

THE
MYSTERY OF
ZION



ISRAEL
AND THE LAST DAYS

Study Guide

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A Plan, a People, and a Purpose

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

With Study Guide

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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!

A Plan, a People, and a Purpose Study Questions. (These questions have been created using the entire first chapter of The Mystery of Zion, not just the synopsis contained in this document):

1. What reasons may have led to the church believing that God was finished with the nation of Israel?
2. Within your own personal belief system, what position do you take with the stance that God still has a plan and a purpose for Israel and the Jewish people?
3. Taking into consideration the miraculous rebirth of Israel in a single day, how does that impact your belief that God still has a plan for Israel?
4. How would you explain the reasons for the antisemitism that has followed the Jews for their entire history since the time of Abraham?
5. After taking into consideration all that was shared in this chapter, do you believe that God still has a plan for Israel and her people? Why?
6. How should Christians respond the disputes regarding Israel's right to exist and occupy the land that God promised her? How have you responded in the past before reading this chapter?
7. Name some of the surrounding nations that were intent on conquering and annihilating the Jews?
8. What types of evidence is available today that confirms God's continued blessings on Israel and the Jewish people?
9. What concepts/realizations concerning Israel did you find to be the most profound within this chapter?
10. Did you ever consider that Israel will play a key role within the times referred to as the "last days?" How does that realization change your mindset regarding Israel's right to exist and occupy the land that had been promised to her by God Almighty?

The Mystery of Covenant

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

With Study Guide

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Before discussing God’s role for Israel in the end times, it is imperative to take a look at Israel from a historical point of view as well as from a biblical or, more importantly, a prophetic perspective. God’s initial purpose for Israel’s existence is crucial in identifying and accepting His future plans for the Hebrew people. This initial step requires a brief examination of the various covenants associated with the nation of Israel, including the Abrahamic Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, the Priestly Covenant, and the Davidic Covenant.

It is important to note, however, that there is one amazing particular regarding God’s covenants that cannot be ignored. As John Hagee states, “Israel alone received the glory, the covenants, the Laws, the directions for tabernacle worship, and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, the prophets, and ultimately, they are the human source of Jesus Christ. Israel alone is referred to by God as ‘My son.’”^{xii} Therefore, the mystery of covenant binds the nation of Israel to God Almighty in ways that no other nation has ever experienced or can ever comprehend.

A “covenant” could be defined as an unbreakable promise or a sovereign promise to man by God. According to numerous dictionaries, it can also be defined as a formal alliance or agreement made by God. According to the *Prophecy Study Bible*:

In the Old Testament there were three ways by which covenants could be made: a shoe covenant, a salt covenant, and a blood covenant.

In the blood covenant, the contracting parties would agree on the terms of the covenant. They would take an animal, kill it, split the carcass in half down the backbone, and place the divided parts opposite each other on the ground forming a pathway between the pieces.

The two would join hands, recite the contents of the covenant, and walk between the divided halves of the slain animal. The blood covenant meant they were bound until death, and if either broke the terms of the covenant, his blood should be spilled as the blood of the slain animal. A blood covenant was a permanent and unconditional covenant. . . .

God was binding himself, unconditionally, by a blood covenant to Abraham and his descendants forever saying, “To your descendants I have given this land.” Confirmation that the promise to Abraham and to his seed was unconditional is presented in Psalm 89:30–37.

Recent decades of Old Testament studies have been revolutionized by research about the concept of “covenant.” Many scholars, conservative and liberal, maintain that “covenant” is the organizing principle around which Old Testament theology must be constructed and understood. It has become clear that in the near eastern world of the second millennium before Christ, formal covenants were the primary way people who were not blood relatives related to one another.^{xiii}

The importance of covenant in this context focuses on the realization that God has a plan for the salvation of humanity—the creation whom He loves. Each of the covenants He entered with mankind were specific as well as necessary for the final realization of this divine plan of redemption.

There are eight recorded covenants that God made with man, starting with the Edenic and Adamic Covenants, which He entered into with Adam and Eve in the Garden. God also made a covenant with Noah before entering into covenant with Abraham. Essentially, these covenants were for the purpose of fully sharing in the fellowship of His creation, either at that particular time or for some point in the future. These covenants could be viewed as stepping-stones that allow humanity a means to move closer to God’s ultimate desire of once and for all realizing the intimacy of a personal relationship between the Creator and His creation. This will only be realized in its fullness and entirety at the end of the “Age.”

John Hagee notes, “The covenants God makes with His people are everlasting, without end, and actually translated ‘longer than forever.’ These covenants are not based on man’s faithfulness to God; they’re based on God’s faithfulness to man. Those who teach that God has broken covenant with the Jewish people teach a false doctrine based on scriptural ignorance and a narcissistic attitude.”^{xiv}

For this brief synopsis, we will look at just a few of these covenants regarding Israel, starting with the Abrahamic Covenant. Then, we will briefly discuss the particulars associated with the Davidic Covenant before finishing this part of the series by revealing the intricacies of the New Covenant with Israel.

The Abrahamic Covenant

The significance of the covenant takes on increased importance when one realizes that “Israel is the only nation founded by a sovereign act of God.”^{xv} However, at the time of Abraham, the human race was one undivided people. There was neither Jew nor Gentile. The human race had become engrossed in idolatry, and God chose to form a separate people and nation that would represent Him to the world, picking a man named Abram (it was who God later changed his name to Abraham, Genesis 17:5). God entered into a formal, lasting covenant with His newly chosen people in order to redeem the world from the sin that separated humanity from relationship with Him.

But as time went on, even within the parameters of this covenant and God’s desire to bring salvation to the world through the lineage of Abraham, humanity continued to turn their backs on God. In spite of His professed purpose and desire for them, and the provision, providence, and faithfulness He poured out and exhibited toward them, they regressed to living as if there was no God.

Clarence Larkin notes, “After the Dispersion from Babel, the descendants of Noah and his sons became idolaters. No doubt God had His witnesses, but there is no record of any. Even Abraham’s father was an idolater. So God decided to single out one family and start afresh. Abraham was chosen and he proved a mighty man of faith, but his righteousness waned in his descendants. Isaac was a good man, but not so good as his father, and Jacob, Isaac’s son, who succeeded to the birthright, was still less so, and the twelve sons of Jacob, with the exception of Joseph, greatly degenerated from the parent stock, and that short Dispensation of only 430 years ended with all of Abraham’s descendants working as abject slaves in the brickyards of Egypt.”^{xvi}

The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. I will make you 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” (Genesis 12:1–3 NIV).

According to the *Prophecy Study Bible*, “The Abrahamic covenant is the basis of all other Old Testament theocratic covenants and provides for blessing in three areas. First, the covenant anticipated that Abraham’s descendants would become a special nation in the work of God—‘I will make you a great nation’ (Genesis 12:2). Second, it promised that Abraham would accomplish great things—‘I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing.’ Finally, God promised Abraham that He was going to start a spiritual movement through him that would influence every nation of the earth—‘in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed (v. 3).’”^{xvii}

The importance of this covenant cannot be overstated, as it was through Abraham’s lineage that Jesus, the Son of God, entered into this world and became the atonement for sin. As the King of kings and Lord of lords, there has never been anyone who has had a greater impact or played a more significant role within the history of the world! Just as significant is the realization that it was through God’s grace, His desire to seek us out, that salvation has been freely offered to anyone who believes. His grace is divinely evident through His covenant.

Again, according to the *Prophecy Study Bible*, “The covenant with Abraham is the first of the theocratic covenants (pertaining to the rule of God). It is unconditional depending solely upon God who obligates Himself in grace, indicated by the unconditional declaration, ‘I will,’ to bring to pass the promised blessings. The Abrahamic Covenant is the basis of all the other theocratic covenants and provides for blessing in three areas: (1) national—‘I will make you a great nation,’ (2) personal—‘I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing,’ and (3) universal—‘in you all families of the earth will be blessed.’ The Abrahamic Covenant constitutes an important link in all that God began to do, has done throughout history, and will continue to do until the consummation of history. It is the one purpose of God for humans into which all of God’s programs and works fit.”^{xviii}

Most Christians today seem to overlook the importance of this covenant, yet God has made its significance apparent in His Holy Word—the Bible. As Sir Robert Anderson writes, “Eleven chapters of the Bible suffice to cover the two thousand years before the call of Abraham, and the rest of the Old Testament relates to the Abrahamic race.”^{xix} There are a multitude of critics who believe the Bible is a disconnected compilation of stories containing no real connection from one book to the next. There are also those who believe that the Old

Testament has no merit within the Age of Grace and that the New Testament is the only part of the Bible applicable in today's society. But when you begin to look at the Bible as a compilation of historical record that not only promises, but also points to, a Messiah, you realize all of the Bible—both the Old and the New Testaments—is actually a divinely inspired record of Jesus. The history of the Bible is actually “His-story!” It's the story of Jesus and God's plan to seek out His lost and broken creation!

The Davidic Covenant

After the Exodus from Egypt and the conquest of the Promised Land, Israel lived for centuries through a system of social governance that depended on a loose tribal system governed by judges. For 400 years, they were caught up in a cycle of rebellion and judgment. The nation as a whole would sin, just as they turned away from God in Egypt. God would then raise up a neighboring nation to discipline His children through military conquest. The Israelites would cry out to God in repentance, God would hear their cries, and He would raise up a judge to deliver them from their bondage. God would free the land from military oppression for the rest of the judge's life, and then the cycle would start all over again. There were seven cycles of rebellion, judgment, repentance, and deliverance during that 400-year time span.

Max Anders notes, “The book of Judges records the darkest period in Israel's history, following one of the brightest eras: the Conquest Era under Joshua. The breaking of God's Law and the record of Israel's subsequent moral degradation are sad indeed.”^{xx} Through it all, the nation of Israel began to cry out to God for a king to call their own. It is probably safe to assume at least part of that desire stemmed from the cycles of judgment placed on the nation for their disobedience and inability to abide by the Law, along with the statutes associated with the Mosaic Covenant. The enormity of such a calling is humanly impossible. In our society today, it's impossible to imagine the enormous burden associated with trying to constantly abide by the extensiveness of the Law. Phillip Yancey writes, “They had atomized God's law into 613 rules—248 commands and 368 prohibitions—and bolstered these rules with 1,521 emendations. To avoid breaking the third commandment, ‘You shall not misuse the name of the Lord,’ they refused to pronounce God's name at all.”^{xxi}

Yet God's covenants with Abraham and Moses were still simultaneously in effect in conjunction with the Davidic Covenant. This covenant between a “man after God's own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14 NIV) and the God whom David sought out provides another piece to the Messianic puzzle. This piece was necessary not only for the incarnation of Jesus, or Immanuel (“God is with us”), but also for a much later time prophesied as the “Day of the Lord.” According to the *Prophecy Study Bible*, “God's covenant with David focused on the Son who

would succeed him and build ‘a house’ for [the Lord’s] name’ (2 Sam. 7:12, 13). On a physical level this prediction referred to Solomon, who built the temple in Jerusalem and consolidated the Davidic family’s hold on the throne of Israel. However, on the future, spiritual level, God had in mind David’s eternal Son, the Messiah (Heb. 1:8).^{”xxii}

In a sense, just as Moses was a form of a Messiah, David was recognized in the same way. Just as Moses took the Abrahamic Covenant to the next level, so the Davidic Covenant builds on the Mosaic Covenant so God’s plan of salvation could come to fruition. The *Prophecy Study Bible* notes, “In this covenant David is promised three things: (1) a land forever (2 Samuel 7:10); (2) an unending dynasty (vv. 11, 16); and (3) an everlasting kingdom (vv. 13, 16). The virgin birth was absolutely essential, not only to assure the sinless character of Jesus but also to fulfill the Davidic covenant. Jesus receives His ‘blood right to David’s throne through His earthly mother, Mary, and His ‘legal right’ to David’s throne through His adoptive earthly father, Joseph.”^{”xxiii}

Many people are confused about the length of David’s dynasty. There are those who believe it ended hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus when the Babylonians conquered the land and destroyed Jerusalem. After all, at the time of Jesus’ birth, Israel was occupied under Roman rule and was no longer a nation under their own authority. But this thinking is flawed, as the Davidic Covenant actually has a place within the future Millennial Reign of Christ. Again, the *Prophecy Study Bible* notes, “After David’s hold on the throne over the kingdom of Israel was firmly established, God made a covenant with him that established the Davidic dynasty as God’s choice to rule His people in perpetuity (2 Samuel 7:14–17).”^{”xxiv}

Therefore, the Davidic Covenant is an eternal one. It began nearly 3,000 years ago and is still a promise from God today. However, it is obvious in this life-altering drama that there has been a long intermission between the first act of this covenant and the promised finale. Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears write, “The glory of God’s kingdom comes briefly in the rule of David and in the promise of the Messiah’s coming as the kingdom king. (2 Samuel 7:1–17; Psalm 89) Nonetheless, David’s very serious sin ruins the glorious reign (2 Samuel 11–12), and conflict rules through the rest of his time on the throne. In the following years, the twin sins of idolatry and injustice dominate in the land. The whole nation goes into exile in Babylon until God rescues them.”^{”xxv}

The Millennial Reign of Christ is one of the mysteries of the Bible that most scholars can’t completely describe or understand. While we know that after the second return of Christ (not to be confused with the rapture of the Church), He will set up an earthly kingdom for a thousand years. Much of how that looks and what to expect is up for debate, but we can be confident that Christ will take His place on the throne of David during this final chapter of

earthly history, where “every knee will bow” and “every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Philippians 2:10–11 NASB).

