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THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

The Holy Spirit of God is the greatest treasure that any human being can possess in this present life. It is so because the Holy Spirit gives the greatest peace of mind available, which peace is referred to in the Scriptures as *“the peace which passeth all understanding”* (Phil. 4:7). The peace which it affords stems from the knowledge it affords—in summary, a knowledge that God is over all, even in the present times when there is so much turmoil and unrest both among the nations and within the nations; the knowledge that God is continuing to work out His plan which will ultimately yield the optimum benefit for all mankind. It is only when such an understanding is obtained that the earlier words of Paul can be practised without qualification: *“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God”* (Phil. 4:6).

Another reason why the Holy Spirit is so precious is that it cannot be bought with money: *“Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world... But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery... Which none of the princes of this world knew... But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God... Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God... But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God... neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”* (1 Cor. 2:6-14). Paul’s words imply that the Holy Spirit cannot be passed down from parent to child—it is God’s province alone to choose those to whom He gives it: *“And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven”* (Matt. 16:17).

Consequence

As mentioned by Paul, one of the effects of the Holy Spirit is to stimulate those who have received it to search out the deep things of God, maybe to the

extent that they overlook the simple components of the Gospel. There cannot be any question that Christians must continually increase their knowledge of God’s plan as Peter exhorts—*“But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”* (2 Pet. 3:18)—but that must be balanced with the benefit that derives from reviewing what they already know: *“Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance”* (2 Pet. 1:13). And so it is at this season of the year that there is benefit in reviewing the meaning of the Gospel.

Nature of death

One critical pre-requisite to understanding the Gospel is to understand the nature of death. Death has overtaken every human being who has ever lived, and any hope for them in the future depends on them being asleep in the grave. Any concept of them having gone to heaven eliminates any need for a resurrection, which was a fundamental teaching of Jesus and His apostles: *“The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him, Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother... Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be...? Jesus answered and said unto them,*

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Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage...” (Matt. 22:23-30). Jesus’ reply implies the resurrection will be a reality. Further, it must be realized the resurrection is still future, as implied by Martha’s response to Jesus when Lazarus died, which response was not corrected by Jesus: *“Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day”* (John 11:24)—she stated the resurrection would be *“at the last day”*. Likewise Peter declared on the day of Pentecost: *“Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day...for David is not ascended into the heavens...”* (Acts 2:29-34).

Any doctrine which promises anything less than a resurrection of all who have died fails to expound the Gospel—*“the good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people”* (Luke 2:10). As Jesus declared: *“Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation”* (Greek: *krisis*) (John 5:28-29). The true Gospel applies to all; anything less nullifies the purpose of Jesus’ death: *“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time”* (1 Tim. 2:5-6). The testimony that Jesus’ sacrifice is the ransom for all will be the resurrection; that is, the purpose of His coming to earth: *“I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes”* (Hosea 13:14). Indeed Jesus declared that the purpose of Him coming to Earth was that the human race may have life: *“... I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly”* (John 10:10)—anything less falls short of the Gospel.

Witness

Another aspect of the Gospel which must be understood before the majesty of God’s plan is captured is that it is not yet time for the Gospel to be brought into effect for the world of mankind at large. At this stage the preaching of the Gospel is to be a witness to the world: *“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come”* (Matt. 24:14). As in the temporal world only a few witness any event so it is with the preaching of the Gospel.

However the full benefits proclaimed by the Gospel will be brought into effect in God’s due time, when

God creates a new heavens and earth as Peter declared: *“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness... But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up... Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness”* (2 Pet. 3:9-13).

Peter wrote that the establishment of the new heavens and new earth were *“according to his promise”*. His promise was made to Isaiah, many centuries prior: *“For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed. And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them. And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent’s meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD”* (Isa. 65:17-25). The blessings of that promise cannot be fully appreciated until one takes time to ponder every element. The conditions will be such that the former will not be remembered nor come into mind, no matter how prosperous anyone was in their previous life. There will not be any weeping in Jerusalem, a city which has been plagued with battles and destruction. People will reap the fruits of their labour—none will plant and their toil be pillaged by another; there will not be any antagonism amongst the brute creation—indeed none shall hurt nor destroy in any part of the kingdom.

That is the gospel—the good news of great joy which is yet to come to all people. These fundamental aspects of God’s kingdom must be understood before the full meaning of the Gospel can be grasped—without the fundamental aspects clearly in mind, the Gospel message loses its impact.■

IF YE LOVE ME

“If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). In those few words Jesus defined the test of the disciples’ love for Him.

