

Why Christians Should Pray for Israel

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The mandate to pray for Israel

Isaiah 62:6-7

6 I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; They shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make mention of the LORD, do not keep silent, 7 And give Him no rest till He establishes And till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth. NKJV

This portion of scripture is often used to encourage Christians to get involved in interceding for the city or nation etc. Whilst this is definitely applicable, the original context of the scripture is often forgotten or overlooked.

When we read the Old Testament prophets we must bear in mind one thing, at the moment when God was speaking to the prophets and inspiring them to speak and write; the Word was not meant primarily for us 21st century Christians, it was meant for Israel or the Jewish people. Whilst it is completely right for us to use such verses for ourselves, we must first understand its original application, thus as someone once said "once we have used it remember to put it back where it belongs"; to the Jewish people.

In this passage from Isaiah we see the LORD speaking to Israel and telling them that He has set watchmen over them. Watchmen were to stand guard over the city and warn the inhabitants of any impending danger. God's watchmen are called to stand guard over the people, specifically the Jewish people, and intercede on their behalf to God. Thus these watchmen are not only to watch outward for impending attack but also to watch inward over the people, watching the goings on among the people and interceding on their behalf to God. This means the watchmen are to know the spiritual state of the people, and pray for them when they break God's word. This is just like Job who interceded for his children asking forgiveness when they sinned against God (Job 1:5).

So in this case we see that God is saying to the Jewish people that He has set up watchmen who will stand on their behalf before Him, praying not only for their protection from external enemies but also praying for God's forgiveness on them when they sin against Him and praying for their revival.

The question to ask then is; who are the ones that God is calling to be the watchmen? It says "you who make mention of the Lord", who could this be? Since it is a call to pray for Israel i.e. the Jewish people then there could be no one else who calls on the Lord except us Christians. So we see Isaiah prophesying thousands of years ago that Gentiles from the nations would believe in the Lord and these are the ones that God is calling to intercede on behalf of Israel.

For centuries Christian theologians have taught that God was finished with Israel; that He no longer has any place for the Jewish people and has replaced them with the church, but God has always maintained a remnant of the church that believed that God still has a place for the Jews in world history. They believed the Bible prophecies pertaining to the restoration of Israel in the land which was given to them by God.

In recent years God has dramatically increased the number of Gentile believers who believe this and stand with and pray for Israel.

Here I would like to present to you eight reasons why as Gentile believers we must pray for Israel.

1. Because God loves Israel and we must love what He loves.

We all know that as children of God we must love what the Father loves; for instance we must love holiness, righteousness, justice, mercy etc. How many of us realize though, that God still loves Israel.

Malachi 1:2-3

2 "I have loved you," says the LORD. "Yet you say, 'In what way have You loved us?' Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" Says the LORD. **"Yet Jacob I have loved;** 3 But Esau I have hated, NKJV

The name Jacob is synonymous with Israel; the Bible also refers to the Jewish people as the "house of Jacob" (Psalm 114:1, Isaiah 2:5 etc).

Jeremiah 31:2-4

2 Thus says the LORD: "The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness-- Israel, when I went to give him rest." 3 The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: "Yes, **I have loved you with an everlasting love;** Therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you. 4 Again I will build you, and you shall be rebuilt, O virgin of Israel! NKJV

One question we have to answer in dealing with the issue of Israel is "how long is everlasting?" If it means what we think it means i.e. "lasting forever" and the verse in Jeremiah says that God's love for Israel is forever then He still loves Israel today in spite of their faults, in spite of their turning their backs on him, in spite of their rebellion, He still loves them, just as he still loves us in spite of our failures too. His love is the same for Jew and Gentile.

Romans 11:28 says "concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers." NKJV

In the book of Romans the Apostle Paul speaking to the Gentile believers in Rome said that the unbelieving Jews were their enemies in the sense that they persecuted the Christians for preaching the gospel. Yet in spite of that, they were still loved by God because of the fathers; the patriarchs. This means that God's love for the Jewish people did not diminish even though they persecuted the early believers.