According to the *Prophecy Study Bible*, “Scripture looks further into the future for the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant in the millennial kingdom. Isaiah 49 traces this story. The servant of the Lord, the Messiah, introduces Himself as One called from His mother’s womb (v. 1) not only to redeem Israel but to take salvation to the ends of the Gentile world (v. 6). He will embody God’s covenant of salvation and hope for the entire earth (v. 8). While the earth rejoices in deliverance (Is. 49:13), Israel feels deserted and forgotten (v. 14; Romans 11:25–27). The Lord assures Israel that their future will be glorious (Is. 49:15–21). They will become the grandest nation on the earth (vv. 22, 23).”^{xxvi}

When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever (2 Samuel 7:12–13 NIV).

He gives his king great victories; he shows unfailing kindness to his anointed, to David and his descendants forever (2 Samuel 22:51 NIV).

The New Covenant with Israel

The *Prophecy Study Bible* notes, “In the last of his Suffering Servant passages, Isaiah identified that Israel’s justification under the new covenant will yet come about in the future because ‘a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief . . . was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people. He was stricken’ (Isaiah 53:3, 8). The Lord concluded, ‘He shall see the travail of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities’ (v. 11). The apostle Paul anticipated a day when Israel, as a nation, would accept Jesus as Messiah and His death as the sacrifice for their sins when he wrote in Romans, ‘Hardening’ in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion. And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them. When I take away their sins’ (Romans 11:26–27). God’s new covenant with Israel, based on the life-transforming ministry of God’s Holy Spirit, will become the means by which the Lord brings to fruition the promises He made to Abraham (Genesis 12:1–3). Abraham’s faith (Genesis 15:6) eventually called forth the sacrifice of the Messiah and the new covenant that springs from it.”^{xxvii}

“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more” (Jeremiah 31:31–34 NIV).

Again, according to the *Prophecy Study Bible*, “God’s new covenant with the nation Israel, introduced in Jeremiah 31:31–34, was made as a replacement for the old covenant with Moses on Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:5–8). But nothing could be clearer than the fact that the entire New Testament is named after and expands on this new covenant as the basis for the church of Christ. For the time being, a covenant that ultimately will complete God’s work with Israel is providing spiritual rebirth for both Jew and Gentiles in the church of Jesus Christ. Paul explained the puzzle of Gentiles benefiting presently from the future promises of Israel by means of imagery from the science of horticulture. He compared Israel to a domesticated olive tree that drew its life from the root of God’s covenants (Romans 11:16, 17). The Gentile nations are a wild olive tree. To deliver Gentiles from their spiritual barrenness, God broke off branches from the domestic olive tree and grafted in wild olive branches that became fruitful because of the root of God’s covenants (v. 17). Paul contended that God broke off the natural branches because of their unbelief (Romans 11:20). He rejoiced that the branches of Israel could be grafted back when the nation turns in faith to Christ (v. 23). In fact, Paul predicted just such a national restoration of Israel at the time of the millennium (vv. 26, 27).”^{xxviii}

Walter A. Elwell adds, “The Gospel’s good news also meant that God’s word of salvation will prevail in another sense. That is, his promises to his people, Abraham’s descendants will not fail (Romans 9:1–6). In Paul’s day the question could be raised: How can Jesus have been the Jewish Messiah when so many Jews do not think he was? If Paul is right, doesn’t this imply that God’s promise to save his people has failed? Paul’s answer: Abrahamic descent is not primarily a matter of ethnicity. To share Abraham’s blessedness before God means rather to share Abraham’s faith in God (Rom. 9:8). Paul goes to considerable length to explain that God is true to his promises, that no human action (or inaction) can derail his good purposes, and that God will never reject the people who he awakens to faith. Romans 9–11 is too rich and complex to discuss at length here, but its general message is clear: the Lord has not abandoned his people and never will.”^{xxix}

The question that arises from the covenant dialogue is this: Is it possible that God is capable of maintaining two separate covenants with two separate groups of people? In other words, is it possible that God could offer the New Covenant to the world and allow Christian believers, called the Church, access to salvation while at the same time maintaining a covenant or covenants that are thousands of years old with Israel and the Hebrew people? What is apparent is that mankind cannot possibly exist under both the Old Covenant and the New Covenant simultaneously. It has to be one or the other.

But is it possible that the Abrahamic Covenant, along with the Mosaic and Davidic Covenants, can either now and/or in the near future be applied to the Jews and the nation of Israel, while the good news of the gospel under the New Covenant is applied to the rest of the world—including Jews who accept the free gift of Jesus Christ? The answer is yes! As Ken Garrison concludes, “We must not interpret Hebrews 8 as indicating that God has abrogated His covenant with the nation of Israel. This is precisely what the Church fathers of the second, third, and fourth centuries did conclude. This has, in turn, provided the basis for the concept that the Church has now replaced Israel. We conclude therefore that God has two major active covenants to accomplish His purpose in the earth. Each covenant has a great people who have been joined to God by the covenant.”^{xxx}

The Mystery of Covenant Study Questions. (These questions have been created using the entire second chapter of The Mystery of Zion, not just the synopsis contained in this document):

1. Why is it important as a Christian to understand the importance of God’s Covenants?
2. How would you define the concept of a covenant?
3. What was the reason God entered into a Blood Covenant with Abraham?
4. What were the three blessings associated with the Abrahamic Covenant?
5. What is the main difference between a conditional covenant and an unconditional covenant?
6. God’s covenant with Abraham was unconditional, yet His covenant with Moses was conditional. What were the three areas of Israel’s life that were covered within this covenant?
7. How did the “Old Covenant” provide the foundation for the “New Covenant?” How does this relate to the foundation of the Christian faith?
8. What was the main impetus of the Davidic Covenant? What were the three promises included in the Davidic Covenant?
9. Within the New Covenant with Israel, God’s work will be completed by providing spiritual rebirth for both Jew and Gentile. What questions come to your mind regarding God’s continued plan for Israel and the Jews throughout this age of grace and into the last days?

10. After studying this chapter, do you believe that God has abrogated His covenants with the nation of Israel? Why or why not?



The Mystery of the Kingdom

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

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The term “mystery” is specifically used twenty-six times in the passages of the Bible, but it is also often referred to in various forms and inferred in other passages. Mysteries are inherent throughout the Bible and have long been the subject of debate, speculation, and even the excuse or the cause for disbelief. References to these “mysteries” can be found throughout both the Old and the New Testament.

The reality is that these mysteries will only be revealed by a revelation from the Holy Spirit. Paul, writing to the church in Corinth, states, “This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed” (1 Corinthians 4:1 NIV). Clarence Larkin adds, “In Romans 16:25, 26, Paul speaks of what he calls ‘My Gospel,’ which he calls the ‘Revelation of the Mystery,’ which was kept ‘Secret’ since the world began, but now is made ‘manifest.’ It was the ‘revelation’ that was promised to Paul at his conversion (Acts 26:16–18), and which comprises the ‘Mysteries of God.’”^{xxxix}

Reference and inference to the concept of mystery in the Bible include:

- Interpretation of dreams—Daniel 4:9
- Mystery of the kingdom of heaven (Jesus speaks through parables)—Matthew 13; Mark 4; Luke 8; 13
- Mystery of iniquity (Satan manifest in the flesh)—2 Thessalonians 2:1–10
- Jesus Christ—Romans 6:25
- Hardening of Israel / mystery of Israel’s blindness—Romans 11:25
- Mystery of the translation of living saints / Rapture—1 Corinthians 15:51–55
- Mystery of the union of Jews and Gentiles in one Body—Ephesians 3:1–11
- Mystery of God’s will—Ephesians 1:9
- Mystery of the restoration of all things—Ephesians 1:9–10
- Gentiles are heirs together with Israel—Ephesians 3:6
- Hidden in God—Ephesians 3:9
- Mystery of the Church as the Bride of Christ—Ephesians 5:22–33
- Christ and the Church—Ephesians 5:32
- The gospel—Ephesians 6:19
- Hidden from generations—Colossians 1:26
- Mystery of divine indwelling (Christ in you)—Colossians 1:26–28
- Mystery of God (namely, Christ)—Colossians 2:2
- Mystery of Christ—Colossians 4:3
- Mystery from which godliness sprang great—1 Timothy 3:16
- Mystery of the Incarnation (God manifested in the flesh)—1 Timothy 3:16
- Seven stars and seven golden lampstands—Revelation 1:20
- Mystery of God accomplished—Revelation 10:7

I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written: “The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob” (Romans 11:25–26 NIV).

To summarize these mysteries, it would be safe to say that each of them in some manner has Christ intricately woven within the hidden tapestry of God’s plan. I assume it would also be safe to confirm that each of these have at their foundation the purpose God’s plan of forgiveness, mercy, and grace. In the words of Robert Farrar Capon, “The Messiah was not

going to save the world by miraculous, Band-Aid interventions; a storm calmed here, a crowd fed there, a mother-in-law cured back down the road. Rather, it was going to be saved by means of a deeper, darker, left-handed mystery, at the center of which lay his own death.”^{xxxii} It is also safe to infer from these citations that God will provide revelation to these mysteries in various ways: through His prophets; His divinely inspired Word, and ultimately, through the leading of the Holy Spirit as a result of study, meditation, interpretation, and divine revelation.

Clarence Larkin was a Bible scholar who lived during the late eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century. For a man of his time, he had profound insight into the plans of God and His purpose for Israel and the Jews. I believe this knowledge was a divine revelation from God. Larkin shares what could be considered divine insight regarding the context of “mystery” within the pages of the Bible:

A “Mystery” in the New Testament sense is not something that cannot be understood, but is some plan or purpose of God that has been known to Him from the beginning, but which He has withheld from the knowledge of men until the time came for Him to reveal it. . . .

In his letter to the saints at Ephesus (Eph. 3:1–11) Paul says, that God by revelation made known to him the “Mystery,” which in other Ages had not been made known unto the sons of men, “That the Gentiles should be ‘Fellow Heirs,’ and of the ‘Same Body’ and partakes of His promise in Christ by the Gospel.”

It is almost impossible to overestimate the bitter “Race Hatred” which existed in Christ’s day between Jew and Gentile. It was a lofty “middle wall or partition” between them. The Jews looked upon the Gentiles as “dogs” and the Gentiles “despised” the Jews. . . . It was therefore to them a revelation that God was going in this Dispensation to take some Jews and some Gentiles and form of them a “New Body” called the Church. In Christ all race and class distinctions disappear, and it is only in the Church that such a “Holy Brotherhood” can be found as the world is seeking.^{xxxiii}

God’s kingdom falls into the realm of being a mystery, even though it isn’t listed in the scriptural notations above. John the Baptist helped bring this terminology into the mainstream of daily language just before Jesus began His earthly ministry:

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: “A voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him’” (Matthew 3:1–3 NIV).

Even Jesus used similar terminology as He shared God’s message with the people in the land who were starving to hear more about this proclaimed kingdom:

When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.” From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matthew 4:12–17 NIV).