The test was not new: obedience has always been the test of loyalty. God told Moses: *“Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine”* (Exod. 19:5). God required Israel to obey.

Jesus also told His disciples: *“If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them”* (John 13:17). Jesus’ words imply there was much joy to be had from merely knowing who He was, but that joy faded into insignificance compared with the joy that would flow from obeying His words.

Not only has obedience been a requirement of God’s people in the past and is a requirement in the present time, but it will be a requirement in the future kingdom of God: *“Behold, the day of the LORD cometh... For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle... And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain. And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague, wherewith the LORD will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles”* (Zech. 14:1-2; 16-19). The nations will be required to obey God’s command to go to Jerusalem to worship, and there will be penalties for any and all nations that do not go. Eventually *“it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people”* (Acts 3:23).

Jesus’ obedience

Jesus practised what He preached. He came to earth to do His father’s will: *“Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith... Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God”* (Heb. 10:5-7). Shortly before His crucifixion He prayed to His father: *“I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do”* (John 17:4). He had obeyed His father’s command and consequently He could say He had finished that work. He was obedient.

Rewards

Consequently Jesus looked forward to being united again with His father in heaven: *“And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was”* (John 17:5). Jesus was to be rewarded for His obedience.

Likewise all who obey His words can look forward to their reward: *“And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him”* (Heb. 5:9). Eternal salvation might at first seem to be a lesser reward than the crown of righteousness to which Paul looked: *“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing”* (2 Tim. 4:7-8). However the salvation of mankind from death is the principal reason Jesus left His heavenly home and came to earth—*“... I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly”* (John 10:10)—and so salvation alone is a great gift from God. However the benefit is greater than merely giving mankind an “after life”—the salvation will not last for only a few years as does the current life, but it will extend indefinitely—it will be eternal life because there will not be anymore death: *“And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away”* (Rev. 21:3-4).

Prerequisite

As mentioned above, Jesus implied that knowledge of God’s will is essential for the Christian, that is, one needs to know what the task is before one can endeavour to obey. This has always been the case—God required the kings of Israel to know precisely the law they were to administer: *“When thou art come unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me; Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the LORD thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother”* (Deut. 17:14-15). God knew ahead of time that Israel would yearn for a king as the nations around them, and so He told them their king must be an Israelite, and not a stranger. Then follows a

detailed list of restrictions and instructions which the king must observe: *"It (the law he was to administer) shall be with him and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to reverence the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them"* (Deut. 17:19). The king was to read the law *"all the days of his life"*, so that he would *"do them"*; in other words he had to know precisely what he should do, and then comply.

Likewise the Christian today must continually read *"the law"* so they know precisely what is required of them. Jesus told His disciples: *"Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life..."* (John 5:39), which Paul explains: *"See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is"* (Eph. 5:15-17). In order for the Ephesians to walk circumspectly it was necessary for them to understand the will of the Lord, and the verses following in Ephesians 5 give some clear restrictions and instructions regarding their conduct. A knowledge of God's requirements is just as necessary today as it was for the kings of Israel.

Growth

Knowing the will of the Lord is not something that can be achieved immediately, but is an ongoing process—one's knowledge is dependent on the Lord who *"gives the increase"* (1 Cor. 3:6).

Refreshment required

Additionally Christians have the treasure of a knowledge of the Lord's will *"in earthen vessels"* (2 Cor. 4:7)—in other words, in porous vessels, through which the liquid content may seep over time—in contrast to vessels made of metal which were not porous (Joshua 6:19). Consequently it is necessary for Christians to continually refresh their knowledge of God's will as exhorted by Peter: *"Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth"* (2 Pet. 1:12).

Obstacles to overcome

Notwithstanding the desire of the Christian to love God and His Son, and endeavour to do so by continually refreshing their mind regarding His will, there are influences which obstruct their endeavours, and their love for Him is proven by them overcoming those obstacles.

One such obstacle is the obligation of the Christian to *"provide things honest in the sight of all men"* (Rom. 12:17). That obligation must be given some priority, particularly in regard to their household: *"But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his*

house ("own" is not in the original text), he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1 Tim. 5:8). Paul's instruction to Timothy is powerful because no Christian would wish to deny the faith, nor to be regarded as being worse than an infidel (an unbeliever). Consequently failure to fulfill one's secular responsibilities does not bring praise and honour to God; not now nor will it in the day of visitation: *"Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation"* (1 Pet. 2:12). It is honest conversation in this present life that will bring glory to God in the future, not slothfulness and failure to meet one's responsibilities.

