



COVER STORY

Israel's Current Conflict and God's Eternal Plan

By Dr. Tim M. Sigler



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Immediately following the atrocities of the Hamas massacre on October 7, 2023, I was contacted by a prominent pastor friend near Washington, D.C. He invited me to take any of the next five Sundays to speak during their three Sunday morning services as well as during an evening seminar with time for Q&A to address five important questions that he believed his congregation needed to be able to answer from a Messianic

Jewish perspective. My pastor friend explained, "I think many people are interested in and concerned about what is happening in Israel but yet with very little knowledge of the issues due to pastors like me not preaching on these things adequately!" Sadly, as he readily confessed, he is right about the lack of clear biblical teaching and preaching about the role of Israel in God's redemptive plan, about how to understand cur-

rent issues in light of the teaching of Scripture, and about how to navigate biblically the ethical challenges that receive lots of one-sided coverage in the culture at large. Of course, I quickly adjusted my schedule to accept this important invitation and address these critical issues. The pastor's questions were so carefully chosen that readers of *Ariel Magazine* might also find them valuable. I will address his first three questions here.



1. Why Is Israel Special to God?

Several Scriptures immediately come to mind when considering God's choice of Israel to be the recipient of covenant blessings:

- ✧ To be blessed by God and be a blessing to all the families of the earth (Gen. 12:3)
- ✧ To be the inheritors of the land of promise (Gen. 28:13)
- ✧ To have God's special favor from generation to generation (Deut. 7:7-9)
- ✧ To have a line of kings from which an ultimate righteous ruler would come (2 Sam. 7:11-16)

Many believers assume incorrectly that because these promises to Israel are found in the Old Testament, they must somehow be part of a now-terminated plan. So, I prefer to begin with Scriptures that address these misconceptions head on.

First, Paul could not have been clearer when he instructed the Roman believers that Israel's gifts and calling are *irrevocable*. In Romans 11:28-32, he stated:

²⁸From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; ²⁹for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. ³⁰For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹so these also now have been disobedient, that

because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. ³²For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all.

Paul was speaking of God's promises to the Jewish people—the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He noted that even if the majority of Jewish people were opposed to the Messiahship of Yeshua and could therefore be considered ideological enemies of the gospel, they would still be *beloved* because of God's covenantal promises given to the *fathers*, meaning the patriarchs of Israel. This covenantal faithfulness was also good news for Gentiles in that it revealed God's design to determine both Jew and Gentile guilty so that He could extend His divine mercy in salvation to all who call upon Him. The gifts and calling of Israel extend beyond her faithfulness to the covenants, and Gentile believers can be grateful that God's covenantal faithfulness extends beyond their disobedience as well. Otherwise, who could be saved?

Second, Israel was chosen for special blessings, including the bringing of the Messiah. In Romans 9:3-5, Paul instructed his readers about his heartfelt connection to his own Jewish people:

³For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Messiah for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, ⁴who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, ⁵whose

are the fathers, and from whom is the Messiah according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

Note the ethnic markers that associate the Jewish people with ancient Israel and the plan of redemption for all mankind. God uniquely gave the Jewish people certain blessings that are listed in this passage. No other people group can claim these outstanding historical realities. God chose/adopted the Jewish people to have His *Shekinah* glory dwell in their midst in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple. God gave them His instructions in the Torah and many other blessings that are simply summarized as "the promises," many of which can be differentiated in Scripture through a study of the biblical covenants. But ultimately, Israel's truly unique blessing that blessed all of creation was that the Messiah came through the Jewish people.

Later in Romans, Paul wrote of the Jewish-Gentile relationship to the gospel in terms of a spiritual debt.¹ If believers rightly appreciated God's plan to bring salvation to all the families of the earth through the Jewish people, there would be no such thing as Christian anti-Semitism. But sadly, such has often been prominent in the church's history.²

Third, Israel's history of disobedience to the covenant and failure to obey the Torah does not invalidate God's promises to bless Abraham's descendants. The nation is still loved by God and will one day be the recipient of His covenantal blessings. Paul made this point in Galatians 3:17-18:

¹ Gerald W. Peterman, "Social Reciprocity and Gentile Debt to Jews in Romans 15:26-27," *JETS* 50/4 (2007): 735–746.

² Michael L. Brown, *Our Hands are Stained with Blood: The Tragic Story of the "Church" and the Jewish People* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 1992).



¹⁷What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.

¹⁸For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.

Many interpreters have attempted to dissociate ancient biblical Israel from the Jewish people today, but this was not the tenor and teaching of the New Testament and it should not be a confusing issue for the church today. Historical, ethnic, genetic, linguistic, cultural, and religious (the list could go on) realities connect the biblical nation of Israel to the Jewish people and the modern State of Israel today. While it is correct to observe that biblical occurrences of the word "Israel" should

not be read as direct references to the modern State of Israel (which obviously did not exist at that time), there is a connection between the two that should not be avoided: The Jewish people of today are the modern outgrowth of biblical Israel, and the history of the Jewish people is the centerpiece of biblical history and prophecy.