For thousands of years, religious leaders, scholars, teachers, and students have questioned the concept of “God’s kingdom.” Did it refer to the heavenly realm, an earthly experience, or maybe some place in between? Is it a reference to a spiritual realm, a physical realm, or maybe an emotional realm? The exact definition for this is as elusive as anything else within the pages of the Bible.

When Jesus made His triumphant entry into Jerusalem during that fateful Passover celebration, most of the people—including his closest followers—believed He was the promised Messiah, the deliverer of Israel. Little did they know that God’s plan, the details of His mysterious motives, had nothing to do with setting up an earthly kingdom at that particular time. God had something different, more spectacular, and more glorious in mind. He was looking at things from the “big picture” perspective, and His blueprint was even more extravagant than anyone could imagine.

God’s plan for the salvation of humanity is intricately woven through the fabric of Israel and the Jewish people. According to the *Prophecy Study Bible*, “The first time, the Lamb of God came to take away the sins of the world, but when He returns, He will come as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah in victory, power and judgment to destroy the enemies of God.”^{xxxiv} That plan is founded on an everlasting covenant the Creator of the universe promised to Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation. That covenant included two specific aspects: first, that Abraham would be the father of a great nation; and second, that through this nation, the people of the earth would be blessed:

Now the LORD had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will

bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:1–3 NKJV).

The definitive “blessing” would come through the form of the Messiah, who would provide hope and redemption to the world as He claimed victory over death and sin. Ultimately, the world was blessed through the nation of Israel and its people. That blessing will culminate on the great and glorious time the Bible describes as the Day of the Lord. As Christians living in a time that has all the prophetic indicators revealing that the time is near for the end of the current age, it’s important for us to be aware of the signs spoken of regarding those days. This is not so we can serve as apocalyptic fanatics, running around our communities in a white robe like an animated cartoon character crying out, “Behold, the end of the world is at hand!” Rather, it is because Jesus Himself told us to be ready, to be vigilant, and to be faithful servants and witnesses:

Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect (Matthew 24:42–44 NKJV).

The Day of the Lord is fast approaching. Jesus took the time to inform His disciples of the events leading up to this amazing time. Actually, this is more than just a “day.” It is a climactic event that sets eternity into motion as all humanity who believed realizes the ultimate relationship with the Creator. The Gospel writers, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, felt it worthy of inclusion within their writings. If Jesus said it, and the Gospel writers included it in their perspective records, then as Christians we need to take heed.

We are living in an age that signals a fast-approaching appointment to “that Day.” The Bible refers to “that Day” or “the Day of the Lord” more than 1,800 times throughout its pages, so it seems obvious there is something special about gaining detailed insight into the actual facts associated with it in order to gain as much understanding as possible regarding this upcoming major event. According to the *Prophecy Study Bible*, “It is not possible, therefore, to understand the last days without understanding Israel’s role in all this. Israel is central to the return of the Messiah, through both their promised return to their land and their recognition of Him as their promised Messiah.”^{xxxv}

Surprisingly, the concept of the Day of the Lord is found for the first time in the first chapter of Genesis, which records the creation story. Within the first words recorded in the

Bible, there is a revelation regarding the mystery of not only creation but also God's plan for humanity and the Millennial Reign. One of the amazing aspects of God's Holy Word is that for much of the information contained within its pages, there is not only a literal interpretation or translation but also a mysterious or prophetic application that can only be deciphered through intense study, research, and divine enlightenment. Within our limited ability to think, at best, in a two- to three-dimensional capacity, it is difficult for us to understand the intricacy of God's multi-dimensional nature as His plans unfold. The records in Genesis highlight God's infinite capacities as we read the record of the creation of life as we know it:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day (Genesis 1:1–3 NIV).

For the first six days of creation, as recorded in the book of Genesis, we are allowed a brief glimpse into an abbreviated perspective of God's creative genius. On the first day, He created light. On the second day, He created the sky and the water. On the third day, He created the land, sea, and vegetation. On the fourth day, He created the majestic expanse of the heavens—the sun, moon, and stars. On the fifth day, He miraculously created the fish and the birds to fill the waters and the sky. On the sixth day, God created all the animals to fill the earth. He capped off the magnificence of His creation with humanity, creating them in His own image. He placed humanity in the sinless and perfect paradise of the Garden, tasking them to care for the earth and share in the fellowship with the Creator Himself. Within each of these six days of creation, we are told "there was evening and there was morning." The next part of the creation story reveals a hidden mystery, as it shares significant prophetic insight essential for understanding the end times—or, more specifically, the Day of the Lord:

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created (Genesis 2:1–4 NIV).

The peculiar part of this last passage—the one that references the seventh day, the blessed and holy day when God rested from all His work—is that there is no mention of either

morning or of night. The Bible is the divinely inspired Word of God, and within its pages are the key to life for all those who believe, so it seems strange to think that Moses somehow forgot to mention within the foundational beginning of the greatest story ever told that on the seventh day there was morning and night. Could it be that we are to assume if it was mentioned for the first six days, it was to be understood it also happened on the seventh day? Or could it be that its omission was not an oversight at all, but rather it was intentionally left out because it provides significant meaning and insight for future consideration of prophetic proclamation?

It is my contention there is no mention of morning or night on the seventh day because, in fact, it has prophetic significance. I believe that seventh day of rest spoken of in Genesis alludes to the most frequently cited proclamation found within the pages of the Bible: the Day of the Lord. Henry Thiessen, a Bible scholar, is credited with saying, "Understanding the Bible is difficult or impossible without understanding the 'Day of the Lord.' The fundamental teaching of the Lord's return is the key to the scriptures." To compound this thought, we cannot understand the great and glorious Day of the Lord without a basic understanding of the Mystery of Zion and Israel's Final Days.

God's ultimate goal since the fall of humanity will be realized on "that Day." Many biblical scholars believe that the Day of the Lord is a reference to the thousand-year reign of Christ in the Millennial Kingdom:

Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles.

Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare (2 Peter 3:1–10 NIV).

What makes this passage particularly interesting is that it not only talks about the Day of the Lord but also notes that to God a “day” is like “a thousand years.” This reference indicates the Day of the Lord is the Millennial Reign of Christ. This passage also refers back to the creation account told in the first chapter of Genesis, which could indicate that on the holy blessed day that lasts one thousand years, God will finally rest. On “that Day” that lasts a thousand years, there will not be a morning and an evening. Why? Because the “Light” of the world will reign on the Davidic throne of Israel. Eternity will no longer rely on the current sun, moon, stars, and rotational forces upon the earth that make up time as we know it. Jesus will be the light, and no darkness can overcome the brilliance of His glory!

The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32)

The Parable of the Lost Son (or, as it is often referred, “The Prodigal Son”) is exclusively recorded in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus told this parable to “tax collectors and sinners” (Luke 15:1 NIV). One of the rulers of the Pharisees had invited Jesus to his home to eat bread on the Sabbath. We are told the Pharisees and the scribes were keeping a watchful eye on Jesus, listening closely to try to trap Him with His words.

Most scholars agree that all the parables found in the Gospel of Matthew relate to the end times and the kingdom of God. However, I have never heard any scholar support the possibility that this parable in the Gospel of Luke had any type of kingdom or end-time application. I’ve heard many messages on this parable, and no one that I know has ever associated this with any type of application, other than in the literal sense. The only other perspective I’ve seen was shared by Philip Yancey in *The Jesus I Never Knew*:

The priest Henri Nouwen sat in the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia, for many hours meditating on Rembrandt’s great painting Return of the Prodigal Son. While staring at the painting, Nouwen gained a new insight into the parable: the mystery that Jesus himself became something of a prodigal son for our sakes. “He left the house of his heavenly Father, came to a foreign country, gave away all that he had, and returned through a cross to his Father’s home. All of this he did, not as a rebellious son, but as the obedient son, sent out to bring home all the lost children of God. . . . Jesus is the prodigal son of the prodigal Father who gave away everything the Father had entrusted to him so that I could become like him and return with him to his Father’s home.”^{xxxvi}

This is an interesting interpretation of this parable, yet I feel a different interpretation can also be applied. I believe this parable in Luke is directly linked to the Millennial Kingdom and speaks directly about both Israel and the Christian believers, known as the Church.

There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, “Father, give me my share of the estate.” So he divided his property between them.

Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

When he came to his senses, he said, “How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.” So he got up and went to his father.

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

The son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.”

But the father said to his servants, “Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” So they began to celebrate.

Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. “Your brother has come,” he replied, “and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.”

The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, “Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!”

“My son,” the father said, “you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found” (Luke 15:11–32 NIV).

Luke was the only author of a Gospel who was a Gentile. Matthew, Mark, and John were all Jews. Luke's Gospel contains many of Jesus' parables that are not contained in any of the other Gospel writings. According to the *Prophecy Study Bible*, Luke's Gospel portrays "Jesus as the compassionate Savior of the world, with love for all people, whether rich or poor, Jew or Gentile; He reaches out especially to women and the poor and the outcast of society."^{xxxvii} Luke's Parable of the Lost Son has a direct correlation to the dynamics of God's children, or two sons. The older son was the one who stayed home, taking care of business, while the younger son demanded his inheritance so he could run off to experience the tantalizing life, searching for all the material things the world had to offer. John Hagee shares a bit of insight regarding this first-born son in his book *Jerusalem Countdown*: "The nation of Israel was made God's children, which is clearly confirmed in Exodus 4:22, 'This says the Lord: 'Israel is My son, My firstborn.'"^{xxxviii}

So, if Israel is the firstborn son, then who is the "lost" or "prodigal" son? I believe this son is the embodiment of the Gentiles. The reference to feeding pigs alludes to the Jewish perspective of being unclean. No Jew would lower themselves to wallowing in a pigsty. Pigs were not only considered unclean but also untouchable by respectable Jews. Remember, when Jesus cast out the demons in the region of Gadarenes, he allowed them to enter a herd of swine, who then ran over the edge of the cliff (see Matthew 8:30–37; Mark 5:1–20; Luke 8:27–38). As far as Jews were concerned, pigs were filthy and one of the most unrighteous critters in creation. They were to have nothing to do with swine; pigs were distasteful and unclean in accordance with Levitical Law. The inference could be applied here, noting a parallel between Jewish perspectives on swine and Gentiles.

After a famine had enveloped the land and the lost son was starving, he repented of his ways, realizing his only hope for life was to beg forgiveness from his father. This son represents anyone who accepts the free gift of salvation that is offered through the grace of the New Covenant or the blood of Jesus Christ. A person's life is transformed by Christ through repentance and asking forgiveness for his or her sins. It requires a person to accept the Father's free gift in order to be welcomed home—back into fellowship with the father.

The next thing we read in this passage is that when the father welcomed the lost son home, he not only accepted the son back into the fellowship of his kingdom, but he also gave the son the best robe, placed sandals on his feet, and put a ring on his hand. The robe represents the robe of righteousness, the sandals represent the shoes of the gospel of peace (see Ephesians 6:15), and the ring is the symbol of the royal lineage associated with the father's kingdom. A ring was used to designate authority, honor, and ownership. It is believed this practice originated in ancient Egypt. In those days, rulers used signet rings to officially seal documents. In Daniel, we read about the significance of a signet ring: "A stone was brought and

placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might not be changed" (Daniel 6:17 NIV).

Haggai also contains a reference about a ring, specifically a signet ring: "'On that day,' declares the LORD Almighty, 'I will take you, my servant Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel,' declares the LORD, 'and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you,' declares the LORD Almighty" (Haggai 2:23 NIV). In the records of the Bible, Zerubbabel led the first group of Jews back to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity and was the governor of the rebuilt Jerusalem. Zerubbabel was a descendant of King David, the grandson of Jehoiachin.

This citation to Zerubbabel in Haggai 2:23 shows that God was giving him a place of authority and honor. It seems apparent this passage could infer that God has placed a seal of distinct eternal purpose on the Davidic lineage, and it highlights the fact that the Davidic Covenant possesses eternal significance. It appears, then, that the significance of the Parable of the Lost Son could be taken in more than a literal sense. Within this interpretation, it could easily be considered one that speaks of the end times for both Israel and the Church. Actually, this seemingly insignificant parable regarding the lost son could have great significant to Christians. As Paul notes in his letter to the church in Ephesus:

Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints (Ephesians 6:14–18 NKJV).

