

A Plan, a People, and a Purpose

An excerpt from the first chapter of the *Mystery of Zion – Israel and the Last Days*

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From the time of Jesus' birth, which became the dividing line between ancient history and the modern age (designated as *anno domini* or the "year of the Lord"), a battle has brewed between the Jewish religious leader's interpretation of the promised Messiah and the reality of God's divine purpose and promise of a Savior. Through the Gospels, the record of Jesus is presented as a historical account, helping to define the true purpose and focus of the Messiah. Yet the misinterpretation of God's plan of redemption for fallen humanity was evident even in the Gospel records of Jesus' closest followers—His disciples. They were all looking for a promised Messiah who would set up an earthly kingdom. They expected Him to rid the world of the tyranny of human governments that pursued secular and man-made goals that perpetuated a state's power and dominance of the known world.

After the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, a new movement swept through the land. The book of Acts records the realization of this divine plan for redemption.

This realization came to be known as the Christian Church, which Christ commanded to be formed just before His ascension into heaven. He instructed His followers to share with the world the good news of the gospel, “first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles” (Romans 1:16 NIV), as the apostle Paul explains in his letter to the church in Rome. Within this founding principle of the Church, which follows the teaching of the New Testament (or “New Covenant” as it is often known), the Bible clearly states there is only one path that leads to salvation. This path, of course, is by accepting God’s gift of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, as one’s personal Savior.

However, during the past 2,000 years, an antisemitism infiltrated the Christian Church. This belief system questioned the right for Israel to exist as a sovereign nation and created a bias and a bigotry toward the Jewish people both individually and as whole. It also perpetuated the lie that God is finished with His once-chosen children, the Jews. However, biblical prophecies indicate (and historical facts substantiate) the premise that God is still involved in the affairs of Israel. There is undeniable evidence that His everlasting covenant with His chosen people requires Him to maintain a personal involvement that ensures their existence, provision, and purpose not only through this Age of Grace but also into the future. The existence of Israel as a nation is essential for God’s end-time plans for all humanity.

Many early Christian scholars taught that the Old Covenant had been fulfilled and replaced by the New Covenant through the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. This perspective perpetuated the assumption that any reference to God’s chosen people had been transferred exclusively to followers of Jesus Christ. As far as the new Church was concerned, Israel had been eliminated for any promise, covenant, or inheritance from God. Justin Martyr described the followers of Christ to be the “true spiritual Israel.”ⁱ Hippolytus of Rome declared that the Jews had been cursed with a “darkness utter and everlasting.”ⁱⁱ Tertullian believed the “new law . . . [obliterated] the old law.”ⁱⁱⁱ Even Augustine embraced these early Church Fathers’ conclusions, though he emphasized the importance to Christianity of the continued existence of the Jewish people. He was quoted as saying, “The Jews . . . are thus by their own Scriptures a testimony to us that we have not forged the prophecies about Christ.”^{iv}

Ken Garrison, in his book *Hebraic Roots*, notes numerous examples of this practice. One of these is Constantine, the Roman emperor who accepted the gospel of Christ: “Constantine wrote regarding the proceedings of the First General Council of the Church at Nicea in AD 325: ‘Let us then have nothing in common with the most hostile rabble of the Jews.’”^v Garrison also notes this same sentiment in Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch (c. AD 110), who wrote, “It is absurd to speak of Jesus Christ with the tongue, and to cherish in the mind of a Judaism which has now come to an end. For where there is Christianity there cannot be Judaism (*Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians*, chapter X).”^{vi} Garrison records an even more biased perspective that was written nearly a century later: “Tertullian (c. AD 200) stated that: ‘In former times the Jews

enjoyed much of God’s favor, when the fathers of their race were noted for their righteousness and faith. . . . But how deeply they have sinned, puffed up to their fall with a false trust in their noble ancestors, turning from God’s way into a way of sheer impiety, though they themselves should refuse to admit it, their present national ruin would afford sufficient proof.”^{vii}

Within these examples, Garrison makes a profound observation concerning the myriad of rhetoric regarding the demise of the Jewish role in God’s plan. He writes, “No Scriptural evidence was set forth in confidently declaring that Israel had been cut off and replaced by the Church. . . . By the fourth Century, Constantine openly ridiculed the Jewish people and exhorted the Church to separate themselves completely from them.”^{viii} Based on these historical writings of various church leaders, it seems that the further history advanced from the time of the ascension of Christ, the more hostile the world’s disdain advanced against the Jews. This culminated in the ultimate travesty, which occurred nearly 2,000 years after the life of Jesus Christ: the reign of the Nazi regime and the horrors of the Holocaust!

