

Why and how to bless the Jews biblically – A message for Christians

1. The Fact and Purpose of God's Choice for Israel

It was God's decision to set the Jews apart as his chosen people (Deut. 4:7-8, Ps. 147:19-20, Rom. 3:1-2, Rom. 9:4) This undeniable fact is recorded in both the Old and the New Testaments of the Bible. God, the Creator of the universe desires to have a loving, personal relationship with all His created beings. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, body and strength, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself" constitutes the basis for the Judeo-Christian faith. Because man fell into sin, God had a unique way of **restoring** sinful man to a right relationship to Himself, the ultimate end being to bring glory to the Creator and joy to His created beings. He used/uses the Jewish people from whom Jesus, the Messiah, the Savior of the world, was birthed to reveal to us how to love God and how to properly and lovingly relate to each other, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

2. The Reason for God's Choice of Israel

In Deut. 7:6-8 Moses gives one of the earliest explanations why God chose Israel: "You are a people holy to the Lord, your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be His people, His treasured possession. The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples (today 13-14 million worldwide). But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath He swore to your forefathers (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob)....."

Very simply yet passionately Scripture justifies why God chose Israel: "because the Lord loved you...." This love affair between God and the Jewish people spans 4,000

years. It is the longest recorded love affair in human history.

Here are some paragraphs describing God's love for Israel from the Old Testament, as excerpted from Avner Boskey's book "Israel, the Key to World revival".

"The Apple of God's Eye: Zechariah proclaimed 2,500 years ago concerning the Jewish people: 'This is what the Lord Almighty says...whoever touches you touches the apple of His eye.' Zech 2:8. From God's perspective, to roughly handle the Jewish people is to stick a finger into the eyes of God! Handle Israel with care!

A Shepherd's Heart - In Ezekiel 34:11-16, 28-31 the God of Israel describes Himself as the Good Shepherd of His nation who will provide, protect, and grant peaceful grazing grounds: "I will bring them out from the nations into their own land, search for the lost, the strays. They will no longer be victims of famine in the land or bear the scorn of the nations. I, the Lord their God, am with them and they, even the house of Israel, are My People and ye, My flock, the flock of My pasture are Mine, and I am your God."

A Mother's Love - Isaiah 49:14-16 conveys that God's love for Israel is softer than a mother's breast, throbbing with more compassion than a mother's womb: "But Zion said, 'The Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me'. 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! I have engraved My people on the palms of My hands; your walls are ever before Me."

God's Land and God's Capital - God's heart for the Jewish people is always connected to the promised Land of Abraham's Covenant: Deut. 11:8-12: "...the eyes of the Lord your God are continually on the land from the beginning of the year to its end." It is always His land and their

land, whatever the nations may call it at any given moment in history - Canaan, Palestine, Greater Syria, The West Bank, the Occupied Territories or the Palestinian Authority.

Why are the Jewish people so devoted to Jerusalem, Israel's biblical capital and to the City of Peace? Nearly 3000 years ago the Lord appeared to King Solomon in Jerusalem and said, "I have heard the prayer and plea you have made before me; I have consecrated this Temple, which you have built, by putting My Name there forever. My eyes and My heart will always be there." 1 Kings 9:3. God's eyes, His Name and His heart are eternally bound to Jerusalem! No wonder the Jewish people declare this City to be their pearl, their prize -their chief joy and eternal destiny! No wonder Jerusalem has been in the hearts and prayers of Jews throughout their dispersion!"

3. God's Relationship to His Servant Israel

In the New Testament Paul explains God's ministry for the Jews on this earth: "to them He committed the oracles of God" (the revelation of Himself through His ongoing interaction with the Jews, and the recording and safe-keeping of that history in both the Old and New Testaments).

Commenting on Romans 9:4 Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum amplifies the eight privileges and prerogatives of Israel: a) as the national son of God Ex.4:22, b) as the witnesses of the "Glory" ("Shekinah Glory") - the physical, visible manifestation of God's presence - c) the four unconditional, eternal covenants He made with Israel, being the Abrahamic, Land, Davidic and New Covenants, as well as d) the Mosaic Covenant = "the giving of the law", the only one that is conditional and temporary, e) the "service of God" being the entire Levitical services and various offerings, f) the "promises" (plural) which comprise the Messianic promises of His First and also His Second Comings, g) the "Fathers" who are the Jewish patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and h) "Messiah Himself" who as the God-man and as a Jew

had a physical and personal relationship to Israel.