Why does God still love them even though they persecuted the church in the early days and for that matter a small minority of religious Jews, still persecute the church in Israel today? It is because of the covenant that God made with Abraham that God still chooses to love them, in spite of themselves.

Many of us find comfort in the words of 2Timothy 2:13 which says that even though we are faithless or unfaithful He still remains faithful to us. If this is true for us Gentile Christians, does it not stand to reason that God will remain faithful to the Jewish people?

Romans 8:38 & 39 tells us that nothing can separate us from the love of God, this includes the things that we have done in the past or sins that we may commit in the future; God still loves us in spite of these things. Now if we Christians believe that of ourselves, how

is it then that some of us can say that God has stopped loving the Jewish people, because of their sin? It does not mean that God condones what they do and it does not also mean that they don't need to know Yeshua (Jesus). It means that they still hold a special place in God's heart because He has covenanted himself with them.

And if God loves them then so should we and when we love someone, we pray for them and so we must pray for Israel out of love first for God and then for them.

2. Because God commanded us to

We New Testament Christians have a tendency to try to dissect God's commands, for example when we read the commands that God gave regarding clean and unclean foods in Leviticus, we try to reason as to why God said they are unclean. A Jewish guide during my first trip to Israel said "if God says don't eat it, we don't ask why, we just obey". This may or may not be true for all Jews but it is the way God wants it.

Our thought is highly influenced by western democratic philosophy, so we feel we have the right to question every leadership decision, we have to remember that the Kingdom of God is not a democracy, it is a theocracy and a monarchy where God reigns as sovereign and what the sovereign ruler says has to be obeyed. And He has said in Psalm 122:6 "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: May they prosper who love you."

He does, however add a blessing for those who obey his command; they shall prosper.

We need to understand the importance of the city itself in God's scheme of things, He has chosen this city. It was He that moved the heart of David to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem and later on, to build His Temple there. It was there in the days of David and Solomon that the Shekinah (abiding) Glory of God dwelt. It was therefore God's throne on earth. And it is His plan to have His throne there again, physically:

Jeremiah 3:17 At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the LORD, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem. NKJV

Ezekiel 43:6-7

6 Then I heard Him **speaking to me from the temple**, while a man stood beside me. 7 And He said to me, "Son of man, **this is the place of My throne** and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel **forever**. NKJV

Ezekiel heard the LORD speaking from the Temple and declaring that the Temple is His throne, the place where His feet will rest.

Is it any wonder therefore that this little piece of ground is the focus of much of the world's attention. Today world leaders are talking about dividing up the land of Israel and the most debated issue is Jerusalem and the most debated issue in Jerusalem is who will have control of the Temple Mount. This tug-of-war has been going on since Israel recaptured the city in 1967.

Today Christians are divided in their view on this matter, there are those who say Israel should sacrifice land for peace while others say they should not? Both cannot be right, so which view should one take on this matter?

Our view should be the Biblical view and the Bible tells us very clearly that the Temple Mount belongs to God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is part of the inheritance they have received.

We must therefore pray that it will not be given over to anyone else.

3. Because of His covenant with Abraham

What is the basis of our relationship with God? It is the covenant that Jesus made for us and we remember this every time we take the elements of communion.

We are assured that God will not break His covenant with us because His Word declares: The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever." (Isaiah 40:8)

Jesus also said "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled." (Matthew 5:18)

When the New Testament talks about the law it is speaking primarily of the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, in the first book it is written:

Genesis 17:2-4

2 And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly."
3 Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: 4 "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. NKJV

Genesis 17:8 Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." NKJV

This Word tells us that God made a covenant with Abraham and that covenant was passed on to his son, Isaac and grandson, Jacob. God is specific about the lineage because Isaac was the son of promise, he was accepted whilst his older brother, Ishmael was rejected. Likewise Jacob was chosen over Esau even from the time they were in the womb.

The covenant promises included the land and that part has not yet been fully accomplished, the Jewish people have not yet possessed all the land that God has given them. Yet His Word promises here that it will happen.

Regarding the land God says here that He gave it to Abraham and his descendants as an "everlasting possession". How then can we say that Israel has no claim to the land, it was given to them to own forever.