Fourth, in light of these straightforward New Testament references, one might allow for a statement from the post-exilic prophet Zechariah. In Zechariah 2:7-10, the prophet stated:

⁷"Ho, Zion! Escape, you who are living with the daughter of Babylon." ⁸For thus says the LORD of hosts, "After glory He has sent Me against the nations which plunder you, for he who touches you, touches the apple of His eye." ⁹For behold, I will wave My hand over

them so that they will be plunder for their slaves. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me. ¹⁰"Sing for joy and be glad, O daughter of Zion; for behold I am coming and I will dwell in your midst," declares the LORD.

In summary, God loves the Jewish people with an everlasting love. Israel is *the apple of His eye*, and God has chosen Jerusalem as His dwelling place.

2. Who Are the Palestinians?

The term "Palestine" refers to the land that once was the ancient kingdom of Israel and was later divided up as Judea, Samaria, the Galilee, and Idumea (or the Negev). It originated circa A.D. 132 as a means of removing its



Above: In 1950, *The Palestine Post* changed its name to *The Jerusalem Post*.

attachment to the Jewish people. The Roman emperor Hadrian's patience was exhausted with the Jewish rebels, who just would not stop in their zeal to reclaim the land of their fathers. So in an act of what today would be considered psychological warfare, Hadrian put down the Bar Kokhba Revolt and renamed Jerusalem as Aelia Capitolina and the region as Palestine. He chose to designate it as the land of the Philistines, a biblical sea people, because they had passed off the scene of history and could not pose a threat. Thankfully, Jerusalem's redesignation did not stick. But sadly, the name Palestine has provided historical confusion for nearly two thousand years.

To be clear, all residents—Jewish, Arab, and anyone else living in the area—before 1948 were considered Palestinians in terms of geography. Even the newspaper that promoted the early Zionist vision of hope for the Jewish people in their ancient biblical homeland was called *The Palestine Post* (forerunner to *The Jerusalem Post*). Like the histories of most lands

that were explored, settled, and made into modern states with organized governments, the early Zionist settlers arrived to a rather disorganized situation in the late 1800s, all under the Ottoman Turkish Empire. There was no Palestinian state. If there had been, we could read about its history and know who its presidents or prime ministers and political leaders were. Yet none of that exists. There were towns with Jewish majority populations and towns with Arab majorities, and some lived and worked in cooperation with each other despite religious and cultural differences.³

In the aftermath of the Holocaust, as the United Nations recognized various new governments in the Middle East, various modern states were formed where the French once had Lebanon and Syria and the British had Palestine. The United Nations also provided their famous Partition Plan of 1947 to allow some of the least attractive sections of coastland, malaria-infested swamps near the Galilee, and quite a bit of the desert to become a future homeland for the Jewish people. The best land in the central hill country was to go to the Arab population. However, this plan was not accepted by the surrounding Arab nations. As Israel declared its independence from Britain on May 14, 1948, its legitimacy was recognized by several foreign governments and, with-

out without hiding any section on the Partition Resolution of November 29. "Yesterday the battle for the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv road was still under way, and two Arab villages were taken. In the south, Acre town was captured, and the Jewish Army consolidated its position in Western Galilee."

in a year, by the UN. Local Arabs were invited to stay and become citizens of the newly formed state, and those who did are considered Israeli Arabs today. Local Arabs who sided with surrounding nations to destroy the newly formed state ended up losing this war and were displaced. The UN established refugee camps in the West Bank (biblical Judea and Samaria), the Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. These were not prisons but places of refuge from a war that was lost.

War is ugly and results in loss of life and human tragedy. In most wars, those who are displaced as refugees have to make new lives for themselves elsewhere. When Japanese refugees fled to the shores of the United States, they eventually became American citizens. Later conflicts produced more refugees from Korea and Vietnam. Any of those directly displaced by war were legitimately considered refugees. Once they were resettled, they became citizens of their new countries, and their children were citizens. However, unlike that which has been done for any other group of people, the UN established the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for those Arabs who were displaced from the Israeli War of Independence. This decision has kept these Arabs and all their descendants after them in perpetual refugee status even if they are third generation and have never even visited the land where their grandparents once lived.⁴ It is this multigenerational group of people who have claimed to be the true

³ The claim to indigeneity is at the center of many debates in the current context of cultural Marxism and intersectionality. See: <https://www.jpost.com/jerusalem-report/article-700904>.

⁴ For information, see: Pesach Benson, "The UNRWA Refugee Controversy Explained," *Honest Reporting*, June 17, 2019, <https://honestreporting.com/unrwa-refugees-explained/>.



Palestinians. Yasser Arafat, after the 1967 Six-Day War, claimed that Jews are not legitimately connected to Palestine; Arabs are. "We are the true Palestinians!" This has led to preposterous claims of an indigenous Palestinian culture distinct from the rest of Arab culture. Again, if such a culture existed, who were its leaders? What are its important cultural markers that make it different from other Arab cultures? The claims of a unique Palestinian culture attempt to call for the necessity of a unique Palestinian state as opposed to just blending in with the surrounding Arab majority countries that share the same language, culture, customs, religion(s), etc.