Fellowship

Fulfilling one's temporal responsibilities reduces the time available for activities that directly express one's love for the Lord, and the time so spent attending to those responsibilities may be interpreted by some as indicating a lack of love for the Lord. Consequently judgment is required regarding how much attention should be given to temporal responsibilities, as Jesus warned His disciples: *"And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with... cares of this life"* (Luke 21:34).

One weapon which helps guard against the cares of this life consuming an inordinate amount of time and energy is fellowship with one's brethren: *"Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering... And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching"* (Heb. 10:23-25). Regular fellowship with brethren aids the development and maintenance of the balance necessary to develop one's love for His Lord.

Sacrifice

Finally one must be prepared to forego those earthly pleasures that do not promote the development of Christian character. In this regard Paul wrote: *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service (worship)"* (Rom. 12:1). The presentation of one's body as a sacrifice must extend to being prepared to lay down one's life for the Master: *"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends"* (John 15:13), and there is no greater friend than the Lord Jesus Christ: *"Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you"* (John 15:15).■

WHO 'OWNS' THE LAND OF ISRAEL?

There are approximately 2570 direct references in the Bible to Israel. This compares with approximately 980 references to “Jesus”, some 550 of which are references to “Jesus Christ”. The term “Messiah” occurs only twice: in Daniel 9:25 and 26 and “Messias” twice (John 1:41 and 4:25). Israel is significant in God’s plan.

One testimony to Israel being a significant nation in God’s plan is its re-establishment in 1948 after so many years in oblivion.

The article below is an edited version of a summary prepared by Kimberly Troup, the Director of the USA Office of Christian Friends of Israeli Communities (www.cfoic.com). It is reproduced by permission of CFOIC. Kimberly has worked for many years in close collaboration with Jews in Israel. Her report is printed here because it gives a concise summary of the current situation regarding the land of Israel from both a Biblical and secular perspective.

* * * * *

Recently, someone posted the following comment on our Facebook page: “They may be God’s chosen people, but that does not give them the right to deprive others of their land and their homes and their livelihoods”.

Psalms 24:1-2: “*The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers*”. In this verse King David states that the Earth—the entire world—belongs to the creator. When God created the world He built paradise and so it is His to give to whomever He chooses. In the Scriptures God has made it very clear who is the rightful recipient of the Land of Israel: “*When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the Children of Israel. But the Lord’s portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage*” (Deut. 32:8-9).

The Most High gave each nation their inheritance; He divided mankind, and fixed the borders. Moreover, he fixed the borders of the nations, based on what the Children of Israel would require! God’s borders are not set by governments or political parties. It is amazing that the borders of Israel cause so much angst for almost every nation on earth!

The situation in Israel today with regard to borders is beyond ludicrous! If someone remodels their kitchen, or adds a porch to their house in Judea or Samaria, it causes consternation from the White

House to the Kremlin, to parliaments across the world, and of course in The Hague.

National borders changed and entire countries were created between the two world wars and no one made a fuss. So why is Israel different? Could it be because there is a spiritual element involved?

Genesis 12:1-8 reads: “*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. So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother’s son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan. Abram passed through the land to the place of **Shechem, as far as the Oak of Moreh (Alon Moreh)**. And the Canaanites were then in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “**To your descendants I will give this land.**” And there he built an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. And he moved from there to the mountain east of **Bethel**, and he pitched his tent with **Bethel on the west and Ai on the east**; there he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord”.*

This one Scripture has two very important themes:

1) God’s commandment to Abram, first “Go to the land that I will show you”, and secondly His initial promise, “To your descendants, I will give this land”.
2) There are four very distinct city names mentioned, Shechem, Alon Moreh, Bethel and Ai. All four cities are found in the area that today the world calls the “West Bank”. This is the area that our friend on Facebook says doesn’t belong to the Jewish people; where Jews are “land-grabbing” and forcing Palestinians out of house and home.

Genesis 17:19-21 reads: “*Then God said: “No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But My covenant I will establish with*

Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year.” God knew that in the twentieth century He would fulfill His promise to return the descendants of Abraham to the Land of Israel. He knew that the modern State of Israel would be established in 1948, and the Arab world would dispute Israel’s legitimacy.

