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SIX LESSONS TO UNLOCKING THE TRUTH
TO GOD'S HOLY LAND



International Fellowship
of Christians and Jews® 

THE STATE OF ISRAEL

This is the second week of our six-week series about the nation of Israel. Did you know that April 19th is the 70th anniversary of the rebirth of Israel? Last week, we examined the *Importance of Israel*. It was the first letter in the acrostic, I.S.R.A.E.L. In this sermon series, we will look at Israel from six different perspectives, including:

Israel is *Important*;

Israel is a *State*;

Israel teaches us about *Righteous giving*;

Israel teaches us about *Aliyah*—the Hebrew word that means return;

As disciples of the Lord Jesus, we must become *Educated* (and educate others) about Israel;

Israel provides us for us an opportunity to *Love* our neighbours.

Today we want to examine the scriptures and discern what God has to say about the state of Israel. Unless you are a very senior citizen, you probably cannot remember a time when Israel was *not* on the world map. But this has not always been so. Only 70 years ago, the world witnessed a miracle: A nation that had not existed for more than 1,800 years came back to life—Israel! The people of Israel, the Jews, had been scattered across the globe for more than 18 centuries. Think of it: A group of people wandering without a homeland for so long! The rebirth of Israel is unlike any other story in the history of the world. It's also the fulfillment of biblical prophecy and a testimony to the faithfulness of God and His promises.

The great story of the state of Israel begins with a terrible tragedy, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Just a few decades after the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Roman empire brought all of its fury and strength against the city of Jerusalem. The great “Second Temple in Jerusalem”, the one Jesus had visited as a 12-year-old boy and later taught in as a full-grown man, was destroyed.

This temple was also the place where the early church met to worship and praise, and it was destroyed. This temple had stood for nearly 600 years. It was the temple that was rebuilt after the Jews returned from their exile in Babylon. We also read about the building of this temple in the Book of Ezra in the Old Testament.

After 600 years of worship at this temple, the Romans marched against Israel. The capital city, Jerusalem, was destroyed and the people of Israel lost their homeland. If they were ever going to regain Jerusalem and restore the nation of Israel, God would have to help them! So began *18 centuries* of waiting and wandering. Over the centuries, many nations of the world rejected the Jewish people time and again. After centuries of discrimination and violence against the children of Abraham, the Jewish people were singled out for destruction by Nazi Germany in the twentieth century. This really wasn't so long ago. This part of the story happened just 80 years ago, during World War II. In what Adolf Hitler called “the final solution”, more than six million Jewish men, women, and children were rounded up, hunted, placed in concentration camps, and murdered.

You can imagine how the Jews of Europe must have cried out to God with questions such as “*Why?*” and, “*How long, O Lord?*” These questions and longings have been a part of the Jewish identity for ages. We can read these laments in our bibles. (For example, in Psalms 13 and 22, or in the opening lines of Habakkuk, just to name a few.) Let's look at Psalm 22, which is famously considered a Messianic Psalm, pointing toward Jesus, our Savior. Yet it also depicts the cries of God's people, asking for his help. Look at verses 19-21:

But you, LORD, do not be far from me.

You are my strength; come quickly to help me.

Deliver me from the sword,

my precious life from the power of the dogs.

Rescue me from the mouth of the lions;

save me from the horns of the wild oxen.

You can hear the cries for help! This Psalm was written by King David, the greatest of the kings of Israel. This song of sorrow was not only used by him, it was read and used by Jewish people throughout the history of Israel. Look closely at Psalm 22. Nearly every Psalm of lament also contains a message of hope, a message of trust in God's faithfulness. Just a few verses later in Psalm 22: 27-28, the text says,

All the ends of the earth
will remember and turn to the LORD, and
all the families of the nations will bow
down before him,
for dominion belongs to the LORD and he
rules over the nations.

Like their ancestors so long ago, the Jewish people of the twentieth century—some of who are still alive today—cried out to God and waited. They understood that even in international affairs, God rules over the nations. God's answer was to establish the state of Israel again—after the entire world had considered it an impossibility. Fortunately, God specializes in the impossible!