The words "for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" in the parable possibly represents of the rapture of the Church. We are then told the father had the fatted calf killed, and they all ate and were merry. This could be symbolic to the Wedding Supper of the Lamb, where Christ is the bridegroom and the Church is the bride. The next part of this parable clearly represents the prideful rebellion exhibited by Israel:

Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. . . . But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. So he answered and said to his father, "Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood

with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.” And he said to him, “Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours” (Luke 15:25, 28–31 NKJV).

The Hebrew people, ever since the divine covenant with Abraham, have stayed home to take care of the business at hand, working in the field and serving as God’s representative to the world. The older son’s bitterness toward the younger brother is clear by his words “this son of yours”—he does not even want to acknowledge this other son was his brother. Again, this is a profound parallel we see between most Jews and Christians in the world today and throughout the history of the Church. There are few who recognize the brotherly bond between Israel and the Church.

It is true that as of yet, the Father hasn’t killed the fatted calf in honor of the older son. He, along with His family, hasn’t yet had the opportunity to be merry. But that time will come. The Millennial Reign of Christ will finally provide the realization that all God offers to the Jews is theirs for the taking. That is, it is theirs for the taking when they finally realize Jesus is the Messiah and they repent, seek forgiveness, and accept Him for who He truly is! The parallels between the Parable of the Lost Son and the relationship between Christians, Jews, and God Almighty are literally uncanny when interpreted in such a manner.

“God’s time clock for the end-time generation is marked by events involving the nation of Israel and the city of Jerusalem. This does not mean that God favors the Jews over His church, but that He has appointed Israel as a major sign for recognizing end-time events. This is established in Daniel 9:24 where the phrases ‘thy people’ and ‘thy holy city’ are a reference to the nation of Israel and the city of Jerusalem.”^{xxxix}

Clearly, God still has a plan for Israel as a nation. Its rebirth in 1948 was a divine appointment. As the life-giving sap of God’s promise begins to flow to Israel, allowing its branches to become tender and its leaves to grow, we know the summer is growing near. As summer goes on, the days quickly pass—and before you know it, the harvest will be at hand. Hal Lindsey provides an interesting note regarding this time: “Even though Israel is now partially back in her ancient homeland, she isn’t at peace with the world around her. Until Messiah comes again and Israel turns to Him, the nation is still officially under God’s divine discipline.”^{xl}

Even though God is still intimately involved in the affairs of the people of Israel, it doesn’t mean they are not under His discipline. That discipline will not only continue but will also increase in severity, as Israel is destined to endure the times of the Tribulation.

The Mystery of the Kingdom Study Questions. (These questions have been created using the entire third chapter of The Mystery of Zion, not just the synopsis contained in this document):

1. How many times was the term “Mystery” used specifically within the passages of the Bible?
2. What role does the Holy Spirit perform within the concept of biblical mysteries?
3. What modern evidence do we have that the mystery of God’s kingdom is intimately linked with Israel and Jerusalem?
4. Which of the covenants, (Abrahamic, Mosaic, or Davidic) set up an eternal monarchy for Israel?
5. God’s Kingdom is often misconstrued to the paradise each of us is promised when we profess our faith in the Messiah. What would be a more biblical definition of God’s Kingdom? When did it actually start?
6. How would you describe the term, “Day of the Lord?” Why do you think it’s considered to be an event, rather than a time or day?
7. What two key roles does Israel play in the Messiah’s 2nd coming?
8. In the creation story contained in Genesis 2:1-4, there is no mention of either morning or evening on the day that “God rested.” What prophetic significance does this have regarding your understanding of the concept of “The Day of the Lord?”
9. How might the parable of the Prodigal Son be applied to the New Covenant with Israel? How does this narrative fit into the concept that God still has a divine plan for Israel?
10. After studying this chapter, what profound insight have you discovered regarding God’s continued plan for Israel?



The Mystery of Zion—Israel’s Final Days: A Timeline

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

With Study Guide

by Lanny K. Cook, PhD Copyright © 2017

Israel’s role in God’s plan for the redemption of mankind has been in play from the moment the Creator of the universe made His initial covenant with Abraham—making an everlasting promise that Abraham would be the father of a great nation and that through him the world would be blessed (see Genesis 12:1–3). God has been intimately and divinely involved within the affairs of His chosen people through His covenant with Abraham, with Moses, with King David, and within the proclamations of His prophets. He has been involved in their affairs regardless of the invasions of conquering nations throughout Israel’s history, in anticipation of the promise of the New Covenant, in spite of the 400 years of silence before the birth of Jesus, regardless of the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem, and even throughout the 2,000 year diaspora, or scattering, of the Jews. Even as the Church continues to share the gospel message of God’s unconditional love provided through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ,

God still has a plan, purpose, and promise for Israel and the Jewish people. He will not “rest” until His plan of redemption for humanity is complete!

According to the *Prophecy Study Bible*, “In Scripture, the expression ‘last days’ is an extremely broad one. For example, in Hebrews 1:1, 2, the author reveals ‘God . . . has in these last days spoken to us by His Son.’ Mankind, therefore has been living in the last days since the birth of Jesus the Messiah . . . we can say that the last days extend from the birth of Jesus until His Second Coming at the end of the Tribulation.”^{xli} In Matthew, we are reminded of the prophetic proclamations regarding the messenger who would come to introduce the beginning of these days:

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the LORD; make His paths straight!’” (Matthew 3:1–3 NKJV).

The following pages provide a representation of scriptural citation and current evidence that confirm God’s continued plan and purpose for Israel and the Jewish people during the time known as the “last days” or the “end of the age.” The apostle Paul’s words in the book of Romans serves as a profound precursor to this section:

I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. . . . Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring! (Romans 11:1–2, 11–12 NIV).

Within the confines of this short synopsis, I will only be sharing a few key points regarding the final days as they relate to God’s plan for Israel. However, within the complete reading of *The Mystery of Zion* you can explore all of the associated topics as listed above regarding the timeline leading up to final stage of God’s plan for humanity. Here is a list of all the topics discussed in the fourth chapter of the book.

“Trodden Down by the Gentiles” *
A Nation Born in a Day! *
“Wars and Rumors of Wars” (Matthew 24:6; Mark 13:7)
The Rapture of the Church *

The Tribulation Begins—Security and Peace *
The Antichrist
The Third Temple
Israel Invaded by a Northern Coalition
Tribulation Midweek—The Abomination of Desolation
The Great Tribulation—Judgment, the Final Three-and-a-Half Years
Israel’s Eyes Opened
Christ’s Return—The Second Coming
The Millennial Reign of Christ
The Messiah Reigns on the Davidic Throne
Tribulation Saints Enter the Millennial Reign
Resurrected Saints Reign with Christ
Israel Restored
The Millennial Temple Built

For the sake of brevity within this review, I will merely share information regarding a few of these points in order to provide a glimpse of the prophetic timeline and associated topics presented within this chapter. Those topics are listed above with an * (asterisk).

“Trodden Down by the Gentiles”

Since AD 70 until the mid-twentieth century, the land known as Palestine lay dormant and barren. This so-called “Promised Land” was anything but a “land flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 33:3 NIV). With the destruction of the holy city of Jerusalem, Rome had put an end to the nation and seemingly to its people. It appeared that the Roman general Titus had even put an end to a civilization and, even more disturbing, an end to God’s promise. Hal Lindsey writes, “Jesus’ predictions regarding the nation restored to the land are extremely significant when we recall that He predicted a world-wide dispersion and complete destruction of the nation which would begin with the generation which crucified Him (Luke 21:22, 23; Matthew 23:36).”^{xlii} Sadly, the words of the prophet Micah would resonate across the desolate landscape of a once vibrant land like a haunting voice of judgment for thousands of years:

Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money. Yet they look for the LORD’s support and say, “Is not the LORD among us? No disaster will come upon us.” Therefore because of you, Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets (Micah 3:11–12 NIV).

Apparently, the end had come for the nation, culture, and covenants of God that had been appointed to Abraham, Moses, and King David. For 1,900 years, this once-vibrant land lay

desolate as it was trodden down not by God's chosen people but by the Gentiles—the untouchable, unrighteous enemies of the descendants of Abraham. It appeared the God of Abraham had finally pronounced final judgment on the people He had set apart for Himself. Their rejection of the prophesied Messiah had brought the wrath of God upon their land and their descendants.

Through the centuries, the land was ruled by the Romans, the Byzantines, the Muslims, and even the Crusaders. Truly, it was a land trodden down by the Gentiles. Palestine was literally a no-man's land. As Richard Booker writes, "When we study the history of the land, we see it only prospers when the Jews are living in it. After the Romans expelled the Jews from Israel in the first and second centuries of this era, the land progressively deteriorated. Since there was never a sovereign state in the land, nor was it the capital of any empire, Israel became a neglected wasteland."^{xliii}

However, in God's plans, by His Word, a wasteland can become fertile ground. From a barren desert, a garden can blossom and flourish. When it comes to God's purpose, there is nothing that happens from a reactionary perspective or from mere coincidence. God was moving on the hearts of His chosen people. Grant R. Jeffrey notes, "During the 1880s, anti-Semitic persecution within Russia and Ukraine forced many Jews to flee to Palestine and North America. In 1896, Theodor Herzl wrote a pamphlet, *The Jewish State*, which aroused an intense longing to return to Zion among Jews living in exile."^{xliv}

The Jews weren't the only people who began to ponder the possibilities of migrating to the area known as Palestine. There were others. Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin state, "Many people in the West believe that the Palestinians had all lived in Palestine for centuries, until they were suddenly, and against their will, displaced during the 1948 Arab war to destroy Israel. In fact, many of these people had come to Palestine only a few years before Israel's creation."^{xlv} The stage was being set and the plans were beginning to unfold for a miraculous return. In most cases, years before something significant happens, the Spirit of God begins to speak to the heart of His children—whispering, suggesting, urging, conjuring up hopes and dreams for something better . . . something divine. And so it was. In May 1948, something miraculous happened that had never happened before in the history of the world.

A Nation Born in a Day!

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).

When the Spirit of God begins to move, things happen, but not always immediately. Often it is in a slow calculated fashion, but somehow, some way, all the pieces of the puzzle for Israel to become a nation began to fall into place. Some of those pieces involved seemingly unsurmountable obstacles, many of which could only be accomplished through agonizing pain and suffering. So it was with Israel. If the horrors and murderous atrocities of the Holocaust had never happened, it is unlikely the world have been willing, or even compassionate enough, to allow the creation of a renewed Jewish state. Perry Stone Jr. writes, “It was the holocaust that, I would argue, provoked the Jews of Europe and many others around the world to push for the establishment of a Jewish homeland. That this happened was nothing less than miraculous.”^{xlvi}

The atrocities placed on the shoulders of the Hebrew people—along with millions of other “undesirables,” as they were labeled by the Nazis—were literally beyond human comprehension. In fact, it could be said that the children of Abraham’s Covenant had never experienced such horror since their origins. Even in Egyptian bondage, the conditions and treatment had to pale in comparison to the years of the Holocaust at the hands of Nazi, Germany. In Egypt, the Hebrew people faced hardship and bondage, but it wasn’t Pharaoh’s desire to annihilate a nation.

Perry Stone Jr. writes, “When they [Israelis in Egypt under Pharaoh] cried out to God, the Lord ‘remembered His covenant’ and began a plan for their release and return to the Promised Land (Exodus 2:24). A modern Pharaoh named Adolph Hitler instigated the violent persecution against the Jews of Europe. This cruel tyrant was the leader of the Third Reich, also known as the Nazi Party. Hitler demonically mesmerized the masses and initiated the final solution to rid the world of all Jews. During seven years of horror called the Holocaust, six million Jews perished in the death camps and torture chambers of the Nazis. The cries of Jews were heard in heaven, just as they were at the time of the Egyptian captivity. God brought both generations of Hebrews out of their bondage through a massive Exodus, and both generations witnessed the destruction of both Pharaohs and their armies. The Exodus from Egypt and the Exodus from Europe opened the door for a remnant of Jews to return to their promised homeland.”^{xlvii}

Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, “Give them up!” and to the south, “Do not hold them back.” Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth (Isaiah 43:5–6 NIV).

After nearly 1,900 years of being scattered to the ends of the earth, without a land to call their own, the children of Israel once again were able to return to their “Promised Land.”