God states very clearly to Abraham, your descendants, your heirs to the promise, those that I will establish My covenant with, will come through Isaac. Ishmael is your son, and he will also receive an inheritance, but My covenant people will be the sons of Abraham and Isaac.

What about the Palestinians? Don’t they have rights to own land and live in their ancestral homeland?

To answer this question, we have to go back in history. The people who are currently called “Palestinian” are not the same people who were called “Palestinian” a century ago. The area was called the Land of Israel or Judea (a place belonging to Jews) from Biblical times until 135 AD, when the Roman Emperor Hadrian changed the name of the province from Judea to Syria Palaestina, a brilliant PR stunt to sever the Jewish people’s connection to the region. This was done following the Jewish Bar Kokhba revolt against the Roman Empire. For most of the period between 135 AD and May 15, 1948, the area was referred to as Palestine or the Land of Israel. From the 2nd Century until the 19th Century, this area called “Palestine” was conquered, captured, sacked, pillaged, and burned by a multitude of empirical armies. But not one of these Empires sought to establish a state of their own in Palestine, nor did they establish their capital in Jerusalem or anywhere else in “Palestine”. The last Empire that controlled “Palestine” was the Ottoman Empire, which fell in 1919 following the First World War.

At the conclusion of that war, the victorious allies carved up the entire Middle East, granting independence to some and creating mandates in some of the other areas. Great Britain was awarded the Mandate for Palestine.

The language of the Balfour Declaration, promising the establishment of a Jewish Homeland in Palestine and close Jewish settlement throughout the area, was incorporated in the Mandate’s foundational document. While the Mandate applied to the entire area of Palestine, representing all of Israel and Jordan as we know these countries today, in 1923, the British violated the original mandate by separating 76% of the Mandatory territory to create Jordan, giving it to the Hashemite family from the Hejaz area of Arabia, which rules the country to this day.

Since the First Century there has always been a remnant of Jews who continued to live in their ancient homeland. For part of this time, they were few and scattered, the vast majority of Jews having been exiled and forced to leave the area by the Romans. And yet there remained a handful of Jews who stayed in the land.

When the British controlled Palestine, the Jews there referred to themselves as “Palestinian”. The Arabs did not recognize a separate national identity for those Arabs living in Palestine and they referred to themselves simply as Arabs, as did the Arabs of much of the Middle East. They saw themselves as part of the Greater Arab Nation that dominated most of the Middle East. Many Arabs immigrated to Palestine following the First Jewish Aliyah (coming home) that took place from 1882–1903. Jews came home to “Palestine” mostly from Russia and Eastern Europe because the pogroms and persecution were so intense that they had been driven from their homes and forced to flee.

Why did they choose to settle in the Ottoman Empire? Because for over 2,000 years, since their ancestors had been driven from Jerusalem and Judea by the Roman armies, the Jewish people have prayed three times a day, every day, to return to the Land promised to them by God. God answered that prayer and when the time was right the Jews started to come home. They came home to a land that was desolate, absolutely barren.

For centuries, bloodshed and fighting had swarmed over this small piece of land, decimating all natural resources and beauty. Yet, they did not give up hope. They were so happy to fulfill the dream of hundreds of generations to return to this land. They immediately began to tend the land. They planted crops, sanitized water, built homes, and drained swamps. What did they need to accomplish this incredible task? They needed willing hands and strong backs, and both Arabs and Jews sought these new jobs.

And thus began the Arab immigration to this area. There were jobs available, money to be made, life to be improved. So the Arabs followed the Jews into “Palestine” and began to work. They moved there from all the surrounding countries, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, Arabia. They came because they could find work and feed their families.

On May 14, 1948 the British Mandate for Palestine ended, and the Jewish nation of Israel was born. Overnight, everyone Jewish who was “Palestinian” became “Israeli.” In time, many Arabs became “Israeli” as well.

The term “Palestinian” was not used again until 1964, when Yasser Arafat organized the PLO, the Palestine Liberation Organization. It is interesting to note that in 1964, Jordan controlled all of the area that is referred to as the “West Bank” or the “Israeli Occupied Territories”. The occupation that the PLO referred to then was Israel within the pre-67 borders, for the PLO from the beginning refused to accept the existence of Israel within any boundaries. It wasn’t until the miraculous Six-Day War in 1967 when Jordan attacked Israel from the Old City of Jerusalem and the hills of Judea and Samaria which it controlled, that Israel responded to those attacks and liberated the area.

