



An Everlasting Covenant

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

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.”ⁱ

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."ⁱⁱ

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.'"iii 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.^{iv}

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."^v

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).”^{vi} 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.”^{vii}

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.”^{viii} 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.^{ix}

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.'"^x

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."^{xi} 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.”^{xii}

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.”^{xiii}

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.

-
- i Walter A. Elwell and Robert W. Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998, 2005, 2013), pp. 323–324.
- ii *Prophecy Study Bible: New King James Version* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 1997), p. 1590.
- iii Perry Stone Jr., *Unlocking Secrets in the Second Coming Scrolls* (Cleveland, TN: Voice of Evangelism, 2004), p. 253.
- iv Elwell and Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament*, pp. 323–324.
- v Paul N. Benware, *Survey of the New Testament (Revised)* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1990), p. 217.
- vi John Hagee, *Jerusalem Countdown* (Lake Mary, FL: Frontline, 2006), p. 165.
- vii Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin, *Why the Jews?* (New York: Touchstone, 2003), p. 163.
- viii Hagee, *Jerusalem Countdown*, p. 168.
- ix Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970), p. 45.
- x Ken Garrison, *Hebraic Roots* (Casselberry, FL: Tzemach Institute for Biblical Studies 1999, 2007), p. 14.
- xi Benware, *Survey of the New Testament (Revised)*, p. 217.
- xii Phillip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), p. 53.
- xiii *Life Application Study Bible: New International Version* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1998, 1989, 1990, 1991), p. 2428.