4. The Inclusion of the Nations in God's Choice of Israel

ALL of the spiritual blessings to Israel (as mediated by God's covenants to the Jews) are made accessible to the nations as illustrated in Romans 11 where the "wild olive branches are grafted into the natural olive tree" to "partake of" (not take over) the "root and fatness of the olive tree" which is a place of spiritual blessing for both Jewish and Gentile believers.

Paul further made it very clear in Ephesians 2:11-16 and Ephesians 3:3-6 that the middle wall of partition - the Mosaic Law of Commandments - has been broken down through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and with that access has been given to ALL Gentile believers ("strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world") to "partake of" (not take over) - ALL the spiritual blessings by the Gospel offered to the Jews.

The one physical blessing - the Land of Israel - is reserved as a place for the Jews to live in, just as other nations can rightfully and peacefully live in prescribed areas throughout the world.

5. What the Church has received from the Jews

It is through the Jews that we can list five specific things that we, the Church, have received from the Jews: the Scriptures, the Savior, salvation, the concept of the Church, and spiritual blessing. The very first believers in Acts 2 were all Jews and they did a most effective job in fulfilling exactly, conscientiously and faithfully Jesus' command to them to be His witnesses "both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the world" Acts 1:8. Upon God's (new) revelation to them that Gentiles were to be included into the Jewish household of faith, they gladly flung the doors wide open to Gentiles (Acts 15), placing a minimum of

legal requirements on them. They were passionately committed to Jesus, the Messiah, and suffered great deprivation and hardship on His behalf. All the apostles, except John the Revelator, were killed for their faith. To the Jews we owe a great debt of gratitude.

6. The Misunderstanding of the Church regarding Israel's Position in God's Plan

In the course of the last two millennia since the Gospel was received by a remnant of Jewish believers and then successfully transmitted to the nations, there has been a tragic misunderstanding on the part of the early (Roman) church fathers over God's relationship to Israel, arising from their presumption that God was finished with the Jews because "they crucified Jesus". In truth, Jesus' death was brought about by BOTH Jews and Romans, which was God's ultimate purpose for Him, namely to die for the sins of all mankind so they can be resurrected to eternal life, John 3:16. He gave his life of his own accord (John 10:18).

These early Roman church fathers were erroneously led to allegorize parts of the Bible which enabled them to write the Jews OUT of the Bible, and write the Church IN as the favored and sole recipients of God's covenants, promises and blessings. They liberally conferred upon the Jews all the curses, including eternal damnation. This error in theology of "super-sessionism" or "replacement theology" has dominated church teaching and most denominations to this day and has placed a wedge between the Church and the Jews. It has stood in the way for Christians to love the Jews, in general, and appreciate the Jewish roots of their Christian faith, in particular. It has also obstructed the understanding that the Church has both a debt and a loving responsibility toward the Jewish progenitors of their blessings.

Since - according to Replacement Theology - the focus of God's love and attention has been transferred to the Church, it is not clear in the minds of some

Christians whether God still loves the Jews and whether He attaches any significance to them today. God's purposes for ALL the nations - including Israel - have always been purposes of truth and love, salvation and righteousness.

The following are the ways set down in the Bible how our heartbeat can beat with God's and Paul's heart-beat for the Jewish people to whom we owe a great debt of gratitude and who have suffered immeasurably as a consequence of Replacement Theology:

7. Five Ways to Correct the Historic Misunderstandings Today

7.A) LOVING THE JEWS IS GOD'S HIGHEST CALLING FOR BELIEVERS FROM THE NATIONS

It is nearly impossible to comprehend the depth of pain and the trauma that is common to the Jewish heart. Centuries upon centuries of ongoing abuse, shame, and oppression in nation after nation left their mark. Continual wandering and humiliation at the hands of hostile foreign rulers scarred the national soul. And waves of persecution by self-acclaimed Christians down through the ages made Christ a very distant and cold-hearted Gentile God!

It is important for Jews to know that you love them and appreciate their part in sharing the Jewish Messiah and Scriptures with you. Because of the influence of super-sessionism on Church theology, most Christians today have little knowledge about the two thousand years of Jewish history from 70 A.D. till the present time. Such information would be very helpful as you reach out and learn to relate to them.