God performed a miracle, and the heart of Biblical Israel was once again under Jewish control. For the first time in over 2,000 years the ruling power in Judea and Samaria was once again Jewish, their capital is Jerusalem, and Jews have continued to come home to their ancient homeland from the four corners of the earth.

Today there are people who call themselves “Palestinian” who have co-opted the ancestral homeland of another people, the Jews! Their heritage consists of hatred, bloodshed, murder, and terrorism as its core value. Generations of Palestinians have been raised hating the Jewish “occupiers”. They have been raised with a value system that exalts the murder of innocents and twists the truth into lies. Today the Palestinian people do not always have it easy. However, their hardships could be done away with if they laid down their weapons against Israel. If they stopped trying to kill and destroy at every opportunity, if they chose to live like neighbors should. There is more than enough land in Israel for everyone. As tiny as the Land of Israel is, there is room for all.

Jews value human life and dignity, freedom and democracy. They want their Arab/Palestinian “neighbors” to live a good life, to have jobs, and education. To raise their families, attend Mosque and celebrate their holy days. The Jew’s greatest desire is to live in peace with their Arab neighbors. Today, there are road-blocks, there are security checks, there are Israeli army patrols, and there is a security fence/wall. Sometimes these security issues cause difficulties for the Palestinians and sometimes for the Israelis as well. But they are all vitally necessary to prevent terrorist attacks.

And the people of Israel are living in a place where they are under attack from without and from within. Given the choice between suicide or an effective army, the Israelis will always choose to defend themselves—because they will always choose life.

Comment: The year 2013 AD is 94 years after the Balfour Declaration in 1919, and peace is not yet established in Israel. Such a long delay might cause doubt whether there will ever be peace in Israel, and whether God’s promise in Psalm 85 will ever be fulfilled: “*LORD, thou hast been favourable unto thy land: thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob*”. “*I will hear what **God the LORD will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people...***” (Psa. 85:1, 8).

However such a delay should not give rise to any doubt that God’s promises are sure and steadfast. The prophet Jeremiah gives some unequivocal assurances that God will fulfill all the promises He has made to His chosen people: “*Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that 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 bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people*” (Jer. 31:31-33). God under-writes His promise: “*Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever. Thus saith the LORD; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the LORD*” (Jer. 31:35-37). It will not be until the sun ceases to be the light that rules the day and the moon ceases to govern the night that God will fail to fulfill His promises to Israel. In 2013 the sun and the moon continue to govern night and day and so God’s promises are still certain.

In spite of the turmoil which still plagues the land God gave to Abraham, there will be peace in Israel as Amos also prophesied: “*And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God*” (Amos 9:14-15). “*For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry*” (Hab. 2:3).■

THE VALLEY OF JEHOSEPHAT

“For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land” (Joel 3:1-2)

The prophet Joel declared that the Valley of Jehoshaphat will be where God will deal with the nations after He gathers Judah and Jerusalem. Later in his prophecy Joel explains that this incident will not be a case of God pleading with the nations in the same sense as pleading might be used in society today, but will be one in which He will judge them: *“Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about”* (Joel 3:12).

The valley of Jehoshaphat is situated between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives in Israel. It is approximately 3 kilometres (2 miles) wide which means it is too small to accommodate *“all nations”* and thus it is assumed Joel’s reference to the valley has a symbolic meaning, and in order to ascribe a reasoned meaning to the prophecy its history is briefly reviewed.

Jehoshaphat in history

The name Jehoshaphat occurs 85 times in the Old Testament, and a simplistic interpretation of the records indicates it is likely there was more than one person who was known by that name:

- A son of Ahilud (2 Sam. 8:16; 20:24; 1 Kings 4:3; 1 Chron. 18:15);
- A priest in David’s time (1 Chron. 15:24);
- A son of Paruah (1 Kings 4:17);
- A son of Nimshi (2 Kings 9:2, 14);
- A son of Asa (1 Kings 15:24).

1 Kings 15 records a succession of the kings of Judah: Abijam was succeeded by Asa (verse 8) who was succeeded by Jehoshaphat (verse 24) and it is assumed that it is to that Jehoshaphat that Joel refers.

Jehoshaphat’s first battle

There are two battles in which Jehoshaphat son of Asa led Judah.

One battle was fought at Ramoth-gilead. The record is in 1 Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 18. In summary Jehoshaphat joined with Ahab king of Israel to regain Ramoth-gilead from Syria because Ahab believed it was rightly Israel’s land (1 Kings 22:3).

