

## Israel: God's Everlasting Covenant Study I – The Call of a Nation

A. It is fitting to begin our study with an excerpt from Sandra Teplinsky's book *Why Care About Israel?* (pp. 17-18)

In the scorching breeze of Chaldean antiquity, God prophesies to His friend Abraham.

"I will bless those who bless you."

Angels, I imagine, dance. Man's redemption rolls into motion; over the sands and cities of the ancient Near East, the Gospel glimmers.

Then one night, Abraham's runaway grandson lays his head down on a pillow of stone, and blanketed by blinking stars, he too, meets the Blessor. In a celestial dream in the desert, Jacob (renamed Israel) inherits the covenant blessing.

Four thousand years later, the world is changed but the Word is not. The heavens collide and God catapults the children of Israel back to global center stage. Instantly, the Jewish nation becomes an international battle zone – and stumbling stone. Why?

Because it's all about Him.

The Creator King picked an otherwise sorry little strain of humanity called Israel for the sake of His own glory – not just for Bible times, but for all of history, down to this hour and beyond. Israel in the twenty-first century is all about *Him*.

Do you want to know your God and His ways intimately? Do you want Him to find in you a friend with whom He freely shares His heart and mind in this increasingly complex world, with its changing set of realities? Then understand what He is saying to you through Israel. Because what He is saying through her, He is not quite saying – or doing – any other way. Appropriate that understanding, and you will not be the same. I think – at least I pray – you will be more like *Him*.

B. There is so much to learn in the Bible about Israel, that we will only be able to touch on some elements. Our hope is that this study will make you want to delve deeper into God's Word on this subject. Don't take our word for it. There is a rich blessing in store for you when you understand God's purpose in revealing so much about this tiny country and people in His Word. Our hope in sharing this study with you is that you will hear Heaven's heartbeat for Israel and the Jewish people, and when you hear your Father's heart, we pray your heart will beat as passionately for Israel as His does, and that you will respond with loving abandon and do whatever it is the Father asks of you.

C. We are going to learn the following truths: (from "*Why Care About Israel?*" p. 19)

- Israel is God's irrevocable covenant people through whom He uniquely reveals Himself to the nations – and you and me.
- Blessings and curses flow from Israel for us to sow and reap.
- Christianity does not supersede physical Israel or her covenant promises.
- The Jewish nation serves as a prophetic microcosm of humanity and God's dealings with all nations.
- As God's New Covenant people, Christians are inextricably related to His Old Covenant people. Together we share a common prophetic destiny.

- According to the Bible, before the Lord returns, only His true Bride from among the nations will stand with Israel.
- God uses Israel to test, reveal and refine the hearts and intents of humanity

### C. Let's get into the Scriptures

#### 1. Genesis 12:1-3 – have someone read it.

- God's call to Abraham begins with a command. What did God ask of him? Answer: *LEAVE your country and GO to the LAND I will show you.*
- What was the promise God then gave to Abraham? Answer: *He would make him into a great nation, would bless him, make his name great, would bless anyone who blesses him and curse anyone who doesn't, and bless all the people of the earth through him.*
- It is important to understand here that the blessing was not only for Abraham personally, but also for his descendants.
- Who do you think God was referring to when He said "all the people of the earth"? Answer: *the gentile nations – this promise also included all the other people of the earth that were not Abraham's descendants.*
- According to Genesis 12:3, what did God require for His blessing on all peoples on earth? Answer: *They must bless Abraham and his descendants.*

#### 2. What does it mean to bless Abraham and his descendants?

- In order to answer that question, first we must know who his *descendants* are. Most, if not all of us, have decided at one point or another that his descendants are Israel and the Jewish people. For purposes of our study, Israel will be used interchangeably with the Jewish people. We will see that biblically speaking, they are one in the same. Let's go to the scriptures and see that this is true.
- Abraham had a son through Hagar, Ishmael. He didn't wait for God, and used his own devices to father a child. In Genesis 17, God reconfirms His promise & covenant with Abraham several times, and that he would have a son through Sarah. Abraham wanted God to establish His covenant with Ishmael. **Read Genesis 17:17-21.** We see that God confirmed He would establish His covenant with Isaac. We'll study more about Ishmael later. Later, in Galatians, Paul indeed confirms that Isaac is the child of promise (Galatians 4:28).
- Covenant re-affirmed by God directly to Isaac in Beersheba – **Read Gen 26:2, 23**
- Covenant re-affirmed by God to Isaac's son Jacob. He has a dream, the famous dream of the ladder. God appears to him in the dream **Read Gen 28:10-19.** And Jacob names the place Beth El (House of God).

This is the same Beth El that Abraham built an altar and called upon the Lord (12:8 and 13:3 & 4)

- God revisits Jacob after he returns to Beth El (**Genesis 35:9-15**). God changes Jacob's name to "Israel."
- Jacob has 12 sons – each of whom become known later as the names of the 12 tribes of Israel (**Genesis 35:23-26**). One of the sons, Judah, the *progenitor of the tribe of Judah*, is where the term "Jew" is derived from. You may ask why that name has been given to them, or even, who is a Jew? In modern Jewry, there is no universally excepted meaning. Even the state of Israel has not put the question to rest. Judah was the tribe of Yeshua, Jesus. After the first exile to Babylon, the term "Jew" is used in the Bible synonymously with "Israel" to describe the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (**See Esther 2:5, Ezra 4:12**). It is interesting to note that the name "Judah" means "praise" or "thanks." The implication is that the Jews are a people created to demonstrate *thankfulness to and for the praise of God*.

