it would be foolish to conclude that men stop being men and women are no longer women when they believe in Yeshua. The same, then, must be true for Jews and Greeks (Gentiles) in this list of dichotomies.

In Galatians 3 and Romans 10:12,13 where Paul uses similar terminology, he is talking about the nature of our salvation being the same for all—Jews, Gentiles, slaves, masters, men and women. All are saved the same way by faith, believing in Yeshua as our atonement for sin.⁶ But that does not negate specific distinctions within the body. Some of these distinctions include:

- God grants different spiritual gifts to individuals “that differ according to the grace given to us” (Rom 12:6) and “distributing to each one individually just as He wills” (1 Cor 12:11).
- Persons with authority over others in a congregation have the same standing before the Lord, but not everyone can serve as a pastor or an elder (1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9).
- New believers are as fully saved as old believers, but they are not to lead a congregation (1 Tim 3:6).
- All believers are called to be witnesses but not everyone is a missionary, which requires being sent by a body (Acts 13:1-3).

These distinctions within the body do not contradict our shared union and relationship with the Lord. The same is true for Jews and Gentiles. It is consistent with this pattern for the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to retain some kind distinction from other members of the people of God in certain ways without violating the common identity we share in Messiah. It

⁵ e.g. Gary M. Burge, *Jesus and the Land: The New Testament Challenge to “Holy Land” Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Co, 2010), 81.

⁶ In the only other place where similar terms are used (Col 3:11) Paul addresses the importance of living a godly, transformed life as a result of our salvation.

is also consistent with the way that God demonstrates His sovereignty by granting material inheritance.

Returning to Genesis 48, when Joseph removed Ephraim and Manasseh from the knees of Jacob, he positioned them properly to receive the blessing for their adoption. Manasseh, as the oldest, was placed before Jacob's right hand for the blessing of the firstborn, and Ephraim stood before his left hand. But Jacob crossed his arms and the blessing of the firstborn went to Ephraim (v. 14). Joseph protested,

But his father [Jacob] refused and said, "I know, my son, I know; he also will become a people and he also will be great. However, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations" (Gen 48:19).

And that was that. The inheritance was uniquely and irrevocably established.

We see a similar allocation of land inheritance regarding the tribe of Levi. As a natural son of Jacob, Levi should have been entitled to territory, but he and his descendants received no land inheritance (Num 19:20; Josh 14:3).

In each case Jacob exercised his will as he was free to do, and other people had to live with that power and ability. The same is true with God's sovereignty over the earth and all who dwell upon it. Here is what the Bible teaches in this regard:

- All land belongs to God (Ps. 24:1). This means that every square inch of the earth is His to do as He pleases.
- God determines when all nations dwell on specific lands and the extent of their boundaries (Acts 17:26).
- The land of Canaan was given by God to Abraham and his descendants as an "everlasting possession" (Gen. 12:7; 13:14-17; 15:17-21; 17:8).
- God gave other land to the descendants of the people groups to the east for their own "possession"—the land of northwestern Arabia to Abraham's son Ishmael (Gen. 17:20; 25:16,18) and the land of Edom to Isaac's son Esau (Deut. 2:4-5).

Supersessionists discount the validity of these divine grants by arguing they are not reaffirmed in the New Testament and that Jesus is the fulfillment of all prophecy, and thus by extrapolation, He is the fulfillment of land promises.⁷ But, as shown in Acts 17:26 cited above, the New Testament does in fact support God's sovereignty in this manner. Supersessionists simply ignore the verse.⁸ Moreover, as previously shown in this series, not all prophecies are fulfilled in Yeshua, some are unrelated to Him. And not all aspects of the Abrahamic Covenant relate to Him, some relate to national Israel. So the supersessionist reasoning is flawed and does not contravene the specific manifestations of divine land sovereignty.

Clearly God has seen fit to grant possession of certain territories to specific people groups. But only one of them He calls "my inheritance." That is Israel (Isa 19:25; Jer 12:14; Joel 3:2).

The Hebrew word translated as inheritance is נַחֲלָה (*nachalah*). It is derived from a root that originally had the sense of a stream flowing down a narrow valley. Like a stream that flows downward from a source, then reaches another place like a pool, then on to another pool by

⁷ e.g. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of God*, vol. 2 part 1, eds. G.W. Bromley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957), 482.