One significant aspect of the battle was that the battle was initiated by Ahab and finally agreed to by Jehoshaphat after God, by His spirit, told Micaiah

that Jehoshaphat and Ahab would be victorious, but Ahab would be killed.

Other than Jehoshaphat asking God for guidance and God revealing the outcome to Micaiah beforehand, there does not seem to be any feature of the battle that can be related to the battle to be fought in the valley of Jehoshaphat as prophesied by Joel.

The battle against the Moabites and Ammonites

A second battle that Jehoshaphat waged was against the Moabites and Ammonites. The record is in 2 Kings 3 and 2 Chronicles 20:1-30.

It is suggested that there are some significant aspects of this battle that might be closely related to the battle that is symbolically to be fought in the valley of Jehoshaphat. Indeed it is possible that the details, being recorded, might be one of the many details referred to by Paul in Romans 15:4: *“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope”*. Some aspects of the battle fought against the Moabites may well be a reassurance to the Christian today that, as they look out on the world in such distress, and the seeming plight of the nation of Israel in particular, their confidence will be strengthened.

There are several Scriptures, other than the verses in Joel, that describe various elements of God’s final battle with the nations, and some of those verses will be referenced in this consideration.

The timing

Regarding the timing of the future battle in the valley of Jehoshaphat, Joel 3:1 reads: *“For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem”*. Thus the battle will be after the Jews have been regathered to their own land.

Likewise the battle against the Moabites occurred after Jehoshaphat returned to Jerusalem after the battle with Syria: *“And Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace to Jerusalem”* (2 Chron. 19:1).

The record is that Jehoshaphat enjoyed peace in Jerusalem after he returned from the battle with Syria.

Likewise there will be peace in the land of Israel before God's final battle with the nations: *"After many days thou shalt be visited: in the latter years thou shalt come into the land that is brought back from the sword, and is gathered out of many people, against the mountains of Israel, which have been always waste: but it is brought forth out of the nations, and they shall dwell safely all of them"* (Ezek. 38:8); and *"Therefore, son of man, prophesy and say unto Gog, Thus saith the Lord GOD; In that day when my people of Israel dwelleth safely, shalt thou not know it?"* (Ezek. 38:14).

Thus the battle against the Moabites recorded in 2 Chronicles 20 and the battle prophesied in Ezekiel 38 both occur after Israel has returned to their own land and are enjoying a time of peace and safety.

The aggressor

The battle between the Moabites and Judah was initiated by Moab and Ammon, not by Judah (2 Chron. 20:1).

Likewise the battle between God and Gog will not be initiated by Israel: *"Thus saith the Lord GOD; It shall also come to pass, that at the same time shall things come into thy mind, and thou shalt think an evil thought: And thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates, To take a spoil, and to take a prey; to turn thine hand upon the desolate places that are now inhabited, and upon the people that are gathered out of the nations, which have gotten cattle and goods, that dwell in the midst of the land"* (Ezek. 38:10-12). Gog will be the aggressor—"they will think an evil thought".

The multitude

The congregation of Moab and Ammon was so large that Judah believed they could not defend themselves: *"Then there came some that told Jehoshaphat, saying, There cometh a great multitude against thee from beyond the sea on this side Syria; and, behold, they be in Hazazontamar, which is Engedi"* (2 Chron. 20:2); *"And Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the LORD, before the new court, And said, O LORD God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? and in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee?"* (2 Chron. 20:5-6).

Likewise Israel's aggressor will be large: *"And thou shalt come from thy place out of the north parts, thou, and many people with thee, all of them riding upon horses, a great company, and a mighty army: And thou shalt come up against my people of Israel, as a*

cloud to cover the land; it shall be in the latter days, and I will bring thee against my land, that the heathen may know me, when I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog, before their eyes" (Ezek. 38:15-16).

Such a congregation is consistent with the description in Joel in that God will gather all nations: *"I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land"* (Joel 3:2). And later Joel describes them as: *"Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision"* (Joel 3:14).

The battle is not yours

Judah realized they would be defeated by the Moabites and Ammonites: *"O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee"* (2 Chron. 20:12); so God reassured them: *"Then upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, came the Spirit of the LORD in the midst of the congregation; And he said, Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's"* (2 Chron. 20:14-15).