Hal Lindsey, author of the *Late Great Planet Earth*, wrote the following regarding this amazing prophetic event: “The one event which many Bible students in the past overlooked was this prophetic sign: Israel had to be a nation again in the land of its forefathers. Israel a nation—a dream for so many years, was made a reality on 14 May 1948 when David Ben-Gurion read the Declaration of Independence announcing the establishment of a Jewish Nation to be known as the State of Israel. In 1949, Prime Minister Ben-Gurion said that Israel’s policy ‘consists of bringing all the Jews to Israel . . . we are still at the beginning.’”^{xlviii}

Yet even with the enormity of this miracle from above, God wasn’t done fulfilling the prophecies of old regarding His covenants with Abraham and His promises to His chosen people. “For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language that they all may call on the name of the LORD, to serve Him with one accord” (Zephaniah 3:9 NKJV). Once again, the reality is that any people who are assimilated into other cultures will eventually, without a doubt, lose their identity as a nation as well as the distinctive traits of their culture. People who live in foreign cultures—especially for centuries—are eventually assimilated into their new environment. Few of their rituals or customs can survive.

However, this wasn’t the case for the Israelites. After 1,900 years of being cast into the various cultures of the world, even their native language—known as the “pure language”—was brought back to life. From a historical perspective, this is totally unheard of—it could only occur as part of God’s divine and sovereign plan for His people. Grant R. Jeffrey notes, “Even in the time of Christ, Hebrew was a dying language. It was used only by the scribes and priests for official religious purposes in the Temple. Almost everyone else used the Greek language, which had become the ‘international’ language of its day. Many conversations would be in Aramaic, a language the Jewish exiles adopted during their seventy years of captivity in Babylon. The revival of the ancient language of Hebrew in modern Israel is another miraculous and unprecedented fulfillment of prophecy in our day.”^{xlix} There could be no other logical explanation to this miraculous phenomenon outside of God’s divine appointment and plan for gathering the Jewish people back into their land.

One last piece of the puzzle needs to be mentioned here. When Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed in AD 70, the governing body of Israel (the Sanhedrin) were also destroyed. Perry Stone Jr. comments, “One of the most dramatic (developments) to occur in the last few years is the re-emergence of a long defunct governing body called the Sanhedrin. In the Second Temple period, the Sanhedrin was essentially the Jewish Supreme Court. It was the most important judicial body in Jewish culture and it trumped all others, even though there were a number of municipal versions which consisted to twenty-three members, who typically were older sages, with one of them being the presiding ‘nasi’ or ‘prince.’ Oftentimes the ‘nasi’ was the High Priest, which was the case at the time of Christ’s suffering.”^l

Once again, God was at work, moving in His way and in His time to bring all the pieces of the puzzle together, moving toward the precise moment when He was ready for His plan to unfold. Within the pieces of the puzzle, we can see the Holy Spirit at work, directing individuals and nations to go to the right or to the left, guiding their paths toward the fulfillment of prophecy, and, just as important, whispering guidance toward the ultimate redemption that only Christ can provide. Grant R. Jeffrey notes, “The modern day Sanhedrin was formally convened in Jerusalem on January 20, 2005. The court’s leader, Rabbi Yeshai Ba’avad, declared that the rabbinic body would meet monthly to issue religious legal rulings, saying, ‘This is the need of the generation and of the hour.’ The reconstituted Sanhedrin discussed several key ideas related to building the Third Temple, including the construction of an altar that would be used for the sacrifice of a lamb during a future Passover. Hundreds of priests from the tribe of Levi were authorized to begin training in the precise rituals of the ancient Temple sacrifices.”^{li}

It is evident that the rebirth of Israel is truly a prophecy that has unfolded before our eyes, and we continue to witness biblical prophecies from antiquity coming to pass today. With the continued regathering (or “Aliyah”) of Jews from around the world back to Israel, further evidence of the end times has been broadcast across the technological airwaves around the world. These nearly forgotten predictions regarding the Jewish people have found new life and profound significance as prophecy continues to unfold. Another prolific prediction recorded throughout many passages of the Bible has to do with Israel both directly and indirectly. These prophecies not only involve Israel but also the entire world.

The Rapture of the Church

These prophetic events that have been fulfilled during the past century lead God’s timetable to a point where the rapture of the Church could come at any moment. Of course, there are skeptics, along with “doomsday” enthusiasts, who provide vocal commentary both in agreement and in opposition to such a prophecy. But if biblical prophecy has any merit, we have no other option than to believe this event could happen at any moment within the next few years. Of course, there will never be agreement even within the confines of biblical scholars as to the exact time of this event. Many a sermon and many a dissertation, along with many personal convictions, have been focused on the possibilities as to the timing of this event.

There are those who believe in a Pre-tribulation rapture of the church. Some believe the Rapture will occur at the Midweek of the Tribulation. And then, of course, there are some who believe the Church will endure the Tribulation and won’t be raptured out until the end or after the Tribulation. It is not my intent to provide proof supporting or denying any of these belief

systems. Personally, I lean toward a Pre-tribulation Rapture, as numerous passages of Scripture state that Christians are not appointed to wrath (see Romans 5:9; 1 Thessalonians 1:9).

John F. Walvoord notes, “In 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11, Paul connected the Old Testament concept of the ‘day of the Lord’ to the rapture and second coming. Like a thief in the night, who comes without warning, the rapture will occur and the day of the Lord will begin. . . . The future period of God’s intervention in the world will begin at the rapture and will include the period of trouble preceding the second coming of Christ and the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth. The day of the Lord will also include the millennial kingdom. The entire period before and after the second coming of Christ will constitute a special divine intervention and rule of righteousness on the earth in the way that is not being experienced at the present age.”^{lii}

What I am sure of is that only God knows the timeline, and whatever He chooses, I can trust it will be to His glory and purpose. Therefore, rather than speculate, it’s safe to just say that according to Scripture, there will be a Rapture and the Church will be taken out of this world. There are two main passages that cite this event—a miraculous event that brings an end to the “Church Age.” The first is found in Paul’s letter to the church in Corinth:

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:51–54 NIV).

This event will signal the end of the Church Age, or Age of Grace, and the end of the New Covenant of salvation that is offered freely to anyone who accepts it through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. Ron Rhodes writes, “The rapture is a sign-less event that can occur at any moment. This is in contrast to the second coming of Christ, which is preceded by many events that transpire during the seven-year tribulation period (see Revelation 4–18).”^{liii} Clarence Larkin, in his book *Dispensational Truth* (which was written nearly a century earlier), speaks of this event as “the most startling ‘event’ of this Age and Dispensation.” He continues to share this thought: “On the morning of that glorious day the air will be filled with the ‘spirits’ of the ‘Dead in Christ,’ come back to earth to get their bodies, raised and glorified.”^{liv}

The second reference to the Rapture is found in Paul’s epistle to the church in Thessalonica:

After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever (1 Thessalonians 4:17 NIV).

Most of us are familiar with the popular *Left Behind* series of books. These books brought the reality of this event to the forefront of speculation for both Christians and non-Christians. While these books are based on the premise that the Church will be raptured, we can only guess as to the way it will exactly happen. It could happen just as described in the *Left Behind* series, where the Christians just suddenly vanish before the eyes of those left behind. Ron Rhodes, author of *The End Times in Chronological Order*, believes “this means that one generation of Christians will never pass through death’s door. They will be alive on earth in their mortal bodies, and suddenly, in an instant, they will be with Christ in their immortal bodies.”^{iv} The thought of what might happen during the Rapture are literally mesmerizing to a lot of people, which is, of course, what made the *Left Behind* series such a popular hit. Clarence Larkin provides some interesting possibilities for us to consider regarding this event:

At first the whole thing will be a Mystery, until someone who had heard or read about the “Rapture of the Saints,” realizing what had happened will explain the situation. But one of the surprises of that day will be that so many professing Christians, and among them many ministers and Christian workers, will be left behind, while some who were not known to be Christians will be missing. The next day’s papers will be full of what happened the day before, and many of them will be swelled to twice their ordinary size by the pressure on their advertising columns for information as to missing ones, and for help to fill important vacancies and positions of trust. For a few days the excitement will be intense. Then the people will settle down to the inevitable. With the exception of a few who will repent and turn to God, the mass of the people will become more hardened and wicked than before, and some who lost loved ones will be embittered.^{lvi}

Regardless of how any of this unfolds, there has been plenty of speculation and conjecture offered during the past hundred years or more concerning this promised event. It is even possible that there could be another explanation as to how this unprecedented event might transpire, especially in consideration of the following passage of Scripture:

And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation (Hebrews 9:27–28 NKJV).

It is possible that those “who are still alive and are left” will experience their “appointment to die once” before their feet leave the ground. They will immediately obtain their new resurrected body, shedding the old shell of a body for the world to see that something tragic has just occurred. Who knows—this question is open for debate. What is certain is that the Church will be raptured from this earth. Both the living and the dead will meet Jesus in the clouds on that great and glorious morning.

Many biblical scholars believe the Rapture will be the earth-shattering event that will initiate the beginning of the Tribulation. There are many theories and much speculation about how this will occur, and multitudes of texts have been written about this particular piece of prophecy. This one topic could provide enough material for an entire dissertation in itself. However, one consideration that seems to have strong merit regarding this event has to do with the lack of reference to the Church in any of the passages related to the Tribulation. As Ron Rhodes observes in *The End Times in Chronological Order*:

In keeping with the idea that the church will be raptured before this time of tribulation begins, no Old Testament passage on the tribulation mentions the church (Deuteronomy 4:29–30; Jeremiah 30:4–11; Daniel 8:24–27; 12:1–2). Likewise, no New Testament passage on the tribulation mentions the church (Matthew 13:30, 39–42, 48–50; 24:15–31; 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10; 5:4–9; 2 Thessalonians 2:1–11; Revelation 4–18). The church’s complete absence would seem to indicate that it is not on earth during the tribulation. Further, a pretribulation rapture best explains the massive apostasy that engulfs the world following the removal of “the restrainer”—apparently the Holy Spirit (2 Thessalonians 2:3–7). The Holy Spirit indwells all believers (John 14:16; 1 Corinthians 3:17), so He will essentially be removed when the church is raptured, thus making possible the eruption of apostasy. Still further, Scripture assures us that the church is not appointed to wrath (Romans 5:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:9).^{lvii}

If Clarence Larkin’s dispensational studies are accurate, it would also be safe to assume the Tribulation cannot begin until the end of the Church Age, which happens when the Church is caught away in the clouds with Jesus. Within this realm of thinking, it would be safe to also assume this would allow the Jews to once again be God’s representative people to the world. Ron Rhodes believes the passage in 2 Thessalonians 2:7–8 “indicates that the lawless one (the antichrist) cannot be revealed until the one who restrains is taken out of the way.”^{lviii} This may also indicate the Church will be raptured out immediately preceding the Tribulation. However, while it is worthy to mention the Tribulation in regard to this end-times discussion, it is not to be a distraction to the topic regarding Israel’s role during these days. Once again, regardless of

what triggers the arrival of this life-altering event, we can be sure that Israel will play a major role within this divine appointment of the seven years of Tribulation.

The Tribulation Begins—Security and Peace

According to the *Prophecy Study Bible*, there are four purposes for the Tribulation. Several of these purposes directly involve Israel, while two of them impact Israel in more indirect means or in a residual manner. “The first is to bring Israel into a place where they will recognize Jesus Christ as the Messiah (Matthew 23:37–39; Ezekiel 20:33–38). The second purpose is to judge the Gentile nations for their efforts to exterminate the nation of Israel and their abuse of the Gentile people (Genesis 12:3). The third purpose is to allow a Christ-rejecting world to personally experience the sorrow and suffering created by the evil empire administered by Satan, the Antichrist, and the False Prophet. The fourth purpose of the Tribulation is God’s wrath poured out on all who rejected the gospel.”^{lix}

About the times and the seasons: Brothers, you do not need anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the Day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. When they say, “Peace and security,” then sudden destruction comes on them, like labor pains come on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers, are not in the dark, for this day to overtake you like a thief. For you are all sons of light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or the darkness. . . . For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him (1 Thessalonians 5:1–5, 9–10 HCSB).