(a) APPLY THE LAW OF LOVE TO THEM WHICH FULFILLS THE LAW (Rom. 13:8)

In Rom. 13:8 Paul was mainly reviewing the Jewish Ten Commandments for the benefit of the (sometimes new) Gentile believers who might *not* have been familiar with them.

For this reason he did not include the commandment about "keeping the Sabbath", which the Jewish believers quite naturally kept at the time, as a token of the Mosaic Covenant.

You shall not commit adultery.
You shall not kill.
You shall not steal.
You shall not bear false witness.
You shall not covet - Love your neighbor as yourself.

(b) PROVOKE THE JEWS TO JEALOUSY
(Rom. 11:11-14, Rom. 12: 1-2):

"The Greek word translated "to provoke to jealousy" is *parazelaō*. The picture we get is that the Gentile believer is to come alongside a Jew, *para*, in daily contact and to live a life of such incredible love and power producing the supernatural fruit of the spirit of love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith that the Jew will begin to burn with red hot envy, *zelos*, so that he will want the very thing the Gentile believer has: the Jewish Messiah!" (from Dr. A. Fruchtenbaum)

7.B) SHARING GOD'S MERCY WITH THE JEWS
(Rom. 11, 12 and 15)

Mercy is shown to the Jews through God's covenantal relationship to their Patriarchs.

Mercy is shown to the Gentiles through their inclusion into the faith of Israel.

God has used (partial) Jewish unbelief to graft them in: Gentile salvation came **AT THE EXPENSE OF THE JEWS** ("for your sakes" Rom 11:28 - for the sake of Gentile salvation the Jews were partially blinded, had their ears stopped up, their hearts hardened **TEMPORARILY**, until "ALL Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:26) which will come to pass in hopefully the not too distant future.

Both (partial) Jewish disobedience *and* God's mercy are in present tense.

Rom. 11:28-31 "You Gentiles in the past have not believed God, but now God has given you MERCY through their (the Jews') unbelief, so that through YOUR MERCY, they (the Jews) might also receive mercy."

Rom. 12:1 "I beseech you therefore, by the MERCIES of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

Rom. 15:9 "and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His MERCY (to them)"

Rom. 15:10 "Rejoice, O nations, WITH His Jewish people!" (because of the MERCY shown to them in 15:9) because now BOTH Jews and Gentiles have a place of equal spiritual standing, as saved sinners, in the family of God.

Is it not true that God has freely bestowed unconditional love on all of us by His death on the cross? Should we also then not apply this same freely-bestowed, unconditional love when we reach out to His brethren in the flesh?

7.C) RESPECTING THE PRINCIPLE "TO THE JEW FIRST, AND ALSO TO THE GREEK" Romans 1:16 FOR SHARING SALVATION WITH ALL PEOPLES, ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD

Jesus **ALSO** has Israel on His heart. He declared that He "came but for the lost sheep of the House of Israel". He limited His ministry to the Jewish disciples, in the Land of Israel, except for a few trips to neighboring Gentile territory (Samaria and Lebanon). Even though a remnant of Jews accepted Him at His first coming, we know from the Bible that He will return a second time, this time for ALL of saved Israel, and He will return to the Land of Israel, to Jerusalem, David's Capital, to fulfill ALL the covenants He made with Israel. This includes establishing the promised Messianic Kingdom in Israel within the land boundaries that were prescribed to the Jews in the Old Testament.

Therefore we should care about the salvation of the Jews, because Jesus cares about His brothers and sisters, the Jews, whether or not they ever came to believe in Him. And if we live for Jesus, we must have Israel on our hearts.

Paul points himself out as one who was **NOT** called to go to the Jews. His calling was to be the Apostle of the Gentiles (while Peter was the Apostle of the Jews). But Paul never lost his heart and prayers to God for His brethren, the Jewish people. Rom.

10:1

And again, while Paul's calling was to the Gentiles, he never forgot the principle of Rom. 1:16. Everywhere he went, he went "to the Jew first", and then "to the Gentile" in every location where God put him: Acts 13: 5, 14, Acts 14:1, Acts 16:12-13, Acts 17: 1-2, 10, 16-17, Acts 18:1, 19, Acts 19:1, Acts 28: 17.