⁸ Such is the case in Burge's comprehensive defense of the supersessionist position on the land, which covers literally hundreds of New Testament verses, but fails to mention Acts 17:26.

continuing to flow down the valley, an inheritance begins with someone who willingly passes it on to the next generation who, in turn, passes it on to the next one and so on.

Inheritance is a legal term that is used both in biblical and modern times the same way. When someone establishes his/her will, it becomes a legal document that is enforceable and binding. The individual heirs might not like what they get in the deal, but their happiness carries no weight and they are powerless to claim anything that has been granted to other heirs. A will can be contested in court, claiming that the person making the will was incapacitated or coerced in some manner. But when it comes to God, that is a claim that simply will not hold up in court.

God has written His will, and the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are the legal heirs to the land of Israel, just as the descendants of Esau are entitled to the land of Edom and the descendants of Ishmael are entitled to the land of Arabia. These are the lands that God has created and sovereignly appointed to specific people.

If we look at the world today, how many people groups or nations are endorsing the God-given right of the Jewish people to the land of Israel? Not many. In fact, some of the heirs of the lands to the east of Israel are not satisfied with their inheritance and covet the land of Israel too.

What about the church? If anyone should understand the legitimacy of the Word of God as a source for the affairs of life, it should be the church. It should be the church that understands that none of us deserve to be saved. Yet God in His grace saves us anyway, so we ought to extend the same kind of grace to Israel. It should be the church that declares unequivocally that the sovereign God of the universe has given the Land of Israel to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It should be the church that turns from the error of allegorizing Scripture and reaffirms the belief held by the earliest Christians that God has sworn a covenant promise to the Jewish people that He will most certainly keep.

When it comes to God's sovereignty, we need to realize that we do not have the authority or the ability to change what God has declared. But this issue is not just about land. There is something far more significant at work in our midst...

We are engaged in the battle for sovereignty of the universe

When it comes to the relentless persecution of the Jewish people, replacement theology fails to offer an adequate explanation. Some supersessionists reduce it to a social justice issue,⁹ while others, as has been shown previously, have actually endorsed the persecution. Surely there must be a deeper issue at work in our midst than just the popularity of harming Jews.

In the 83rd Psalm we are told that the enemies of Adonai conspire against the Jewish people and declare, "Come, and let us wipe them out as a nation, that the name of Israel be remembered no more" (Ps. 83:4). Although these enemies of the Lord state their intentions to take control of the land of Israel (v. 12), it is not just a land battle, it is an attempt to do away with the Jews in order to do away with Adonai, the God of the Jews.

In many ways, the battle erupting around Jerusalem is a test to demonstrate whose God is the True God. Will it be Adonai? Or Allah? Many people are asking questions along these lines today. Are these two Gods one and the same? Is one real and the other a harmless myth? Or is one real and the other a very powerful spiritual being who is not truly divine?

The Bible reveals that we are not alone. There is another created being who dwells in our midst, yet is unseen in the physical realm. He is Satan. According to Isaiah 14, between the time

⁹ e.g. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "The Church and the Jewish Question," in *No Rusty Swords; Letters, Lectures and Notes, 1928-1936, from the Collected Works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Edwin H. Robertson and John Bowden, eds. (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 226.

of creation and the fall of humanity, the angel Lucifer (meaning “star of the morning”) led a rebellion against God. Lucifer became known as Satan, the Hebrew name meaning “Adversary” (1 Pet. 5:8).

In his opposition to God, Satan tempts and deceives people (Mat. 4:3; Rev. 12:9) and manifests himself as an “angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14). That means having a sense of attractiveness, glory and legitimacy. He appears to be the “real thing.” That means he does not come to people with horns on his head or the way that is depicted in art and the movies. He will appear just the way people envision God to be. The reason is his stated agenda—to reign supreme over the universe. With unequaled arrogance, he has boasted:

“I will ascend to heaven;
I will raise my throne above the stars of God,
And I will sit on the mount of assembly
In the recesses of the north.
I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;
I will make myself *li-Elyon* like the Most High” (Isa.14:13).

He wants to be God. But if Satan is to supplant the True God as sovereign over the universe, he must defeat Adonai somehow. How can Satan possibly believe that he could accomplish such a plan? He really must have a lot of self-confidence and audacity. Where is the place of vulnerability that he is attacking? It is God’s Word. His reasoning is not complicated. If he can break God’s ability to keep His word, Satan will prove God to be a liar. Making God lie is Satan’s plan to defeat Him.

