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Messianic Perspectives®

God has not forgotten the Jewish people, and neither have we.

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ISRAEL: GOD'S TIMEPIECE PART 2

BY DR. GARY HEDRICK

On a cold, dark night in April of AD 30 (or thereabouts), the nation Israel stood at the most crucial point of decision in her 2,000-year history—and the moment is captured vividly for us in the New Testament.

The scene unfolded under a star-studded night sky in a frosty, torch-lit courtyard on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Shadowy figures were huddled around campfires, trying to keep warm. It was the middle of the night and a young rabbi from Galilee—Yeshua by name—was on trial for sedition and blasphemy.

In a nearby hall, He stood before Caiaphas, the High Priest of Israel, in the presence of other members of Israel's highest representative body, the Sanhedrin, who had been hastily called out of their beds at this odd hour. The story is recorded for us in three of the New Testament Gospels (Matt. 26:57-68, Mark 14:53-65, and John 18:12-24).

This was a defining moment for Israel. It was more significant than the crossroads she faced at Mount Sinai. It was more crucial than the choices the Israelites made in the days of the judges or the prophets. Her response on this night would determine the nation's course for centuries to come.

In those days, the high priest was the closest thing Israel had to a king. He presided over the Sanhedrin. Even under Roman rule, this council enjoyed broad authority. It

consisted of 71 representatives (chief priests, scribes, and elders), many from Israel's most prominent families.

So when Yeshua of Nazareth stood before Caiaphas and the other assembled members of the council, they were judging Him on behalf of the entire nation. The Lord remained silent until Caiaphas asked Him if He was the Messiah, God's son. Then we read, "*Jesus said to him, 'It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven'*" (Matt. 26:64).

Caiaphas was enraged by those words. It was clear to him that Yeshua was not only claiming to be Israel's long-awaited Messiah, but He was actually asserting that He would fulfill predictions from the Tanakh (the Jewish Bible) that could only be fulfilled by God himself (specifically, Dan. 7:13 and Psalm 110:1).



What may have incensed Caiaphas most of all was the implication (from the same passages) that even though he would be the lowly Nazarene's judge on this night, someday the tables would be turned. In effect, Yeshua's words put Caiaphas—and the rest of the council—on notice that they would stand before Him on Judgment Day.

Yeshua's words demanded a response. And at that point, Israel's future for the next two millennia—at least from a human standpoint—teetered in the balance. Everything depended on the council's response to the Lord's claims. They asked Him point-blank if He was the Messiah, and He answered them with equal candor: Yes, absolutely and unequivocally, He was all of that and more.

So this was Israel's point of decision. If the council responded by accepting Him, He had already said He would take the nation under His protective wing as her Messiah (Matt. 23:37-39). On the other hand, if they rejected

Him, the nation would eventually be expelled from the Land once again—sent out among the nations, lost and alone, like sheep without a shepherd (Psalm 44:11; Ezek. 20:23-24). The Diaspora that had begun in the days of Babylon and Assyria (Deut. 4:27-29) would be complete.

Caiaphas and the others should have fallen on their faces in humility and contrition and—like Thomas before them—cried out, “. . . *My Lord and my God!*” (John 20:28). But they didn't. Instead, they (on behalf of the entire nation) rejected Yeshua as the Messiah. Caiaphas ripped his clothes ceremoniously and accused the Lord of blasphemy (Matt. 26:65). The die was cast.

We can speculate all we want about what would have happened if, in some parallel universe, the nation had welcomed Him as her Messiah on that cold night in Jerusalem. But that's all it would be—speculation. In any case, He would have still needed to die (and shed His blood in payment for our sins) to make Redemption possible. And it's true that there are scenarios one can imagine that would have allowed for His death—even if the nation had received Him.

But that didn't happen. The Sanhedrin (on behalf of the nation) rejected Him. And 40 years later, Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed—just as He had predicted (Matt. 24:2).

The Great Divide

Most Christians agree with the facts as I have presented them up to this point. But here's where we encounter the great divide of opinion in Christendom: Was God's setting aside of Israel in the first century (when she rejected her Messiah) temporary or permanent?

That question is part of a larger debate over so-called “replacement theology,” the version of Christian theology that says God is finished with ethnic Israel. (The technical term for replacement theology is *supersessionism*—and there are several variations of it, some of which are vehemently anti-Israel.)

But why is there a debate on this topic at all? The Apostle Paul settled the issue millennia ago when he wrote: “*I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew . . .*” (Rom. 11:1-2).

How could it be any clearer? The sin of the high priest on behalf of the nation, as grievous and tragic as it was, did not result in a final and irreversible judgment upon the nation. Someday, Israel's unbelief will become faith and her blindness will turn to sight—much like Rabbi Shaul's did (Acts 9:1-18).