Our primary text for today is Isaiah, chapter 49, a chapter that speaks of the restoration of Israel. Like so many biblical texts, it has multiple meanings and applications. Scholars tell us that Isaiah's original prophecy was about the restoration of Israel after it had suffered its first exile in Babylon, six centuries before the time of Christ. They also say the first eight verses of this chapter are one of the "servant songs" that refer to the coming of Jesus. But if we listen to the words of Isaiah 49 while thinking of modern Israel, the parallels are striking. Let's start with the verses immediately after the servant song:

This is what the LORD says:
"In the time of my favour I will answer you,
and in the day of salvation I will help you; I will
keep you and will make you
to be a covenant for the people, to
restore the land
and to reassign its desolate inheritances, to
say to the captives, 'Come out,'
and to those in darkness, 'Be free!' (Isaiah 49: 8-9)

As He so frequently does, God promises to answer the cries of Israel. He did so when he set Israel free to return home after Babylonian captivity. He did so in the person of His Son, Jesus. And He did so with re-birth of Israel in 1948. This is the wonder of the scripture. Its prophecies speak on many levels and to many generations! One passage of prophecy can apply to multiple points in history.

Just a few verses later, we see the same pattern, where Isaiah's words refer to the return from Babylonian exile, the work of the Savior, and the modern nation of Israel:

"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast
and have no compassion on the child she has borne?
Though she may forget,
I will not forget you!
See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands;
your walls are ever before me.
Your children hasten back,
and those who laid you waste depart from you. (Isaiah 49:15-17)

When we read the words, “*See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands*”, as Christians, we immediately make the connection to the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross—and we should! Isaiah is also revealing how dear the people of Israel are to God. Even when Israel turned away from God time and again, God remained faithful to His commitment to Israel. The glory of Isaiah’s prophecy is that while he paints a picture of Christ, he also portrays God’s faithfulness to Israel—then and now.

As the chapter draws to a close we hear the promise that God’s people, as they return to Israel, will be “carried” by nations and kings.

This is what the Sovereign LORD says:

“See, I will beckon to the nations,

I will lift up my banner to the peoples; they
will bring your sons in their arms

and carry your daughters on their hips.

Kings will be your foster fathers,

and their queens your nursing mothers.

They will bow down before you with their faces to the ground;

they will lick the dust at your feet. Then

you will know that I am the LORD;

those who hope in me will not be disappointed.” (Isaiah 49:22-23)

Do you see the reference to kings and queens? World leaders are called to provide help and support to Israel as they return from exile. During the time of return from Babylonian exile, there were people like King Cyrus and King Darius, and Esther, a godly woman born for just such a time. We should ask ourselves today, “Who will be the ‘kings and queens’ who support the modern state of Israel? Who will be the ones able to see what God has done and affirm His will? Who will be the kings and queens who encourage and support this most recent state of Israel?” Perhaps it is our responsibility as Christians to support the new state He has created.

The beauty of this passage of scripture is that the Holy Spirit has inspired it on so many levels. Isaiah prophesied the return of Israel from its exile in Babylon; he also looked forward and saw the work of Christ nearly six centuries later; *and* he saw the return of the state of Israel in 1948. This is not merely an interesting history lesson. It carries with it the call to honour what God has done in all three generations: the Babylonian return, the sacrifice of Jesus, and the work of God in our generation.

Do you remember last week’s message, when we discovered that God’s blessing to Abraham and all the people of Israel would become the source of blessing for the whole world? The Old Testament scriptures nearly always remind God’s people of His faithfulness. Even in the song of lament (Psalm 22, which we looked at earlier), King David looks forward to a day when “all the ends of the earth will remember and return to the Lord.” (v. 27)

And just as God heard the cries of Israel in biblical times, God heard the cries of the Jewish people after World War II. The remaining Jewish survivors of the Holocaust after World War II began to hear God’s voice. He was calling the Jewish people back to the land that He had given them. You might also recall from last week’s message that time and again in the Old Testament, God promised blessings and protection to Abraham and his descendants. God had promised the people of Israel that the land of Canaan was His gift to them forever. (The scripture also records the words of the prophets who cried out warnings to the people of Israel that their unfaithfulness might cost them the very land God promised. But God’s promises are greater than our unfaithfulness.) And so, on May 14, 1948, the United Nations General Assembly, against all expectations, recognized Israel as a sovereign state once again. In Isaiah 66:8, the prophet predicted a nation would be born in a single day—and that day was the creation of modern Israel, May 14, 1948.