With the dispersion of the Jews to the four corners of the earth for two millennia, Jews are still to be found *throughout* world, so if you, like Paul, are led to minister to the Gentiles, you, too, can fulfill your vision to the Gentiles, but at the same time seek out and share the message of salvation first, whenever possible, to the Jews living in the area(s) so that BOTH Jew and Gentile get an opportunity to hear the good news of the Gospel.

This is not a matter of preference but of Biblical priority. The church for historic reasons distinguishes two branches of missions (home and foreign) -and both need to follow the principle of Romans 1:16, "to the Jews first..." as did the early Church.

7.D) BLESSING ISRAEL MATERIALLY IN RECIPROCITY FOR GOD'S MERCIFUL SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS ON THE GENTILES:

The Bible gives an impressive record of gifts to the (materially lacking) believing Jews in Jerusalem:

Gifts encouraged from the Roman believers: Paul in Rom. 15:25-27 exhorts them to make "material contributions to the poor (Jewish) believers in Jerusalem", giving the example of Macedonia and Achaia.

Gifts to the believers in Antioch: In Acts 11:27-29 the church in Antioch sent gifts to Jerusalem believers at a time of great famine in the days of Claudius Caesar.

Gifts to the Corinthian believers: In two entire chapters of II Cor. 8 and 9 Paul addresses and highly commends the Gentile believers of Macedonia and Achaia (again!) for their generous donations to the "saints in Jerusalem". (Please note that Paul then and now is not exhorting the Corinthian church of his day to missions *in general*, but to *the poor saints in Jerusalem in particular*. This is the context of these two chapters and we need to read them *with contextual application*.) This would imply that today we need to be giving to the original "mother church" which is in Jerusalem, Israel, in addition to the other missions of God's leading. The priority of the household of God for giving is stated in Gal 6:10,

Gifts to the Philippian believers: In Phil. 4:10-19, Paul praises the Philippians for their gift of money to him via Ephroditus for the poor Jews in Jerusalem. The Philippians were especially close to the heart of Paul, because their church was the only one that made a financial contribution to Paul when he left Macedonia for the poor Jerusalem believers. was in Thessalonica. Comparing "being full" (Phil. 4:12) and "being hungry" Paul considered "himself full" after having received Ephroditus' gifts which were "as a sweet-smelling fragrance, an acceptable and well-pleasing sacrifice to God."

It is *in the context and as a result of giving specifically to the poor Jews in Jerusalem (and not to churches in general)* that Paul pours out a prophetic blessing on the Philippian donors: "But my God shall supply ALL your need, according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

The financial gifts Paul spoke of were not one-time offerings at all, but rather an established Apostolic tradition in support of the Jewish believers in Judea. This practice continued faithfully until the second century when it was stopped by the second pope due to the power struggle between Rome and Jerusalem. Tragically, soon after that the Church sank into 1,000 years of darkness!

7.E) PRAYING FOR THE JEWS IS THE PRIVILEGE OF ALL CHRISTIANS

Keeping abreast of current news about Israel, the Jews in dispersion (as well as the nations of the world) will enable you to pray knowledgeably for them, some of the needs being:

1. Understanding, sensitivity and love to grow and flow from the Church to the Jews
2. Salvation for the Jews both in Israel and world-wide
3. Israeli Government to act righteously, decisively and courageously
4. Spiritual warfare against the steep surge of global anti-Semitism (including Arab hatred) and protection for Israel and Jews world-wide
5. Open doors for persecuted Jews - and other Jews who are so led - to return to Israel
6. The veil of Replacement Theology to be lifted with penitence from almost all Christian denominations
7. Sharing of this information with your Pastor, Church, Christian friends, children and grand-children

Psalms 122:6 encourages us to specifically pray for the City of God: "Pray for the *Peace of Jerusalem* - they shall prosper who love Thee." True peace will not come until the Prince of Peace returns to His Jewish people in Jerusalem and to this earth. Therefore when we pray for the Peace of Jerusalem we are indirectly praying for the Lord's Return. Let us therefore pray for the Jewish

people to soon usher in the Lord's return with their personal invitation:

"Blessed is He that comes in the Name of the Lord!"

Until then, may your heart be syncopated with the very heart of God to beat for the Jews!

Maranatha!

Compiled/written by Chavah Benda, 2009

References:

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ⁱ According to recent scholarship, ALL the authors of the Old and New Testaments are Jewish, including Luke.