Much has been written about the end times or the future apocalyptic predictions for the end of the world. There is even speculation that the Mayan calendar points to the assumption that the world will come to an end at a certain time. So, the apocalyptic nature of Tribulation prophecy has been a foundational premise for much political, societal, and doctrinal discussions and debate, and it has also provided the impetus for many movies, books, video games, and even nightmares. Allen M. Barber notes, “Scofield believed the Day of the Lord covers the period from the tribulation and the reign of Christ on David’s throne to the Great White Throne judgment and the ushering in of the new heavens and earth.”^{lx} There is an old adage that always comes to mind when I think about the complexity of the Tribulation: “It will come in like a lamb, but go out like a lion.” Actually, the implications of such an analogy are quite profound as it relates to God’s plan, the Sacrificial Lamb of God, and His return as the Lion of Judah!

To better understand the Mystery of Zion and Israel's Final Days requires an awareness of the basic events of the Tribulation. There are several pivotal events associated within this seven-year period and several key considerations specifically outlined in the Scriptures. First and foremost is the necessity for Israel to once again have its rightful place among the recognized nations of the world. Hal Lindsey, in *The Late Great Planet Earth*, lists this stipulation at the top of his requirements that must be in place before the Tribulation begins: "The general time of this seven-year period couldn't begin until the Jewish people re-established their nation in their ancient homeland of Palestine."^{lxi}

The Bible details the exact moment when the Tribulation will begin the countdown to its seven-year duration: when the Antichrist signs a seven-year covenant with Israel. This event is recorded in Daniel 9:27, which states, "He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him" (NIV). Once the Antichrist signs this covenant with Israel, the time clock to the seven-year countdown of the Tribulation begins. Ron Rhodes states, "The final 'week' of seven years will begin for Israel when the antichrist confirms a seven-year covenant (Daniel 9:27). The signing of this peace pact will signal the beginning of the tribulation period. It will begin the seven-year countdown to the second coming of Christ, which follows the tribulation period."^{lxii}

The Prophetic Clock Continues to Tick

Now that we have reviewed a small portion of the prophetic timeline associated with the end times, it's time to once again return to the Mystery of Zion in order to complete our study. To do this, we will look at the passage of Scripture that most scholars recognize as the one that foretells Israel's rebirth of a nation. This event literally started the clock ticking down toward the end of the age—the events just outlined in this chapter:

Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away (Matthew 24:32–35 NIV).

Before continuing on, it's essential to remember the event that will trigger the remainder of the unfulfilled prophecy—an event that has already occurred, which is the rebirth of the nation of Israel in modern times. Jesus' words in Matthew 24:32–35 are significant, as they serve as the precursor to nearly all the end-time prophecies contained in the Bible. The

fulfillment of this prophecy is monumental. Not only does it provide evidence that the Bible is reliable, but it also provides epic details into the plans of God, all the while serving as a reliable witness to God's everlasting covenant.

God in all His sovereignty could never go back on His word! The trigger to the Mystery of Zion has already been pulled! And so, it appears that the Day of the Lord is drawing nigh and could dawn at any moment!

The Mystery of Zion-Israel's Final Days: A Timeline Study Questions. (These questions have been created using the entire fourth chapter of The Mystery of Zion, not just the synopsis contained in this document):

1. When did Israel's role in God's plan for the redemption of mankind actually begin?
2. What was the significance of the term "Trodden Down" in regards to Israel? How long did this term apply to God's chosen nation?
3. What were a few of the miraculous occurrences that accompanied a "Nation being born in a day?"
4. How do you explain the constant battles to survive that Israel has had to endure throughout their entire history? What would be the ramifications associated with Israel finally being destroyed even now?
5. Of all the Rapture theories, (pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, or –post-tribulation) which one do you feel has the most biblical evidence to believe? Why?
6. At the beginning of the Tribulation period we are told that there will be untold Peace and Security. How does Israel fit into this scene? What is the significance of this?
7. According to the Prophecy Study Bible, "The Antichrist will have a three-point plan for world domination. He will establish a one-world currency, a one-world religion, and a one-world government now being called the New World Order."^{xiii} How does this relate to what is currently happening within our world? How does that make you feel?
8. Right before the Midweek of the Tribulation period (3-1/2 years into the Tribulation), several different signs have fallen into place. What are they and why are they each significant?
9. The last three-and-a-half years of the Tribulation are referred to as the "Great Tribulation." This is where God's wrath is unleashed on the unrepentant lives of the entire world. What reasons do you see for Israel to be included within these terrible days? When you read about the suffering of those under God's judgement during those days, how does that motivate you to share the Truth of the Gospel with those you love?
10. We are told that finally Israel's eyes will be opened at the end of those days. Why is this important and how does it initiate Christ's Second Coming?
11. What do you believe is the significance of the Millennial Reign of Christ?
12. What event ushers in the concept of "the Fullness of Time?" What is the significance of the scripture from I Peter 1:23 in regards to this "Fullness of Time?"



An Everlasting Covenant

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

With Study Guide

by Lanny K. Cook, PhD Copyright © 2017

To fully understand the Mystery of Zion and Israel’s Final Days, there is one consideration with which we need to wrestle: can we rely on the Bible, the Word of God? In other words, can we trust it? The reality of this question poses a dilemma for much of the scholarly world. Skeptics contend that much of the Bible is nothing more than storytelling or mythology gathered from old wives’ tales of the nation of Israel. But those who come to the Scripture with an open mind will find that it truly is a divinely inspired piece of literature.

Walter Elwell and Robert W. Yarbrough write, “The Christian understanding of the Bible finds one of its clearest expressions in 2 Timothy 3:16–17. ‘All Scripture is God-breathed,’ Paul writes. He refers specifically to the Old Testament, but the same holds true for the New, since it is Scripture too, including Paul’s letters (2 Peter 3:15–16). Elsewhere Peter states the same truth using a different figure: ‘No prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit’ (2 Peter 1:20–21). The point is that Christians are justified in holding a very high view of the reliability of the

Bible, because it is not just a human book but one of divine origin, and because it makes the claim to be ‘God-breathed’ itself.”^{lxiv}

Israel’s appointment as God’s chosen people was specific, divine, and set forth from the foundations of the world. According to the *Prophecy Study Bible*, “God chose the nation of Israel so that He would have a repository of divine truth for generations to come. Through Israel God has given the world the Word of God, the patriarchs, the prophets, Jesus Christ, and the apostles. There would be no Christianity without Jewish contribution. God’s love for Israel produced Satan’s hatred for Israel and the Jewish people. Anti-Semitism is driven by a demon spirit because of the righteous contributions the Jewish people made to civilization.”^{lxv}

Through Israel, God gave people the Laws of Moses, proclaiming the straight and narrow path that leads to salvation. Through His Law and the prophets, God shared with the world a path that would eventually wind up at the foot of His throne. Israel was an integral part of that plan, yet there are many people today who think the Old Testament and Israel are no longer a viable component of God’s purpose. They contend that ever since the gospel message was proclaimed to the world and the Church came into existence, God has no further plan or purpose for the Old Testament, the Jews, or Israel. Jesus speaks directly to these misconceptions, as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:17–20 NIV).

The Bible, in its entirety, is an amazing literary marvel. It’s not just a book of history, dates and times, or people and places. It’s not just a compilation of philosophical ramblings or insignificant rhetoric. Rather, it’s a meticulously refined manuscript that was carefully, thoughtfully, and divinely compiled for the sole purpose of providing humanity with God’s divine revelation. It is “God’s story.” Both the Old and New Testaments contain revolutionary insights and profound wisdom for enlightenment, not only for living in the current age but also for understanding the plans and purposes of God Almighty. It is also the only book that offers the key to eternity, where true paradise is found through relationship with the Creator Himself.

The Bible is by far the most complex and intricate piece of literature on the face of the earth. The individual threads of this monumental tapestry at times appear to have no relevance or meaning to us today, as they often come across as nothing more than tattered and torn ancient parchments. Yet within each individual thread, there is meaning, purpose, and an intricacy that cannot be explained through any other means than the divinity of its inspired authorship. Each individual thread, when divinely revealed by God, allows us to see it has neither a beginning nor an end. Its circular concentricity constantly winds its way back to the realization that God's love for His creation is eternal and that He has an everlasting plan for it.

Perry Stone Jr. notes, "The Old Testament is the New Testament concealed, and the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed. In fact, many of the future prophetic events predicted in the New Testament are actually concealed in the book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible. The name 'Genesis' in Hebrew is Bereshith, meaning 'First in order or beginning.'"^{lxvi} Simply stated, the Bible leads us, guides us, directs us, and proclaims to us that Jesus Christ is Lord. Jesus is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End. There is no other means for any of God's earthly creation to gain access to the Father than through the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Period!

The writings contained within the pages of this book proclaim this, as the revelation of Israel itself could never have been imagined or conceived by mere mortal writers. This is especially true when we consider that this piece of historical literature was written over a 1,500-year time span, by forty authors, in three different languages, and over three continents. It contains sixty-six books that proclaim historical facts, prophetic proclamations, profound insights to living, and, most importantly, the expression of God's love and plan for humanity.

Jacob, the father of Israel, who was the son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham, was given a vision sometime around 1400 BC. This vision was a word from God regarding Israel's future, as recorded in this prophecy from Genesis:

Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep. Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the LORD stood above it and said: "I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I am with you and

will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you” (Genesis 28:10–15 NKJV).

William Goetz, in his book *Apocalypse Next*, shares an interesting quote from Mark Twain, one of the most famous Americans ever to live:

Mark Twain, certainly not a religious man, observed and commented on this amazing phenomenon. He wrote: “He [the Jew] could be . . . vain in himself and not be ashamed of it. Yes, he could be excused for it. The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian arose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff, and passed away; the Greek and the Roman followed, and made a fast noise, and they are gone; other peoples have sprung up and held the torch high for a time; but it burned out, and they sin in twilight, or have vanished. The Jew saw them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert, aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?” The secret is that God has spoken concerning the Jew, and He is keeping His Word supernaturally.^{lxvii}

What makes this quote so amazing—almost eerie—is that Mark Twain (or Samuel Clemens, which was his given name) died in April 1910, thirty-eight years before the miraculous rebirth of the nation of Israel. The Jews of Twain’s day made him sit up and take notice, and it makes me wonder what he would have penned if he had been around to witness the divinely appointed rebirth of the Jewish state—especially since he wasn’t much for religious dealings. Apparently, even toward the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the plight of God’s chosen people was beginning to move in the hearts of the nations. Even Clarence Larkin, in his book *Dispensational Truth*, speaks of the future prophecy of Israel once again coming into existence as a nation.

The question we have attempted to answer is this: *Does God still have a plan for Israel and the Jewish people?* The answer must ring forth “yes,” for the Bible provides too much evidence to consider any other option. Theologians, Bible scholars, pastors, and Bible teachers who have studied the Word, examined the prophecy, and pondered the possibilities have to agree that God is still actively fulfilling His promise to the covenants He made with the fathers of Israel. Paul Benware writes, “In light of Israel’s disobedience (Romans 10:21), has God cast them aside? The answer is an emphatic ‘no.’ Israel is stubborn, disobedient, and undeserving. However, the promises God made in the Abrahamic Covenant were eternal and unconditional. Israel’s present spiritual blindness is limited in extent (it is ‘partial,’ Romans 11:25) and duration

(it is 'until,' Romans 11:25). Someday, God will fulfill His promises to Israel and 'graft' Israel, as a nation, back into the Abrahamic Covenant experientially (Romans 11:23–25). They will finally be redeemed as a nation, partaking for the first time of the New Covenant."^{lxviii}

To provide further evidence supporting this claim, we can defer to John Hagee, who addressed this question specifically. "Has God cast away Israel? Absolutely not! The fact is, when something is 'cast away,' you never hear of it again. Yet in the Book of Revelation, twelve tribes of Israel, and twelve thousand out of each of the twelve tribes, are sealed to present the gospel during the Great Tribulation (Revelation 7:4)."^{lxix} This is a key consideration in God's future plan for the nation of Israel. After the rapture of the Church, there will only be one true representative left of the one true God, who will present God's love and His plan of salvation to the world: the Jews and the nation of Israel. If for no other reason than this, it becomes obvious that God has a profound purpose for His chosen people during the end times.