Likewise the battle described in Joel 3 and Ezekiel 38 will not be Israel's but the Lord's: *"And it shall come to pass at the same time when Gog shall come against the land of Israel, saith the Lord GOD, that my fury shall come up in my face... Surely in that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel; So that the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the field, and all creeping things that creep upon the earth, and all the men that are upon the face of the earth, shall shake at my presence, and the mountains shall be thrown down, and the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground"* (Ezek. 38:18-20).

In that vein Joel wrote: *"The LORD also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the LORD will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel. So shall ye know that I am the LORD your God dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain: then shall Jerusalem be holy..."* (Joel 3:16-17).

And Zephaniah prophesied: *"Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations,*

that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy” (Zeph. 3:8).

Likewise Isaiah also prophesied the battle would be God’s: *“I have trodden the winepress **alone; and of the people there was none with me:** for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury...” (Isa. 63:3)—of the people there will be none with Him; the battle will be solely God’s.*

Disarray

The last feature of the battle will be the internal disputes which God will cause to erupt amongst the oppressors, just as He did in the battle against the Moabites: *“And... the LORD set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten. For the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of mount Seir, utterly to slay and destroy them: and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, every one helped to destroy another” (2 Chron. 20:22-23).*

And thus will it be in the final battle: *“And I will call for a sword against him throughout all my mountains, saith the Lord GOD: every man’s sword shall be against his brother” (Ezek. 38:21).*

Outcome

The outcome of the battle by Jehoshaphat was glorious: *“And the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries, when they had heard that the LORD fought against the enemies of Israel. So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet: for his God gave him rest round about” (2 Chron. 20:29-30).* God’s power was recognized by the nations and peace extended throughout the realm.

And it will be likewise after the final battle prophesied by Joel and Zephaniah: *“And it shall come to pass in that day, that the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters, and a fountain shall come forth of the house of the LORD, and shall water the valley of Shittim” (Joel 3:18).*

“For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent” (Zeph. 3:9).

The effect of the final battle will be everlasting: *“And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD’S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Isa. 2:2-4).*

And to John it was revealed: *“And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Rev. 21:3-4).* Certainly the Lord’s ways are above Man’s ways (Isa. 55:8-9).■

FOR THE ELECT’S SAKE

In the King James Version, Matthew 24:22 reads: *“And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened”.*

Different conclusions have been drawn from the phrase: *“for the elect’s sake”*. The differences arise from the meaning of two words: “for” and “elect”. One view is that the verse should read *“by the elect”*, and if the elect is assumed to be the Gospel Age church, it may be inferred that the church will be with the Lord in determining the duration of the last days. However there is a distinct Greek word that is translated “by” (*“dia”*: Strong’s #1223) and that word does not occur in this text. The question

reduces to who are the elect?

The title “elect” is applied to at least three entities:

- The nation of Israel: Isaiah 45:4;
- Jesus Christ: 1 Peter 2:6;
- Gospel Age church: Colossians 3:12.

If the nation of Israel is adopted, the shortening of the days could refer to the persecution suffered by the Jewish nation during World War 2—if those days had not been shortened it is conceivable, from a human standpoint, that the Jews would have been exterminated, as was Hitler’s declared objective. However the days were shortened and the nation of Israel exists today in their homeland.■

SOUND DOCTRINE

The Apostle Paul charged Timothy with a huge task: *“I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ... preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine...”* (2 Tim. 4:1-3).

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul explained that there are at least two components of “doctrine”, doctrine being the teachings or instructions that are intended to have a modifying effect on the believer. The first is the technical, academic or theological component, being those teachings that explain the origin of Man and His destiny. It also includes the interpretation of prophecy. Paul advised Timothy not to be distracted by such intellectual arguments but to focus on the things that promote *“godly edifying”* (1 Tim. 1:4). He continued to say that *“the end of the commandment is love out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience and faith unfeigned”* (verse 5).

Paul continues in verses 9 and 10 to explain that the teaching of how one must conduct oneself is also doctrine. Such teachings maybe referenced as “devotional doctrine” and comprise the other component of Christian doctrine.

Sound doctrine

Sound doctrine is doctrine that is founded in truth, that is, teaching that is verified by fact. Consequently in determining sound doctrine the question must be asked, what is truth? That question has perplexed mankind for many centuries—the first instance when a decision had to be made regarding whether something was true, was in the Garden of Eden when Eve was confronted by Satan. Before that time the question had not arisen.