If we believe as theologians say that God no longer loves or cares for Israel that means that God has broken His covenant with Abraham and his descendants and if that be the case then it makes God a liar but the Bible declares in Psalm 89:34-35 "My covenant I will not break, Nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips. Once I have sworn by My holiness;" NKJV

It then makes God to be untrustworthy. But we all know that is not the case, we know that God is a faithful God and He keeps His word. And so, we have to pray so that God's Word will be accomplished, all of it!

4. Because our Messiah came through Israel

How would you feel if someone knocked on your door one day and gave you the keys to a brand new Mercedes Benz? This happened to a pastor friend of mine in the United States, he said he was speechless and his wife couldn't stop crying for a long time. They were so grateful; I bet you would be too. Now to be sure this was a blessing from God, it was God who provided him with that car but God used a human agent to do it.

We the church, have received something even more precious than a Mercedes Benz, we have received the most incredible gift of all; God gave us His one and only Son, Jesus. This, the most precious gift of all also came through human agency:

Micah 5:2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting." NKJV

Ever Christmas we sing the carol "O little town of Bethlehem" yet how often do we equate Bethlehem with the Jewish people and how often do we feel a sense of gratitude to them for being the vessel that brought our Saviour into the world for us?

One thing we Gentiles don't understand is that when we received Jesus we not only got him but we got the Jewish people as well. It's like getting married not only do you get a husband or wife you get the in-laws as well. Sometimes in-laws don't agree and sometimes they fight but at the end of the day, like it or not, they are related. The church is eternally linked to the Jewish people through Jesus. In fact Ephesians 3:6 says that we Gentiles have a shared inheritance with Israel because of Christ. So we share in everything that God has promised to Israel because of our relationship with Christ.

Instead of being grateful and being willing to share, we became like little children and wanted all the inheritance and refused to share it with our older brother and for centuries the church has persecuted the Jewish people. We forced them to convert and give up their Jewish practices and become like us. We forced them to break the very commands that God Himself gave them in the Torah, threatened them with death if they kept the dietary laws, the Sabbath or the feasts which are written in the very Bible we believe in.

Many thousands died in the name of the church, and finally when the Jewish people needed someone to speak up for them during WW II when millions were slaughtered, we the younger brother remained silent.

It is time for the church to change that part of our history, it's time for us to pray for them with a heart of gratitude for giving us the greatest gift of all, and we must pray that they themselves would receive this gift that they have given us.

5. To restore the relationship that God meant for us to have with Israel.

Under the teaching of "replacement theology" we have been taught that we (the church) have replaced Israel in God's plans, the New Testament however teaches us that we have been brought into the commonwealth of Israel:

Ephesians 2:11-13

11 Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh--who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands -- 12 that

at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. NKJV

The scripture says here that as Gentiles we were once far away from the commonwealth of Israel, far from the promises and covenants of God but now by the blood of Christ we have been brought near i.e. brought in to share in these things with Israel, not replace them. The book of Ephesians goes on to tell us that God's plan is to reconcile Jew and Gentile in Him and make them One New Man.

Ephesians 2:14-16

14 For He Himself is our peace, **who has made both one**, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, 15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself **one new man from the two**, thus making peace, 16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. NKJV

Not only have we been brought into the commonwealth of Israel but we were meant to be one with her. But history bears witness to the fact that we have separated ourselves from her and began to consider ourselves greater than her. One good example of this was at the Council of Nicea in 325 CE when they decided officially not to celebrate the Feasts of the Lord which were prescribed in the book of Exodus and Leviticus and which the Jewish people were celebrating. They separated the remembrance of our Lord's death and resurrection from the Feast of Passover. Thus we have Good Friday and Easter today separate from Passover.

Here's a thought for you. Normally when we remember the death anniversary of a loved one such as in holding a memorial service, we would hold the service on the day the person died. For instance the memorial service for those who died in the World Trade Centre in New York is always held on September 11th, regardless of what day of the week it falls on. We disregard the fact that they died on a Tuesday. How is it then that we always remember the Lord's death on a Friday? Especially since our Lord died during Passover and Passover is on a fixed day every year according to the Jewish calendar.

