

October 27, 2023

Israel and God's Presence

In 70 A.D., after a seven-month siege, the Roman army broke through the defenses of Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple, burned the city, and demolished its walls. Almost all the Jewish inhabitants were either slaughtered or enslaved. Over the next 70 years, the Romans brutally put down two other great Jewish uprisings, culminating in near genocide of the Jewish people who lived in the regions we now call Israel and Palestine. Those who survived were scattered to nations throughout the Roman Empire and beyond.

Jesus foretold of Jerusalem's destruction, the scattering of the Jewish people, and the nineteen centuries Jerusalem would be controlled by the "Gentiles," saying, *"And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: **and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled**"* Luke 21:24. It was not until the "seven day war" in June of 1967 that the "times of the Gentiles" to occupy and control Jerusalem came to an end.

Since the 70 A.D. destruction of Jerusalem, no people on earth have suffered so much and still remained a distinct people as have the Jewish

people. As Christianity rose to political power, the Jews, who once persecuted the Christians, became the persecuted. They were subject to forced baptisms and conversions. They faced mass expulsions and banishments from many European nations. They were forbidden most occupations and were used as scapegoats for disease, famine, and economic failure. On many occasions there were great massacres of Jews by those who claimed the name of Christ. It is evident that those who authorized and committed such things did not know Christ, but still they did it in the name of Jesus Christ.

With the rise of Islam, the Jews found a new persecutor. While at times they were protected, they were regulated to be second-class citizens and soon became the scapegoat for defeats or tragedies in the Muslim world. Under Islam they also suffered similar expulsions and massacres as they did under Christendom.

All these persecutions came to a climax with the Holocaust, when the Nazis slaughtered 6 million Jews during World War II. Re-formed as a nation in 1948, Israel has suffered continuous attacks from nations and groups opposed to its existence. Even today, antisemitism rages in nations around the globe. Just this month we saw the great massacre of Israeli men, women, and children at the hands of the evil group called Hamas. The only reason evil men have not been able to completely destroy the Jewish people is revealed by the Prophet Isaiah. He wrote, *“Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have*

been like unto Gomorrah." Isaiah 1:9. God himself has stayed the hands of the destroyers so that one day he could fulfill the promise he made to Abraham concerning his natural "seed." Although they rejected His Son, God had not forsaken His promise.

In the final week before going to the cross, Jesus wept over Jerusalem, saying, *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate:"* Luke 13:34-35. The Greek word translated "desolate" means "lonesome" or "empty." This was a warning that Israel would be left "alone" without God's presence because of their rejection of God's Son, Jesus Christ. Without God's presence, they would no longer have God's protection.

For 3½ years, God reached out to Israel through Jesus Christ. He healed their sick, opened the blind eyes, cast out devils, raised the dead, and declared the word of God unto them. Still, they rejected him as their Messiah and demanded his crucifixion. With a broken heart, Jesus said, *"Ye shall not see me, until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."* Luke 13:35. He had continually called unto them, but they would not hear him. Now, he would not come to them again until they first embraced him as their promised "Messiah."

Since that time, the Jewish people have diligently sought for Messiah to come unto them, but he has not. Jesus' words were steadfast: ***"Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me."*** John 7:34. While they seek Messiah, they reject Jesus who is Messiah. For this reason, even though they seek him, they do not find him. Regardless of the false assurances many evangelical leaders give to the Jewish people, their Messiah will never come to them until they first turn to Jesus Christ. Yet, how could it be that a people who have suffered so many cruelties at the hands of those who claimed to know Jesus would ever call upon Jesus Christ? I know such a thing seems impossible, but it is already recorded in God's word.

Contrary to my sincere prayers and desire, the sufferings of the Jewish people will continue and increase. If they defeat Hamas, still another adversary will arise. It will increase until it seems as though Israel will cease to exist. All their military power and alliances will fail them. Yet in that hour, God has promised a great turning to Jesus. He said, ***"And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon (toward) me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn."*** Zechariah 12:10. In an hour when it seems all hope is lost, their hearts will begin to turn towards Jesus Christ who is their promised Messiah. It is only then the presence of God will

return to the Jewish people, and when that happens ...they will no longer be alone!

“Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle.” Zechariah 14:3-4.