It might be difficult to appreciate the dilemma that faced Eve. She was perfect; she had no experience with anything other than the truth; she hadn’t heard anything that wasn’t absolutely true. All of a sudden she was confronted with directly opposing statements: on the one hand God said *“Ye shall surely die”* and on the other Satan said *“Ye shall not surely die”*. Having had no previous experience with anything other than truth it was a very difficult situation. However it must also be recognised that God orchestrated the situation in that He had already planned Man’s redeemer, and His plan was to subject Man to an experience with wrong doing because it would be to his ultimate benefit as Paul explained in his letter to the Romans: *“For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him*

who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom. 8:20-21).

Concordance study indicates the expression *“not willingly”* is an accurate translation of the Greek text, and it may be interpreted that Eve was coerced or forced into eating the fruit. However that is not the case—there is no Scripture which indicates Eve was forced in any way. The real issue was that God had given her an intellect just as He had given Satan, and the wiles of Satan deceived Eve: *“And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression”* (1 Tim. 2:14). One is deceived when they believe something that is untrue; belief being conviction in one’s mind. In other words, Satan’s intellect was superior to Eve, and without having any experience with untruth, Eve was in a vulnerable situation, albeit in accordance with God’s plan.

The Christian’s challenge

The challenge to the Christian today is the same as that which confronted Timothy: how was he to distinguish what was truth and what was error?

It is “easy” to say whatever one believes must be consistent with Scripture, but Timothy did not have the Scriptures as they are available today. However, on the other hand, the deceptions in the world today are more subtle than they were in Timothy’s time: *“But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of... and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works”* (2 Tim. 3:13-17).

Nevertheless to continue in the things learnt as a child would mean one’s knowledge would not grow, and indeed for many it would mean holding false ideas of hell fire and the end of the world. Hence Paul’s exhortation to the Thessalonians is relevant to the Christian in the twenty-first century, perhaps more so than at any previous time: *“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Thess 5:21-23).■

THINK ON THESE THINGS

"Finally, brethren... think on these things" (Philippians 4:8)

Paul's final exhortation to the Philippians—"think on these things"—implies the items he listed were to be pondered and not given only fleeting attention. The root meaning of the Greek word "logizomai" (from which the English word "think" is translated) is to "take an inventory", and is elsewhere translated "conclude", "esteem", "number", "reason" and "reckon", all of which imply deliberation.

Inventory

One of the purposes of an inventory is to provide a record which can be referenced at any time and so obviate the need for repeated "counting". Hence Paul's exhortation to the Philippians was for them to make a list which would provide them with a ready reference of those things which engender truth, honesty, just dealings, pure thoughts, love, praiseworthy actions, virtuous deeds and praise for God and their fellow man. In other words they were to note and remember those things that aid (and not hinder) their edification, and the edification of those around them.

Prophecy

Another item which should be in the Christian's inventory is Bible prophecy. Meditation on the prophecies contained in the Bible stimulates a yearning for more truth, and in turn also increases a yearning for that righteous kingdom to be established. Peter urged his readers to keep the prophecies clearly in their minds as he wrote: *"This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets..."* (2 Pet. 3:1-2), *"for we have not followed cunningly devised fables..."* (2 Pet. 1:16). Familiarity with the prophecies is a powerful aid in helping the Christian keep their mind focused on the things Paul lists in Philippians 4:8.

Rewards

Paul had a clear vision of his objective: *"Brethren... this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 3:13-14). It was his constant deliberation on his reward and the race before him that enabled him to *"keep his body under"*: *"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain... I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into*

subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Cor. 9:24-27). The reward offered to the Christian should be one of the items in their inventory.

Examples

Other items upon which the Christian should meditate are the examples set before them, both the supreme example of Jesus and the examples of Old Testament heroes and New Testament warriors.

Regarding Jesus' example Hebrews 3:1-2 reads: *"Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house"*. Jesus was totally devoted to and fully occupied by the work His father had given Him to do, as indeed were many in times past, such as Moses. Keeping their examples in mind are other powerful agencies which will help the Christian to keep their minds on things which have the qualities listed by Paul in Philippians 4:8.

Words to no profit

On the other hand there are many things which the Christian is exhorted to exclude from their inventory. One of them is striving about words of no profit, as Paul wrote to Timothy: *"Of these things put them in remembrance... that they strive not about words to no profit... but shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness"* (2 Tim. 2:14-16). Such an exhortation is particularly relevant in the twenty-first century because *"... the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith... For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness..."* (1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Pet. 2:18). The Christian must guard against being drawn into debates about things of no consequence—a task made more difficult today because of the increase of knowledge!■

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