In the meantime, God is making use of the interlude to call out a people for Himself from among the Gentiles (Rom. 9:25-26). In English, we call this entity the “Church.” The Greek word is *ekklesia*—literally, a “called out” assembly.

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CJF Ministries
P.O. Box 345
San Antonio, TX 78292
210-226-0421

info@cjfm.org

Messianic Perspectives™

Dr. Gary Hedrick, Editor in Chief
Rachel Zanardi, Editor
Erastos Leiloglou, Designer



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During this interim period (which we sometimes call “the Church Age”), we should remember that the Jewish people, in spite of all of their failures and shortcomings, are still God’s earthly people. Their future—if we can only see beyond the gathering storm clouds of judgment—is as bright as the promises of God!

of Chaldea For all the evil they have done In Zion in your sight,’ says the LORD” (51:24).

I can imagine Nebuchadnezzar saying, “But Lord, it’s not fair for you to punish us. We were just following Your orders!” Then it’s like God says, “Yes, but they are still My people—

for the rest of the world, that we can tell the time on His prophetic clock by keeping an eye on the nation Israel.

Comparing the Two Comings

We can learn a great deal about the Second Coming by looking back at the Lord’s first coming. We know this because at the Ascension, two angels stayed behind after the Lord was gone and they said, “. . . ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come **in like manner** as you saw Him go into heaven’” (Acts 1:11, emphasis mine).

He will come the second time, then, “in like manner” as He came the first time—that is, His future coming will be literal, it will be on schedule, and its staging area will be the Land of Israel.

His coming will be literal—that means it won’t be a figurative or spiritual return. The Second Coming prophecies weren’t fulfilled in AD 70 because “every eye” didn’t see Him on that occasion (Rev. 1:7).

His coming will be on time—that means God is on a schedule. Just like His first coming took place “in the fullness of time” (Gal. 4:4), He will return precisely when He is supposed to. This determination is His, not ours. People who say the Lord should have already come need to get over it. He will come when the time is right (Acts 1:7).

He will return to Israel—that means He doesn’t return to New York, Moscow, Brussels, or Beijing, but to the ancient Land of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. When He came the first time, He came through the Israelite royal line of King David—and His people rejected Him (John 1:11). He will come the second time when His people Israel receive Him and cry out, “*Baruch Haba baShem Adonai*” (“Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord”; Matt. 23:39).

Watching the Clock

A clock is an instrument that marks the progression of time. It indicates hours, minutes, and in some more modern digital clocks it also indicates days and dates.

The nation Israel is a clock, of sorts, because it helps us measure the progression of time on God’s prophetic calendar. In fact, the clock stops ticking, as it were, whenever Israel is not in her Land.



Better Be Careful

Professing Christians who exhibit anti-Israel and anti-Jewish attitudes should proceed with extreme caution. Listen: **you’d better be careful what you say about, and how you act toward the Jewish people.** Even in their current state of national unbelief, they are still the “apple of [God’s] eye” (Zech. 2:8).

If you have any doubts about this, just read Jeremiah 25. In this compelling chapter, God calls the King of Babylon “My servant” (v. 9). Now think about that for a moment. Nebuchadnezzar, whose armies invaded Israel and destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in 586 BC, was acting as God’s servant! That is, this pagan king was God’s instrument to bring judgment down on His own wicked and idolatrous people.

But here’s what I want you to see. Just a few verses later, we have this remarkable statement: “*Then it will come to pass, when seventy years are completed, that I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity,’ says the LORD; ‘and I will make it a perpetual desolation’*” (v. 12, emphasis mine). And when the Lord refers to the Babylonians’ “iniquity,” He’s talking mainly about their treatment of Israel: “*And I will repay Babylon And all the inhabitants*

and woe to anyone who lays a hand on them, regardless of the reason!” In this same chapter, when God declares that He will punish the Babylonians, He wants them to know that He is “the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel” (25:27). Although He’s sovereign over all nations, the Lord doesn’t identify Himself in this passage as the God of the Babylonians or the God of the Assyrians. Rather, *He is the God of Israel*. Even when the nation is in sin, and deserving of judgment, He is still their God (31:37)!

Every king and every empire in history that has sought to harm the Jewish people has paid a high price for it. That’s not an exaggeration—it’s a historical fact. And the reason they have paid a price is that Israel is the apple of God’s eye.

Make no mistake about it, my friend. Israel has always played, and continues to play, a central role in God’s plan of the ages. He still loves that tiny nation—and He has great plans for them: “*For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope*” (29:11).

Geopolitically, militarily, and even religiously, the events of the end times will be centered in Israel. In fact, my thesis in this study is that there is such a close correlation between God’s plan for Israel and His future agenda



The Five Convergences

Let's take a look at how the "clock" works. The Bible mentions five Israel-specific events or conditions which, when they come together at the same point in history, point to the Second Coming of the Messiah. We call them convergences because they occur in concert with each other and they all point to the same thing (the word *convergence* simply means "a coming together").