Immediately following the prophecy of the New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34), we are given this bold declaration:

Thus says Adonai, Who gives the sun for light by day,
And the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night,
Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar;
The LORD of hosts is His name:
“If this fixed order departs from before Me,” declares Adonai, “Then the offspring of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before Me forever.”
Thus says Adonai, “If the heavens above can be measured,
And the foundations of the earth searched out below,
Then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel
For all that they have done,” declares Adonai (Jer 31:35-37).

Those are some pretty big “ifs.” The very existence of the universe is linked to God’s promise to preserve Israel. Can you see Satan’s scheme? His strategy is very apparent—destroy the Jews and thus break God’s power. Through temptation and deception, Satan has tried it with many people groups down through the centuries, most notably the Nazis, who despised the God of the Bible and sought to restore the worship of pagan gods in Germany. And now he is trying it in the Islamic world, which seeks to expand the worship of Allah to cover every inch of Israel.

No Israel, no Jewish people, no fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel means no more enforcement of God’s promise to cast Satan into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10). If Satan would be successful in his scheme, he could stand before Adonai and say, “I beat you!” The end result would be the defeat of the One who created him, and Satan would then reign over the universe.

So you can see him at work generation after generation, tempting people to move the boundary just a little bit, from Origen to Constantine and Eusebius to Augustine to Martin Luther to Adolf Hitler. That’s the way the Adversary works. And all-the-while, many of God’s people

have no idea what is happening, and naively lend support by delegitimizing Israel theologically.

So it is imperative that we have this understanding—that we are witnessing the battle for the sovereignty of the universe. And Israel is caught in the crosshairs of the Adversary.

God is not finished with the people of Israel

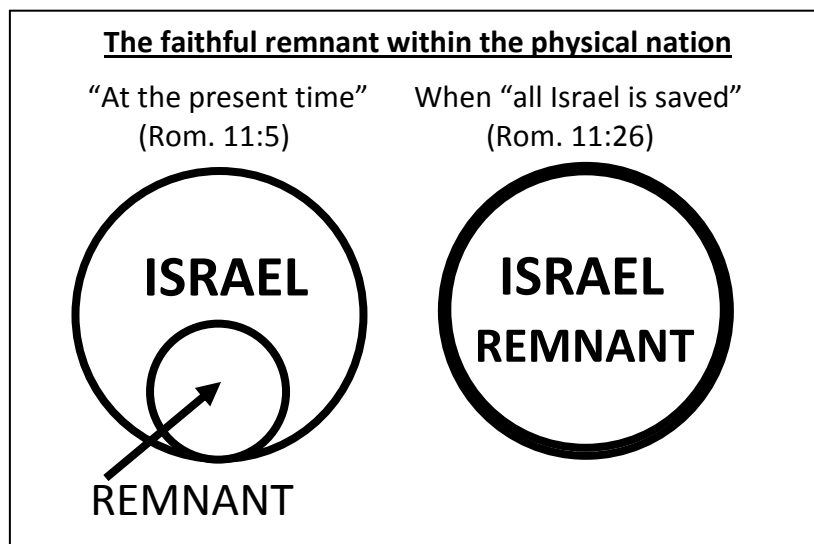
The principle of God’s sovereignty not only applies to the land of Israel, it also applies to the *people* of Israel. Two more land principles are important for our consideration.

- National sinfulness of Israel would cause their removal from the land, but not their right to the land (Lev. 26:40-45; Ps 89:30-37)
- The people of Israel would be restored to the land prior to a spiritual renewal (Ezek. 37:11-12,14).

The restoration of Israel might be compared to the 13 yr old boy who fainted in the middle of the National Spelling Bee competition a number of years ago (2004), and then stood up on his feet and proceeded to correctly spell the word “alopecoid.” Eventually he made it all the way to the final round. Yes, the nation of Israel may have fainted and collapsed, but it has gotten back on its feet, and in the end will be able to recognize the Word of God accurately and completely. How can we be confident in that regard?

Previously we considered Paul’s teaching in Romans 9 on the existence of the faithful remnant within the physical nation of Israel. In chapter 11 he returned to that theme, saying, “In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God’s gracious choice” (Rom 11:5). That describes this present time as well. There still is a remnant of Messianic Jews in Israel and around the world who are a testimony of God’s faithfulness to His promise.