Even on such an historic day as the creation of the modern state of Israel, there was trouble. *Every one* of Israel's neighbours declared war against this reborn nation. When the British left "Palestine" and the new nation of Israel tried to take its rightful place in the world, five Arab nations declared war on Israel: Egypt, Syria, Transjordan, Lebanon, and Iraq. Azzam Pasha, the Secretary-General of the Arab League at that time, announced to the world their one aim: "It will be a war of annihilation." Miraculously, Israel defended itself against *five* invading armies and established itself as a homeland where Jewish people could return and once again have the opportunity to live in the blessings promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The lessons for us today are more than just history lessons. The real life experiences of the people of Israel demonstrate that even when all hope appears to be lost, God is still faithful to His promises. And even when it seems like the odds are overwhelmingly against us, God Himself will come to our defense. This is true for us personally, as well as for the people of Israel. The promises that God originally made to the patriarch Abraham were still in the operation when Israel was reborn as a state. This should give us hope for every trouble we face personally and also hope for the fate of *our* nation—so long as we remain faithful to God.

Time and again in the Old Testament, God promised to bless Israel if she remained faithful and to bless those who blessed Israel. God also promised that He Himself would stand against any nation that stood against Israel. This has been demonstrated over and over again during Israel's 70 years of modern history. It was certainly demonstrated in those early years just after 1948. Derek Prince was a British bible teacher and scholar who lived in Jerusalem in 1948. He was an eyewitness to the events that reestablished Israel. In his essay "*Our Debt to Israel*", Prince remembers and reflects on the lessons of these biblical promises and the realities of the modern world. He writes:

Britain emerged victorious from two World Wars, retaining intact an empire that was perhaps the most extensive in human history. But in 1947–8, as the mandatory power over Palestine, Britain opposed and attempted to thwart the rebirth of Israel as a sovereign nation with her own state.

(Since I was living in Jerusalem throughout this period, I make this statement as an eyewitness of what actually took place.) From that very moment in history, Britain's empire underwent a process of decline and disintegration so rapid and total that it cannot be accounted for merely by the relevant political, military or economic factors. Today, less than a generation later, Britain is a struggling, second-rate power.

Before World War II, Great Britain was the greatest empire in world history. After turning its back on the new state of Israel, it was reduced to what Dr. Prince called "a second-rate power." Think of it. The fate of nations may not depend on their political or military strength, but rather on whether they stand with Israel. This is true of all nations, including Canada.

So what can we do? How can we respond to the scripture and God's will?

First, we must allow our views regarding the state of Israel to be informed by the scriptures, as we understand them. The Bible speaks to us about so many stands we must take in life: to stand for light and to confront darkness; to stand with the poor and the oppressed, because Jesus said "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me"; we must stand for the life of the unborn while also supporting the women who need our help; *AND* we must stand with Israel—because it is the teaching of scripture.

Second, we must understand that the battle is “not against flesh and blood” (as Paul teaches us in Ephesians 6:12). In part, this means that the relentless opposition to the state of Israel in our day is not driven by politics or the opinions of men—it is not merely that some people “don’t like the Jews”—it is a spiritual battle! While it is good to support leaders who support Israel, the focus of this wrestling match must be on intercessory prayer for Israel and the people of Israel. The real “enemy” is not any group of people, but “principalities and powers” that are arrayed against the work of God and the blessings of God that are designed to flow through Israel to the entire world! While persuasion and political argument certainly has its place, ultimately, this is a spiritual battle.

Finally, we can and should look for practical ways to support the state of Israel. This can be accomplished by showing kindness to our Jewish friends and neighbours. It means teaching and declaring biblical truth (as we understand it), always in a spirit of humility and love. It may also mean looking for tangible ways to support Israel or the people of Israel through our charitable giving. I urge each of us to prayerfully consider our personal responsibilities as Christians. We are the people who received the good news of the Gospel through the faithfulness of the earliest believers, who were all from Israel. Surely there are loving ways to fulfill our debt to Israel—but more on that next week!