The decision was made at Nicea in 325 CE, when the Roman Emperor, Constantine said that it was not fitting for us to have anything in common "with the murderers of the Lord" and changed the day of remembrance. Thus we have Good Friday every year and became almost totally separated from our roots in Israel.

This never was God's plan and we must pray for the restoration of this plan of God for the church and Israel to be one.

6. To finish the great commission

The church today is very focused on completing the Great Commission, probably more so than at any other time in history. To this end we have developed aids such as the 10/40 window to help us identify the regions that are the least evangelized. One reason why we want to finish the Great Commission is because we believe that Jesus' return is dependant on it's completion. This of course is based on Matthew 24:14 "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come." NKJV

Whilst this is good and right we have forgotten one important factor – Israel. Most of the church has never seen until recently the role that Israel plays in God's plan of redemption. Rev. Peter Tsukahira in his book "God's Tsunami" tracks the move of the gospel around the world; how it began in Jerusalem and by a sovereign move of God it went westward into Europe (Acts 16). The gospel moved into pagan Europe with such strength that it transformed European society to its very core.

From Europe the gospel continued to move westward into North America while at the same time moving to places like Africa. From the west coast of North America the gospel continued to move west and today the strongest move of God is west of the West Coast of The United States, in Asia. The house church movement in China has been experiencing the longest running revival in world history; South Korea holds the largest Presbyterian, Methodist and Pentecostal churches. In Singapore we are experiencing a strong move of the Holy Spirit among the youth and most of these are first generation Christians. As we go on we hear of God's moving in India. So we see that the gospel continues to move westward, so where will it end – in Jerusalem where it all began.

In the book of Romans the Apostle Paul says that when the Jewish people turn to believe in Yeshua as their Messiah, it will spark a world-wide revival.

Romans 11:12 Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! NKJV

Romans 11:15 For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? NKJV

The Bible says here that their (Jewish people's) acceptance (of Yeshua) will mean life from the dead, i.e. revival for the nations.

So if we want to see the Great Commission completed, not only do we need to pray for the nations and continue our missionary endeavors, we must also pray for Israel. Pray that the eyes of the Jewish people will be opened to see that their Messiah has already come and His name is Yeshua, so that revival will come to our nations.

7. For the salvation of our nation

In the parable of the sheep and goats (Matthew 25:31-46) Jesus talks about the end-time judgment, one thing has always puzzled me about this parable; it seems that the basis of God's judgment here is the works which we did or did not do (Matthew 25:40). Doesn't the Bible say that our salvation is based upon faith not upon works (Ephesians 2:8-9)? Why then, the judgment on works?

The key can be found in the opening verses of this parable.

Matthew 25:31-33

31 "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. 32 **All the nations** will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. NKJV

The judgment that Jesus was talking about is not a judgment of individuals but rather a judgment of nations and look at how the Bible dictionary defines nations:

NT:1484 - ethnos (eth'-nos); probably from NT:1486; a race (as of the same habit), i.e. a tribe; specially, a foreign (non-Jewish) one (usually by implication, pagan):

KJV - Gentile, heathen, nation, people.

(Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright (c) 1994, Biblesoft and International Bible Translators, Inc.)

So the nations spoken of here are the Gentile nations.

This therefore gives us a picture of Jesus judging the nations and the basis of his judgment is how the nations have treated the Jewish people; His brethren in the flesh.

We all are aware that when Israel disobeyed God and went after other gods He exiled them to the nations like Assyria, Babylon and Persia. Then they were in the land but ruled by the Greeks and Romans. After the great revolts of 70 and 135 AD they were scattered and most ended up in Russia and the former Soviet Union. Not only was God disciplining His children, Israel, He was also testing these nations to see how they would treat the Jewish people.

If we believe that God's Word stands forever then this word definitely still stands:

Genesis 12:3 I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you NKJV

This is the promise that God gave to Abraham. Practically every one of these nations mistreated the Jews who were in their land.