During the twenty centuries in which the Jews were cast to the four corners of the earth, God never allowed any nation to have a lasting impact on either the land of Israel or the holy city of Jerusalem. It is true there were foreign nations who ruled over this land of Abraham, but none ever claimed it as their own in regard to being a sovereign, recognized nation—that is, no other people or nation beside the Jews. Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin state, "In more than the three-thousand-year-long-history of the land of Israel as a political entity, only three independent states have ever existed there, and each one has been Jewish: the state established in the aftermath of the Jewish exodus from Egypt, and later ruled for more than four centuries by King David and his descendants; the commonwealth established during the Second Temple, and destroyed by the Romans; and the modern state of Israel, established in 1948."^{lxx}

The reality of this tiny nation the size of New Jersey is that it is special. It is not special because of who inhabits it or the history involved within its ever-changing borders. It is not special because of its location during the time of antiquity or even for its location in the modern age. It is not special because of its wealth, its knowledge, its resources, or its place among the nations of the world. Israel is special because of God's divine providence and promise. As John Hagee notes, "God's Word paints the portrait that Israel's future is secure and bright."^{lxxi} The Mystery of Zion becomes even more confusing when we consider how the Jewish people, for thousands of years, have maintained a continuous distinction and possessed an obviously unique identity and purpose. Hal Lindsey writes:

The nation of Israel cannot be ignored; we see the Jews as a miracle of history. Even the casual observer is amazed how the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have survived as a distinct race in spite of the most formidable odds. What other

people can trace their continuous unity back nearly 4,000 years? Twice the Jews have been destroyed as a nation and dragged away as slaves under inhuman circumstances; twice the Jews returned to their ancient homeland and reestablished their nation. What other people have preserved a distinct and separate national identity, in spite of a total of some 2600 years of being scattered—years of dispersion, as it is called? During all these years, these men and women without a country have suffered the most insane and unjust persecutions ever endured by any collection of people or nationalities. Jewish survival is a phenomenon. However, Jewish history, with all of its tragedies and triumphs, has been accurately foretold.^{lxxii}

God's plan of salvation for humanity is intricately woven through the fabric, the fiber, and the very essence of Jewish history as provocatively proclaimed by its prophets of old. Jewish history is one of promise. It is centered on the need, hope, anticipation, yearning, and desperation for a Messiah. Jewish history not only paved the way for humanity's redemption, serving as the conduit for the Messiah's initial appearance, but also even today serves as the lightning rod that will perpetuate His return. For Jews, they are still anticipating the arrival of their Messiah. For Christians, Jesus Christ is the Messiah who will one day return to earth and establish God's kingdom for all eternity, bringing the realization of salvation to the Jewish people, the nation of Israel, and to all who call upon the name of the Lord.

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6 NIV).

Ken Garrison writes, "The first church was established in Jerusalem. It was made up exclusively of people from Jewish backgrounds. We believe from our study of the book of Acts that they were observant Jews, in every sense of the word. They evidently worshiped in the Temple. . . . They obviously participated in everyday Jewish life. Nevertheless, they were different. They each had experienced God's Holy Spirit bringing them into His presence. . . . They became distinguished as the sect called 'The Way.' 'The Way' implied the way of direct communion with God. Messiah Jesus declared that He was, 'the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.'"^{lxxiii}

In this current age, there is only one way to gain access to God's eternal kingdom: through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul Benware writes, "Presently (in this Church Age) Israel has the same standing as the Gentiles and like the Gentiles they must hear and believe the gospel in order to be saved (Romans 10:9–21). Any Jew who calls on the Lord for salvation will be saved."^{lxxiv} However, with that being said, God still has a plan for the nation

of Israel and the Jewish people. Literally, it's as much of a mystery as the mystery of the Gentiles being heirs together with Israel, as written by Paul to the church in Ephesus:

This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 3:6 NIV).

The history of Israel and the Jewish people is filled with passion, purpose, failure, accomplishment, celebration, tragedy, and destiny. No nation or people in the world can trace their roots back more than 4,000 years. The Jewish people's story is unlike any other in the history of mankind. They are the only nation that began in the ancient days through an eternal covenant with God, and they are the only nation in the modern world that can still make that claim. Their journey from the humble beginnings of a man named Abram took them to places they could never have imagined, let alone planned. Their journey throughout a myriad of lands in the Mideast has been filled with promise, seasoned with failure, sprinkled with adversity, and garnished with glory and proclamation of God Almighty.

Israel's purpose was divinely inspired and centered on being a blessing to humanity. That blessing was manifest in the mystery of the incarnation of God—Emmanuel, translated as “God with us,” as He took on the flesh of humanity in the form of the one named Jesus. Philip Yancey, in his book *The Jesus I Never Knew*, said this about the Messiah who made His arrival in Israel 2,000 years ago: “Jesus did not come close to satisfying the lavish hopes of the Jews. The opposite happened: within a generation Roman soldiers razed Jerusalem to the ground. The young Christian church accepted the destruction of the temple as a sign of the end of the covenant between God and Israel, and after the first century very few Jews converted to Christianity.”^{lxxv}

The realization of this blessing was the initial earthly step in the introduction and establishment of God's kingdom. It was a plan that would take thousands of years to come to fruition. According to the *Life Application Study Bible*, “Paul had a vision of a church where all Jews and Gentiles would be united in their love of God and in obedience to Christ. While respecting God's law, this ideal church would look to Christ alone for salvation. A person's ethnic background and social status would be irrelevant—what mattered would be his or her faith in Christ. But Paul's vision has not yet been realized. God chose the Jews, just as he chose the Gentiles, and he is still working to unite Jew and Gentile in a new Israel, a new Jerusalem, ruled by his Son.”^{lxxvi}

Paul's vision will find fulfillment, but not during this age. It will only find fulfillment within the Millennial Reign of Christ. As previously discussed, in Romans 11, he provides insight

into the mystery of God's plan for the nation of Israel and the Jewish people. I believe this passage of Scripture has profound insight into Israel's role during the last days, which, of course, actually began with the advent of the Church Age after the resurrected Christ's ascension to heaven and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. . . . Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring! (Romans 11:1–2, 11–12 NIV).

It is important to highlight several points in these verses that could easily be skimmed over and ignored. Israel's transgressions brought riches to the world when they rejected Jesus, which was of great benefit to the rest of the world, as the gospel was proclaimed first to the Jews and then the Gentiles. This is a pretty straightforward point that was accepted in Paul's ministry and the early beginnings of the Church. However, Paul makes a bold and deeply profound statement in the final verse when he states, "There will be even greater riches involved when God's chosen race *is* brought into full inclusion." He also says, "How much greater riches *will* their full inclusion bring." Paul specifically states that God's chosen race will be included in the glory of God's promise through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus is a sound inference to this mystery regarding Israel and the Church, together as one for the purposes of God, which, of course, can only happen through the blood of Christ.

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands)—remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came

and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit (Ephesians 2:11–22 NIV).

The illustration of a structure in this passage provides an interesting analogy to the architectural design of God's plan of salvation. Christ is the chief cornerstone. Within the concept of constructing a building, the cornerstone is the first stone that is set. All the other stones are put in place in relation to this specific stone. The cornerstone is the determining factor for the position and the integrity of the entire structure. According to Paul, the foundation of God's holy temple is built on the apostles and prophets of Israel. The rest of the building—Jews and Gentiles—are joined together through Christ. At the deepest level, in such an analogy God's purpose is intricately designed with numerous specific components, all of which are necessary for the holy temple of His kingdom to exist throughout eternity. To remove any of these components would result in a cataclysmic structural failure.

The question that then needs to be raised is how those who lived by faith under the Law of Moses actually found forgiveness and salvation. Did it happen automatically when Jesus paid the price for humanity's sin? Was it retroactive to all the children of Israel regardless of whether they practiced their faith or attempted to live their lives according to the Law? Remember, Jesus said He came not to destroy the Law or the Prophets but that through Him they might be fulfilled (see Matthew 5:17). Could it be that the children of Israel were all grandfathered into salvation, because Jesus was the ultimate fulfillment of the Law? Or could it be that Ezekiel provides the answer—that the dry bones will be gathered up and given new life so that Jesus will rule over more than just the saints from the past 2,000 years who chose to follow Him? That question might be answered through the scripture found in Matthew 27:50–53 that describes the event of Jesus' death on the cross:

And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people (NIV).

I am neither naïve enough nor bold enough to try to answer that question. After all, it's not up to me to provide an answer to the mystery of such a question. Actually, the very essence of such an inquiry adds to the multitude of unanswered ponderings surrounding the Mystery of Zion. I can only say that for much of that mystery, only time will tell as the prophecies unfold and eyes are opened to the amazing preeminence of God. However, I will say that I'm anxious to one day find out for myself what the answer to this mystery will be! Until that day, I rely on the omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent Creator to take care of all the details of His magnificent plan.

An Everlasting Covenant: A Timeline Study Questions. (These questions have been created using the entire fifth chapter of The Mystery of Zion, not just the synopsis contained in this document):

1. Why do you believe that the Bible is reliable? How do you defend its authenticity?
2. Why is Israel called God's chosen people?
3. What have you discovered to be some of the most profound evidence to confirm that God still has a plan and a purpose for Israel?
4. After making your way to this culminating chapter, how do you reconcile Israel's rejection of Jesus as the Messiah, with God's continued plan and purpose for Israel and the salvation of the world?
5. How would you answer the question as to how the Jews who were under the Laws of Moses found salvation? How did they come back to life and appear in the city after Jesus' Resurrection?
6. What thoughts do you have regarding Paul's statement in Romans 11:1-2 where he talks about the greatness of the riches associated with Israel's full inclusion?
7. What about the first verse in Romans 11, where Paul asks the question whether Israel fell beyond recovery? What does this suggest regarding God's continued plan and purpose for Israel?
8. In your opinion, after completing this study, how would you explain the purpose of the Millennial Reign of Christ?
9. How would you visualize Paul's explanation found in Ephesians 2:11-22 of a holy structure being built with Christ as the chief cornerstone? When he talks about both Jews and Gentiles being joined together through Christ within this structure, what comes to your mind?
10. After reviewing each of the aspects within the timeline of God's Everlasting Covenant, which ones do you consider to be the most significant? Why? Have they helped to confirm or deepen your faith? In what ways?



The Mystery Unveiled

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

With Study Guide

by Lanny K. Cook, PhD Copyright © 2017

Throughout the Scriptures, the Word of God makes reference to Israel and the Jewish people from the time of Abraham to the end of the ages. Through it all, they are there in some form or another. At times they have been a nation, and at other times, sadly, they have been a people without a homeland, dispersed to the winds of time—but they have never been a people without an identity. Replacement theology proclaims that the Church has replaced Israel within the confines of God’s plan for humanity. There is no more truth to this false doctrine than there is to those who proclaim a dual covenant theology, believing Christians gain salvation through one covenant and Jews are redeemed through a different means. There is only one way to salvation, and that is through Jesus Christ. He confirmed this when He said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6 NIV).

There can be no other conclusion to the Mystery of Zion other than the realization that God still has a plan for Israel and the Jewish people. The biblical records provide conclusive evidence that Israel and the Jewish people will play a significant role not only during the end times but also in Christ’s Millennial Reign as well as within God’s eternal kingdom after the creation of the New Heavens and New Earth. Many of the covenants that God made with His chosen people, Israel, are eternal and will never be broken or expire. However, there will come

a day when God will virtually transform these previous covenants into an all-inclusive “New Covenant.” The prophet Jeremiah proclaimed this thousands of years ago:

Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more (Jeremiah 31:31–34 NKJV).

Both the Old and New Testaments mention Israel’s role in future events. Historical events over the past sixty years regarding Israel and the Jewish people provide irrefutable evidence of God’s divine plan for His chosen people and His nation. There can be no other explanation for Israel, or even the descendants of Abraham, to have any notable form of cultural identity after thousands of years in exile. Israel’s rebirth as a nation, the Jews return to their homeland, and the re-establishment of their ancient language should, at the very least, make the world sit up and take note that God still has a plan for His chosen race. The divine protection afforded Israel from the threat of foreign invaders during its short modern-day life once again provides evidence that something bigger is at work within the confines of this tiny nation. Israel and the Jewish people are intricately woven into the fabric of God’s blueprint for humanity in the past, in the present, and in the future!

The Bible provides evidence for Israel’s purpose throughout the end of this age and the ushering in of the Tribulation, the Millennial Reign of Christ, and God’s eternal kingdom. Of course, there will be those who argue the validity of the Bible. But what other book could even come close to providing accurate prophecy regarding not only the rebirth of this nation and the return of its people to their homeland but also the destruction of Israel and Jerusalem nearly 2,000 years ago? No other book written in the history of the world even comes close to approaching the accuracy and validity of biblical prophecy. Attempting to dispel the accuracy of this divinely inspired work just because a prophesied event hasn’t yet occurred is ludicrous. Just because some prophecies haven’t come to pass at this moment in no way means that God won’t see to their fulfillment sometime in the future.