But there is more to the story. A day is coming when “all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, ‘The deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob’” (Rom 11:26). In that day, the believing remnant of Israel will ultimately reach national proportions to “all Israel.”



If you know anything about the life in Israel today, it seems reasonable to conclude that

this will take much more than a mere revival. Something dramatic will be necessary. Again, the Bible provides the answer. Chapter 12 of the book of Zechariah describes a great battle in which the nations come against Jerusalem, but the Lord intervenes. The prophet describes the survivors of Israel nationally recognizing Yeshua as Messiah and Savior:

“I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn” (Zech 12:10).

It will be a solemn day when “all Israel shall be saved.” But then the Messianic kingdom will begin and the possession of the land and the sovereignty of God will finally be settled (Zech 14:9,11). There is much more that can be added, especially regarding the millennial kingdom. But the most important realization that we can have is that we can regard the Bible as a source of truth that can be trusted.

So when God declares He has not rejected Israel, the rest of Scripture backs that statement up. And when God offers us everlasting life through faith in Yeshua, as promised in the New Covenant, we can count on it in the same way that Israel will continue to exist before Adonai—as long as the universe exists as we know it.

Personal implications

We need to recognize that our world is a spiritual battleground

There is another dimension to our existence beyond what we can comprehend with our eyes and ears. As Paul warns us:

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12).

The implication is that most people are not aware of this battle raging around them. That is certainly true in our personal lives. Our greatest blind spot is the one that keeps us from looking within us.

But this spiritual battleground is especially intense concerning Israel because of the Adversary’s schemes. Yet in spite of the threats of destruction of Israel and the hostility toward the God of Israel, let it be said that the True and Living God is still on the throne. May we recognize with confidence that Yeshua has already won the victory by giving His life as our atonement on the cross and by resurrecting from the dead.

We are called to be people of blessing

The promise of blessing and cursing as part of the Abrahamic Covenant is still in effect (Gen. 12:3). Cursing Israel is a popular pastime today. And it is not hard to recognize. But what about the act of blessing? What does it look like when we actively and intentionally bless the Jewish people?

- **We bless Israel by reading and understanding Scripture with discernment and compassion.**

When we hear Yeshua say, “You are of your father the devil” (John 8:44), we can see that He was not referring to every Jewish person who has ever lived, as some have

claimed, but to a select group of religious leaders who opposed Him on that day.

When we hear the people call for Yeshua's crucifixion by saying, "His blood be on us and on our children" (Mat 27:25), we can see that there is no place in Scripture that allows someone to curse the generations to come, as some have claimed. But the guilt would fall only on those who cried out those words. So when you rightly divide the Word of God in passages that relate to Israel, you are being a blessing.

- **We bless Israel by redeeming back its culture.**

The Church Fathers may have cursed and banned every vestige of the Jewish culture from the Church, and we are still be facing this effect many centuries later. But there many wonderful cultural elements—the Jewish roots of Christianity—that many Christians are discovering and appreciating today. And in so doing, we restore the legitimacy of these ways of worship and daily living, which is a true blessing in many ways.

- **We bless Israel by standing with the Jewish people in times of persecution.**

It's not labeled as such, but persecuting Jews is rampant once again today. If you are Jewish, you are a potential victim in the eyes of those who are filled with hate. If you are a Gentile Christian, you too are a potential victim (you just may not be aware of that fact yet). But Gentiles have a somber responsibility to stand against persecution of Jews because there is no one else who will. There is a lesson that we can learn from Nazi Germany. It was German Lutheran pastor, Martin Niemoller who said:

"In Germany, they came first for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Catholic. Then they came for me, and by that time no one was left to speak up."¹⁰

Will you speak up when persecution comes? If so, then you are a true man or woman of blessing.

Conclusion

It is important to be well-informed on the message of Scripture and the way it integrates into real-world circumstances. But ultimately the message comes down to our own walk with the Lord. There is so much we can learn by examining the long and winding road of Israel because the parallels to our own lives are great.

When we want to study an example of God's grace in action, we can find it in the *history* of Israel, and can count on it in the *future* of Israel. When we want to look for an application, we need only look at our own hearts. Let us rejoice in the unity that we have been given in Messiah—Jews and Gentiles sharing in God's blessings together, through the loving grace of our great and sovereign Lord who always keeps His promises.

¹⁰ Martin Niemoller, *Dachau Sermons*, trans. by Robert H. Pfeiffer, (New York & London: Harper & Brothers, 1946).