In case you are not convinced read this prophecy of Joel:

Joel 3:1-2

3:1"For behold, in those days and at that time, When I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem, 2 I will also gather **all nations**, And bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; And I will enter into judgment with them there **On account of My people, My heritage Israel, Whom they have scattered among the nations; They have also divided up My land.** NKJV

This is an end-time prophecy and God says here that God will gather the nations to judge them, and the basis of His judgment is how they have treated Israel. It would truly be a stretch on theology to say that this prophecy pertains to the church because it clearly states that the judgment is on account of His people ... whom they have scattered among the nations. The church has not been scattered by anyone among the nations, we are the nations.

It also says they have divided up "**My land**". Which other land has God called His land? Only the land of Israel, over and over again in scripture God claimed that land as His own. This is the land that the nations are so eager to divide even until today, think about the "roadmap" that the nations are talking about and more recently the decisions made at Annapolis, Maryland.

When we look at it historically we see that God's Word is true; all those great empires that mistreated the Jewish people no longer exist, Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, Romans are all only remembered in history books. More recently we see that after the

Second World War when the British government reneged on the Balfour declaration, Great Britain lost its greatness. The Soviet Union had many Jews living in their nation and carried out many pogroms against them eventually collapsed. Is this not an indication to us of how much God loves the Jewish people and how true His Word is?

God's judgment on the nations is based upon how they relate to Israel, thus it is vital for us to build that spiritual bridge from our nations to Israel and one way we do this is by praying for her. We also need to pray for our own nations and governments that they will be favorable towards Israel so that our nation will not become a "goat nation".

8. To hasten the return of Jesus.

2 Peter 3:11-12

11 Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12 **looking for and hastening** the coming of the day of God, NKJV

The Apostle Peter tells us here that we are not only to look forward to, but also hasten the return of the Lord. Most Christians are not aware that there is something we can do to speed up the return of the Lord. Of course if we mention this in church the thought would be that we need to finish the Great Commission, this is true, but is there also another element that needs to be in place? What or rather who is Jesus returning for? His bride of course! At the end of the Bible we hear this cry – "And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" (Revelation 22:17).

Of course as the church we believe that we are the bride of Christ, true but only halfway. We have to ask who did God first call His bride?

Isaiah 54:5 For your Maker is your husband, The LORD of hosts is His name; And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of the whole earth. NKJV

Jeremiah 3:14 "Return, O backsliding children," says the LORD; "for I am married to you. I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion. NKJV

Who were Isaiah and Jeremiah talking to and talking about? Not the church but Israel, it was Israel that God first called his bride, that he first married. But there are those among us who will ask didn't God divorce Israel? (Jeremiah 3:8) Yes He did, but if we read on in this same chapter we see God calling her back (Jeremiah 3:11-14, Isaiah 54:7-8). Thus that divorce was not final, after all we know that divorce is not in the original plan of God, Jesus said that it was because of the hardness of man's heart that God allowed it (Matthew 19:8).

We all also know that polygamy is not in God's order of marriage, thus will God break His own law and have two brides? Certainly not! We were always meant to be one bride; Jew and Gentile. Jesus also gave us a hint of this in John 10:16 when he talked about the "other sheep that he has and he said that there will be one flock under one shepherd.

When Jesus stood on the Mount of Olives one time he said to Jerusalem: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! 38 See! Your house is left to you desolate; 39 for I say to

you, **you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'** (Matthew 23:37-39 NKJV)

Speaking to Israel, Jesus said that they would not see Him again until they would welcome him as they had done a few days prior to this when he entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

If we want hasten the return of Jesus we must therefore pray that the Jewish half of the bride will call for the bridegroom to come. Think about it, which bridegroom in his right mind could resist the call of his bride, but at the moment only half the bride is calling for him and that's not enough we must pray that the other half, the Jewish half will firstly recognize him as their bridegroom and then call for his return together with the Gentile half. This will stir the heart of the bridegroom and cause him to move in response and the bridegroom will return

Thus we have eight reasons that compel us to pray for Israel, which should be more than enough. Will you stand as a watchman on the walls of Jerusalem?

Ps 122:6-9

6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you. 7 Peace be within your walls, Prosperity within your palaces." 8 For the sake of my brethren and companions, I will now say, "Peace be within you." 9 Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek your good. NKJV