God has granted the world limited access into His future plans. Through the Scriptures, He provides a glimpse of the things He wants humanity to know and understand. However, there are still many untold mysteries involving the “final days.” If God believes future events require a greater understanding and more thorough knowledge for the good of His purpose, He will provide the revelation to the appropriate entities at the appropriate time. There are many mysteries in this time that are before us. God has shared the “need-to-knows,” and fortunately He is keeping many of the particulars to Himself. Personally, I prefer it that way.

So, what can we take away from all of this material and pondering? First, God has a plan of salvation that He wants to share with the world so that no one should perish (see 2 Peter 3:9). Second, God has a divine appointment for Israel, the Jewish people, and the Church. Third, there are mysteries of God that won’t be revealed until God deems it appropriate, either as they come to pass or as He provides further revelation. Fourth, somehow, in some way, in the not-so-distant future, God will enact a New Covenant with Israel that will lead to *all* of Israel being saved. (The question that arises from this is how can all of Israel be saved collectively, if all of Israel isn’t saved individually?) Fifth, Gentiles and Jews will have a significant role in the 1,000-year Millennial Reign of Christ and the Age of Ages—eternity. Finally, we are still living in the Church Age, which means that currently the only way to find salvation is through the acceptance of God’s free gift that comes by the acceptance of His Son, Jesus Christ, as Savior and Lord. When we accept this sacrifice of God’s love and ask Him into our hearts, we will be grafted into the cultivated olive tree. Within this “grafting in,” we also must realize the life-giving sap of Israel will one day “flow” a second time, through the purpose and design of a loving, gracious, sovereign God—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

John Hagee said it well when he proclaimed, “All roads of Jewish history have to lead back to Genesis 17, where God established an everlasting covenant with the father of God’s chosen people, Abraham.”^{lxxvii} This is obviously true, but I would contend that all roads lead specifically back to the scripture contained in Genesis 17:6–7: “I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you” (NIV). For if we are grafted into the holy root of the cultivated olive tree, then we too must look back to this passage of Scripture to celebrate the source of our faith and the promise of God’s New Covenant—one that offers salvation through the redeeming blood of the Lord Jesus Christ!

As Christians, what do we do with this information regarding times that we may or may not be around to witness? It is apparent that God has a purpose for not only His Church during these days but, more importantly, His chosen people, Israel. So, to that question, there is only one response: we are called to share the amazing revelations of God through the proclamation

of His gospel message to those we encounter throughout our lives. With that being said, I believe it is relevant to share a quote from Theodore Epp, an American Christian clergyman and radio evangelist who lived during the twentieth century: “Live as though Christ died yesterday, rose from the grave today, and is coming back tomorrow.”

In the meantime, we need to recognize that God still has a divine appointment—or maybe I should say a divine destiny—for Israel, even though much of that destiny is shrouded in a cloud of mystery. We must support Israel’s right to exist as a sovereign nation. We must pray for the coming of the Prince of Peace, all the while praying for the Peace of Jerusalem as we look forward to that great and glorious Day of the Lord!

For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day; but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: “AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,” God says, “THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND; AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY, AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS; EVEN ON MY BONDSLAVES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT and they shall prophesy. AND I WILL GRANT WONDERS IN THE SKY ABOVE AND SIGNS ON THE EARTH BELOW, BLOOD, AND FIRE, AND VAPOR OF SMOKE. THE SUN WILL BE TURNED INTO DARKNESS AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD, BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD SHALL COME. AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED” (Acts 2:15–21 NASB).

However, what is even more important to this theological study is the realization that God still has a plan for Israel. When He made a covenant with Abraham, it was everlasting. God’s covenant with His chosen people had a beginning, but it was one without an end! What is obvious throughout the premise of this study is the fact that while Christians share an eternal covenant through the gift of salvation by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God’s plan for our purpose on this earth will terminate long before His plan for the nation of Israel comes to an end. After the rapture of the Church, Israel will once again take its rightful place at the forefront of God’s plan and purpose for all humanity. All the Christians in this world will have departed through a miraculous Rapture. At that time, regardless of whether we believe in a Pre-tribulation, Post-tribulation or even Mid-tribulation Rapture, the Church will no longer be the means through which God deals with humanity. Once again, it will be up to Israel to serve as the conduit for the fulfillment of the final biblical prophecies.

John Walvord notes, “Isaiah 43 shows that God, who created Israel, would be with the nation through the deep waters as well as the fires of her affliction (vv. 1–2). The ultimate purpose of God is to bring the people of Israel back to the Holy Land from being scattered all over the world (vv. 3–7). This has been fulfilled only partially in return from the captivities and

awaits its complete fulfillment at the second coming of Christ (Ezek. 39:26–28). In supernaturally restoring Israel, God will make the nation a testimony to His own deity and power (Isa. 43:8–13). In the immediate future, God would deliver Israel from Babylon (vv. 14–21). But in spite of God’s goodness, Israel would not respond (vv. 22–24). God reminded her that only He would be able to blot out her transgressions or punish her for her sins (vv. 25–28). This prophecy will be fulfilled in the millennial kingdom.”^{lxxviii}

When the Age of Grace culminates on that glorious day when the dead in Christ rise from the grave with a final trumpet call (see 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18), the stage will be set for the ushering in of a final age—one that will culminate with the Millennial Reign of Christ. At that time, He will reign for 1,000 years upon this earth as He takes His rightful place within the most sacred of places in the rebuilt final Temple. He will sit upon His throne from within the Holy of Holies. There will no longer be a need for the Ark of the Covenant to be a part of this final Temple. There will no longer be a need for sacrificial blood to be poured over the Mercy Seat within the Temple. Jesus’ blood has already been poured out for the final forgiveness of sins and the redemption of humanity. He is the sacrifice, the Mercy Seat. He is “Emmanuel,” God with us, no longer in just a spiritual sense but also in a physical sense. It is here that He reigns not only for that 1,000-year age, which is known as the Day of the Lord, but also, when that final earthly age is complete, forevermore with all His beloved followers—those who proclaim He is who He says He is: the Lord God Almighty.

It is from this place in the Messiah’s Millennial Kingdom that the nation of Israel will finally find the peace and fulfillment spoken through God’s prophets. For thousands of years, Israel prayed for the peace of Jerusalem. It is a peace they will never claim until that great and glorious Day of the Lord when they look on the One whom they pierced and realize that He not only was, but is, their promised Messiah (see Zechariah 12:10). At that time, another prophecy will find fulfillment: “At the name of Jesus every knee should bow . . . and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Philippians 2:10–11 NIV).

So, what does all this mean? There are many ramifications. It means that God *still* has a plan for the nation of Israel, both as a political and spiritual body. It means God’s covenant with Abraham is still intact. It means the holy city of Jerusalem is God’s holy city—it doesn’t belong to any religion other than those who follow the one true God. Currently, it could be said this includes both Christians and Jews, but in reality, the only reason Christians could be considered in this mix is because we have been grafted into the Vine that provides eternal life.

God’s holy city never belonged to the Jews, the Christians, or any other religious entity. It has been God’s holy city from the ancient of days. The covenant God made with Abraham was about the land and His chosen people. According to Genesis 12:1–3, “Now the LORD had said to Abram: ‘Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a

land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (NKJV).

Zion is the city of God: “And they shall call you The City of the LORD, Zion of the Holy One of Israel” (Isaiah 60:14 NKJV). It is where the Lord has dwelt and will dwell again: “For the LORD dwells in Zion” (Joel 3:21 NKJV). During Christ’s Millennial Reign, Zion will continue to play a significant role. After the Millennial Reign, we are advised that God will build a New Jerusalem: “I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband” (Revelation 21:2 NIV). John described it this way:

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (Revelation 21:10–14 NIV).

It will be at this time—and this time only within the confines of human history—that God will be finished with the earthly nation of Israel. Until that time arrives, God’s plan is still intact. He still has a purpose for His chosen people and His chosen nation. The significance of this serves as a warning to any and all who attempt to take a stand against it. As long as God is in control—and you are naïve if you think He isn’t, or there might come a time when He isn’t—Israel will maintain its rightful place among the nations. Woe to any nation or politician who takes a stand against the sovereignty of God’s chosen! Israel was literally born in a day in modern history, as I discussed in an earlier chapter. It is the only nation in history to come into existence, fall into desolation and destruction—with its native inhabitants cast to the four corners of the earth—and then miraculously revive thousands of years later in an instant.

As long as God has a plan for Israel’s existence, it will continue on. It will never be destroyed again. It will continue to exist and maintain its rightful place among the nations of the world because of God’s covenant with Abraham. Jerusalem is the holy city. God, in His sovereignty, will never allow it to be divided, invaded, or destroyed, regardless of the world’s preference and interference, until His Millennial Reign is accomplished. Those who curse Israel will be cursed. Those who bless Israel will be blessed! Those who attempt to interfere with God’s purpose for Zion, or with His covenant with Abraham, will meet their untimely demise.

Israel will continue to survive and maintain its place among the nations of the world not because of the significant role it plays in the secular world but because of God's divine destiny for His chosen people and His plan for the salvation of humanity. Israel's survival is attributed to God's divine sovereignty. Israel survives because of God's promise. Israel will continue in this world until God's purpose and plan for the Messiah's Millennial Reign is complete. The miracle of Israel will continue because God's hand is still upon this tiny nation of the world. Israel is here to stay until the end of the ages. Israel's final days will lead us all into eternity!

Israel will play a leading role long after the rest of us have departed from this world and the secular world powers have ceased to exist. Why? Because God entered into a covenant with His beloved servant, Abraham. Until God's purpose is accomplished, there is nothing the world can do to change the course of Israel's divine destiny! Ultimately, this is the Mystery of Zion that separates Israel from the other nations this world has ever known. With that being said, remember to continually pray for the Peace of Jerusalem! After all, the promised Messiah is the Prince of Peace! He is the Lion of Judah, the Holy One of Israel, and at His name, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord! At His Second Coming, He will usher in the final fulfillment of Israel's purpose and promise! Until that time, Israel will continue to not only exist but also stand as a testimony to the divine sovereignty of God.

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is alive and well! His hand of protection and promise remains on His chosen people. The assurance that we find to the Mystery of Zion is that for more than 4,000 years, God has been intimately involved in the affairs of His chosen nation, both corporately and individually. As Dennis Prager has often stated in his speaking engagements, "Zion is the miner's canary for the human race!"

The Mystery of Zion and Israel's Final Days are critical factors that are intertwined in the ultimate destiny of humanity. This reality will never change as long as this world continues to exist in its present state and as long as the remainder of biblical prophecies await fulfillment in accordance with God's divine purpose. It began with a covenant that God entered into with a man named Abram. It will culminate within the realization of the New Jerusalem. For Zion's sake, and for the salvation and redemption of humanity, we must never forget God's promise!

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet,
till her vindication shines out like the dawn,
her salvation like a blazing torch.
The nations will see your vindication,
and all kings your glory;

you will be called by a new name
that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.
You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD's hand,
a royal diadem in the hand of your God (Isaiah 62:1–3 NIV).

Shalom!

The Mystery Unveiled Study Questions. (These questions have been created using the entire final chapter of The Mystery of Zion, not just the synopsis contained in this document):

1. After reading through this study, what are your thoughts on “Replacement Theology?”
2. How has the history of Israel impacted your faith?
3. Do you believe God still has a plan and a purpose for the Nation of Israel and His chosen people?
4. What does it mean to you when you hear the phrase, “Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem?”
5. Of all the many times God's divine protection sustained and secured Israel's annihilation by her enemies, which one do you think is the most significant?
6. Have your views changed regarding Israel's sovereign right to exist as a nation? If so, why?
7. How would you reconcile the difference between the political and the spiritual body of Israel? Do you see a difference? What?
8. Do you believe that Israel is key to God's prophetic plan for all humanity? Why? Or, Why not?
9. Has this study helped you to trust that God will keep each every promise contained in His Word?
10. Do you believe that Jesus is the Messiah and He came to redeem all the world, including both Jews and Gentiles? How about you? Do you believe?

A Plan, a People, and a Purpose

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