Finally, most Palestinians do not recognize Israel. They either do not recognize the right of Israel to exist (thus the desire for continual *jihad* until the elimination of "Zionism in Palestine" is

achieved) or they do not recognize Israel as a legitimate partner in a two-state solution. This fact is clearly observed in maps created by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and later the Palestinian Authority. On these maps, Palestine is everything known as Israel today, and the PLO wants it all liberated from the Zionists. There are no seriously considered political leaders among the Palestinians who are promoting a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

This is not to say that there are no peace-loving Palestinians. I know some of them personally, and I am grateful to call them friends. However, these people of peace are trapped in a larger culture of hatred and violence. If they speak up too loudly, they will be punished. The leaders have a tight grip on the culture as a whole, so much so that when atrocities occur

and innocent people die, even grandmothers are seen dancing in the streets and holding "Free Palestine" signs that support "the resistance."

There are also some wonderful but marginalized Palestinian academics who have suggested a path other than *jihad*, but a negotiated peace with the Israelis is not what is taught in schools, even UN-sponsored schools. Many Western leaders have decried the hatred inflicted upon Palestinian children who are taught to stab, stone, or otherwise harm and kill Israelis. Cartoons for young Palestinian children have idealized martyrdom and promoted suicide bombings as part of childhood entertainment.

Sadly, Palestinians have no elected consensus. Mahmoud Abbas was elected president in January 2005 for a four-year term, and there have been no elections since then. This democratic





disorder led to the Fatah party having the majority rule in the West Bank and Hamas gaining control of the Gaza Strip in 2006.⁵ There is also a lack of consensus in the PLO, and this leadership vacuum has led to many groups vying for power by trying to show themselves strong in their attacks against Israel. So, there has been no unified leader among the Palestinians with whom to attempt serious negotiations, peace proposals, or solutions to the conflict.

Those identifying as Palestinians today ultimately need the same good news message of the gospel as any other group. God loves the Palestinians as He does all people, and we can love them as well by praying for them. We pray especially for Palestinian believers to be bold in their witness so that many will come to saving faith in the Messiah.

3. Are the Jews Occupiers of Palestinian Land?

The Bible and history show an enduring Jewish presence in the land known as Israel today. As the archaeological record clearly reveals, excavating in this land uncovers artifacts of Jewish history and ancient Hebrew texts. Since there never was a "Palestinian state," it is impossible to defend the position that the Jewish people came and stole it from the Palestinians. When the early Zionist settlers came to the land where there were both Jewish and Arab local residents, they purchased and acquired land that had been used by local Bed-

ouin for grazing their herds. Some of those very same Bedouin still enjoy free passage and use of the same land and have good relations with the State of Israel. The Jewish settlers reclaimed malaria-infested swamplands and made them flourish with agriculture. They sought a peaceful existence with the local Arabs, and many families of Jews and Arabs coexisted in harmony and enjoyed mutually beneficial commerce.

When the State of Israel was formed, local Arabs were given the opportunity to stay and participate. Israel's Declaration of Independence states, "WE APPEAL—in the very midst of the onslaught launched against us now for months—to the Arab inhabitants of the State of Israel to preserve peace and participate in the upbuilding of the State on the basis of full and equal citizenship and due representation in all its provisional and permanent institutions."⁶ Many local Arabs did stay and became an integral part of the State of Israel. Even today, there are Arab Israelis who serve as elected members of the Knesset and represent their populations. Any claims of apartheid are simply false.

Conclusion

This article attempts to provide a concise answer to some of the complex questions surrounding Israel's current conflict and God's eternal plan. A Messianic Jewish perspective is grounded in the sufficiency of Scripture. It is informed by language, history, culture,

and geography. It takes Bible prophecy seriously and interprets Scripture from a literal historical-grammatical approach. It ultimately points us to our Messiah, who came as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world. He is the Prince of Peace and will make peace in the midst of spiritual warfare in the heavenly places and for Israel and the nations one day here on earth. He is the One for whom Israel waits and the One that both Jews and Gentiles can receive as a personal Savior from sin today—*Yeshua HaMashiach*. Of Him the prophet Zechariah wrote, *And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one* (Zech 14:9). Isaiah 9:7 further promises:

There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.



Dr. Tim Sigler has been invited by Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum to steward the efforts of Ariel Ministries into its next generation of gospel witness and doctrinal faithfulness. A seasoned practitioner in Messianic Jewish ministry and professor of Hebrew and biblical studies, he maintains an active international presence as a visiting professor, conference speaker, ministry consultant, and author.

⁵ For information regarding the political situation since 2005, see: "PA Unfit to Govern Gaza Post-Hamas, White House Says," *Ynetnews*, December 3, 2023. <https://www.ynetnews.com/article/bjf91v9rp>.

⁶ "The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel," n.d. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-declaration-of-the-establishment-of-the-state-of-israel>.