It’s not surprising that there is such confusion in regard to Israel’s role in God’s plan for humanity as well as His continued purpose for the Jewish race as a whole. There is a cloud of mystery surrounding God’s chosen people and their Promised Land as it relates to how they fit into God’s bigger plan to bring salvation to the world by serving as the genetic conduit for the Messiah to be born. The perspectives from the early Church Fathers and even Constantine perpetuated the misconception that God is finished with the Jews and the nation of Israel.

After the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70—when the Jewish people were literally scattered to the four corners of the globe for 2,000 years—it appeared that the early Church Fathers were right. However, with Israel’s miraculous rebirth as a nation in 1948, the prophecies regarding Israel’s role in God’s overall plan were miraculously resurrected. A nation that had been a long-forgotten part of Mid-eastern history, a civilization that had long since been forgotten, and even a language that appeared to have been lost to antiquity, were all resuscitated and brought back to life. The dry bones of a nation were given new life. As Garrison notes, “Contrary to the assumptions of the early Church fathers, rejection or divorce of His people was never an option considered by God (Jeremiah 33:24–26).”^{ix}

Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your seed from the east, and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, “Give them up!” and to the south, “Do not keep them back!” Bring My sons from far, and My daughters from the ends of the earth (Isaiah 43:5–6 NKJV).

This Old Testament prophecy had implications not only for the immediate future of Israel at the time but also for their distant future, which, of course, saw the realization of the

nation's rebirth in the twentieth century. According to the *Life Application Study Bible*, "Old Testament prophecy is often applied both to the near future and the distant future. Judah would soon be exiled to Babylon, and a remnant would return to Jerusalem in 538 BC at Cyrus's decree. In the ages to come, however, God's people would be dispersed throughout the world."^x

However, when the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution in one day declaring Israel a sovereign nation on May 14, 1948, an ancient prophecy was fulfilled: "Who has ever heard of such things? Who has ever seen things like this? Can a country be born in a day or a nation be brought forth in a moment? Yet no sooner is Zion in labor than she gives birth to her children" (Isaiah 66:8 NIV). Shortly after, many of the world's Jewish populations began to return to their promised land. In a single moment, prophetic proof declared that God was not finished with His chosen nation or the lineage of Abraham, with whom He had entered into covenant thousands of years earlier.

From the onset of Israel's recognition as an independent nation, the neighboring Arab countries, along with much of the world, has been hell-bent on finding ways to annihilate this tiny divinely appointed nation. At the heart of this battle lies the land that God promised to Abraham thousands of years ago, which was realized in 1948. The continued hostilities, conflicts, and antisemitism cast upon God's chosen people provide evidence that He has not written them off of His list, even as the forces of evil continue to battle against the Abrahamic lineage and God's promise for the salvation and redemption of humanity.

Anti-Israeli sentiment is also spewing out of American universities and labor unions across the country. An article in *Salon* regarding an American university worker's union advocating for a boycott of Israel provides compelling evidence to support this politicized battle against the existence of this nation: "A recent U.S. State Department report acknowledged the 'institutional and societal discrimination against Arab citizens of Israel,' as well as the unlawful killings, excessive force and torture people endure at the hands of the Israeli military in the illegally occupied Palestinian territories."^{xi} The claim that Israel is illegally occupying the Promised Land is based on the ignorant claims of a secular liberal base that is, sadly, misinformed of the Creator's purpose for His chosen people and the land He deeded to them through a lasting covenant. What becomes apparent is that God's plan is boldly in play at this moment in time. In spite of the world's odds being stacked against Israel, His plan will succeed!

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ⁱ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Typho*, chapter 11, quoted in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:200, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supersessionism#cite_ref-Ref_I_15-0.

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- ii Hippolytus, *Treatise Against the Jews*, chapter 6, quoted in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 5:220, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supersessionism#cite_ref-Ref_m_16-0.
- iii Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews*, chapter 3, trans. S. Thelwall (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1870), http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supersessionism#cite_ref-Ref_n_17-0.
- iv Augustine, *The City of God*, chapter 46, quoted in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2:389, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supersessionism#cite_ref-Ref_o_18-0.
- v Ken Garrison, *Hebraic Roots* (Casselberry, FL: Tzemach Institute for Biblical Studies 1999, 2007), p. 52
- vi *Ibid.*, p. 51.
- vii *Ibid.*
- viii *Ibid.*, p. 52
- ix *Ibid.*, p. 49
- x *Life Application Study Bible: New International Version* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1998, 1989, 1990, 1991), p. 1413.
- xi Ben Norton, “‘Defining Political Issues of Our Time’: NYU Grade Student Union Overwhelmingly Votes to Boycott Israel over Violations of Palestinian Human Rights,” *Salon*, April 22, 2016, http://www.salon.com/2016/04/22/one_of_the_defining_political_issues_of_our_time_nyu_grad_student_union_overwhelmingly_votes_to_boycott_israels_violation_of_palestinian_human_rights/.