3. Now that we have determined who Abraham's descendants are, we can get back to the commandment to "bless Abraham & his descendants." What does it mean to bless? What does it mean to curse?

- Know the *Blesser*. God has always desired to bless people – all people. **Let's read Genesis 12:2-3** again. "I will make you [Abraham and his chosen descendants] 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.*"
- **Bless:** In Genesis 12:3, the word "bless" is "**barekh**", which stems from the root word "**barakh**". Sandra Teplinsky, in her book *Why Care About Israel?* explains: "**Barakh**" literally means "to kneel." It connotes an attitude of the heart, humility. Kneeling before someone implies honor, preference or service. It's a posture of laying down one's life for another. The word "bless" denotes "enrichment", both physical and spiritual. In other words, "making rich." "Rich" means abundance in quantity or quality. So, when we put them together – kneeling to enrich. Isn't this what God does with us? He kneels (so to speak) to enrich us. Jesus did so when He washed Peter's and the other disciples' feet. Jesus submitted Himself to the Cross to bring the riches of *His* inheritance to us, eternal relationship and life with His Father in Heaven! As the Psalmist says in **Psalm 18:35** "You stoop down to make me great." We get a very clear picture then, of what it means to bless the Jewish people. It is to humble ourselves not in worship of them, but in Messiah-like humility, in honor, deference and service to them, to seek to enrich their lives. We'll talk more about this later and what we can practically do.
- **Curse:** the Hebrew definition has two meanings: 1) to stop or impose a barrier, ban or paralysis and 2) to treat lightly or belittle or make little.

- It is important to understand these verses because it determines the course of history. Have you noticed that every person or nation that has cursed (tried to stop or belittle) Israel has been cursed? We don't have time for a full history lesson here, but let me just name a few:
  1. A pharaoh enslaved the Hebrews in Egypt and was destroyed in the Red Sea (**Exodus 14**).
  2. The Moabites tried to curse Israel through a soothsayer named Balaam and they were cursed instead (**Nehemiah 13:1-2**).
  3. Assyria (Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon) is no more.
  4. Haman the Persian, formed a diabolical plot to destroy the Jews, and was himself hanged (see **Esther**).
  5. The emperor Constantine came to power in Rome and made Christianity the official religion of the empire and the new church-state alliance imposed cruel and virulent anti-Jewish laws. The great Roman church crumbled, Rome destructed from within and sent the then known world spiraling into the Dark Ages. It is interesting to note that during this time, Islam rose to the fore.
  6. Even in modern history, Britain was once a great power who dominated the world. Jews were settling in Britain about 500 years ago and they enjoyed favor from a small, but vocal group of Christians who supported the Jews in the land. These "forerunners of Christian Zionism" as Sandra Teplinsky calls them, "played a major role in imparting help to European Jews who were returning to and rebuilding their ancestral homeland." (*Why Care About Israel?*, p. 46) As Teplinsky explains, Britain was blessed because she was blessing the Jewish people. A turning point came after World War I. Britain was granted a great opportunity by God to oversee and supervise the establishment of a Jewish homeland in what was then called Palestine. However, she did not follow through with her promise in the Balfour Declaration. By the time all was said and done, 76 % of what was originally promised was given to the Arabs (that area of land is the modern country of Jordan). Britain abandoned their mandate and turned their responsibility over to the UN for the remaining 24% of the land. In 1947 it was partitioned into two separate states, which left the Jewish people with a mere 12% of the original promise! It is important to note that during the years of the Holocaust, Britain severely limited the amount of Jews who could immigrate to Palestine (10,000/year) due to pressure from the Arabs. Millions of Jews that might have been saved instead perished in Hitler's gas chambers. Great Britain's empire is no more.
  7. Germany was a nation completely humiliated, decimated and divided after World War II and Hitler's attempt to destroy the Jewish people.

8. Spain, France, the Soviets, all were once great powers who have been humiliated and are a shadow of what they once were. Why? Because they cursed the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
9. The Arab nations are following down the well trodden path of these other people and nations. From history, we can clearly see that they are headed for destruction unless they repent. Sadly, they are missing out on the blessing that God intended for them through their relationship with Israel. As God changed Esau's heart toward Jacob so many thousands of years ago, He will do it again, and Jacob and Esau will once more fall on one another's necks and weep, and their relationship will be restored! It should be noted that Esau's descendants are the Edomites, the Arabs who today live in Jordan. They are also those who claim to be "Palestinian." We're going to learn in a later study how we can be a part of God's plan for reconciliation & redemption of the Arab people to Himself.
10. And what about America, you may ask? We don't want to dwell here too long because getting into politics is not the purpose of our study. However, in the arena of world politics, America has steadfastly been Israel's greatest ally...and we have been blessed because of it. But in 1993, things began to change, and America's presidents began pressing persistently upon the Jewish nation to make peace with her enemies by dividing up her land. God is very clearly against this. **Read Joel 3:2.** The little known and studied book of **Obadiah** has some very interesting things to say and we would be wise to listen: **read verses 10-15**

History proves that those who blessed Israel were blessed. Those who cursed her were cursed. We need to pray for America, that she will not follow down the path of destruction with the rest of the nations. Of course, we know through prophecy, all nations will one day turn against Israel. And the United States appears to be going down that same path. ***Will we, as Christians, take a courageous stand with her?***