Each of the five convergences can easily stand alone; however, a convergence by definition occurs along with other corresponding indicators. When all five of these indicators come together in the same generation, it will provide compelling evidence that this current phase of world history is drawing to a close—and the Second Coming prophecies are about to be fulfilled.



1. The Labor Convergence

The first convergence is found in a prophetic message the Lord Jesus delivered on the Mount of Olives during His earthly ministry (Matt. 24 and Mark 13). On this occasion, He responded to three prophetic questions posed by His disciples. They wanted to know, first of all, when the Temple would be destroyed (a prediction that was fulfilled in AD 70, roughly 40 years later); second, they asked about "the sign" of His return; and third, they requested more details about "the end of the age" (Matt. 24:3).

In the verses that follow, He masterfully weaves together information about all three of these prophesied events in one, unified answer. Because of the complexity of the disciples' triad of questions, the fulfillment spans a period of nearly 2,000 years (from AD

70 to the present and beyond). A number of end-time trends/signs emerge from this extraordinary discourse in Matthew 24:

- The rise of false messiahs (vv. 4-5)
- Wars and rumors about wars (v. 6)
- Nation against nation, kingdom against kingdom (v. 7a)
- Famines (v. 7b)
- Earthquakes (v. 7c)
- Tribulation and martyrdom for believers (v. 9)
- Infighting in the believing community (v. 10)
- The rise of many false prophets (v. 11)
- Increase of lawlessness or anarchy (v. 12)
- Proclamation of the Gospel to the whole world (v. 14)
- False religionists who perform deceptive miracles (v. 24)

These indicators, in and of themselves, are not prophetic. They only become prophetic when they fit the birth pang paradigm. (In verse 8, the Greek word *odin*, translated “sorrows” in many of our English Bibles, literally means “birth pangs.”) That is, in order for a sign to be an end-time indicator, it must happen with increased frequency and intensity—like the birth pains a pregnant woman experiences just before her baby is born. Also, all of the indicators must happen at the same time (v. 33).

When these conditions are met, we can call these events a *trend* or *sign* of the approaching Second Coming of our Lord—like the telltale labor pains that precede the birth of a baby.

Incidentally, the idea that the “times of the Messiah” (*Yemot haMashiach*) will be preceded by the “pangs of the Messiah” (*hevlo shel Mashiach*) did not originate in Christianity. It’s actually related to pre-Christian Jewish messianism, which is rooted in the Tanakh (the Jewish Bible, or what Christians know as the Old Testament) and other traditional Jewish sources.

The Prophet Micah, for instance, uses his own prophecies in the 6th century BC about the impending Babylonian Captivity (which finally happened in 586 BC) as an opportunity to telescope forward to the Messianic Age in the distant future. He talks about the “Daughter of Zion” (Israel) writhing in the agony of childbirth during her captivity in Babylon (4:6-10). Then, in the following chapter, Micah foretells the birth of an Eternal One in Bethlehem (5:2)—a birth also accompanied by labor pains (v. 3). Of course, that was none other than the Lord Jesus, who will someday return to “. . . stand

and feed His flock In the strength of the LORD, In the majesty of the name of the LORD His God; And they shall abide, For now He shall be great To the ends of the earth” (v. 4).

To the ancient sages of Israel, this recurring theme of birth pains had great significance. According to one Jewish scholar, the rabbis thought it meant that “. . . only when the cup of evil was filled to the brim would the Messiah come to bring salvation” (Louis F. Hartman, “Eschatology,” accessed at www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org).

This shows us, once again, how Jewish the New Testament is—in fact, the NT is a continuation of the Jewish OT. There is a marked continuity of themes and ideas from the OT to the NT—and John the Baptizer (*Yochanan haMatbil*, or יוחנן המטביל), the last of the OT prophets, links the two. In his epic work *The Messiah Texts* (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1979), the late rabbinic scholar Raphael Patai summarizes a number of these themes, including the birth pangs of the Messiah, the New Jerusalem, the New Covenant, the anti-messiah (who is called Armilus in some of the traditional writings), the marriage supper of the Lamb (or “messianic banquet”), the resurrection of the dead, Elijah as Messiah’s forerunner, Messiah’s suffering and death, and even His preexistence. These were all teachings that arose in ancient Judaism and were either clarified or amplified later in the NT.

So when people say things like, “The idea of a literal reign of the Messiah on earth is just a Jewish myth,” we should put that idea to the test. For one thing, if we are obliged to reject any notion out of hand that was a feature of ancient Jewish thought, then there are other Jewish ideas that we should also throw out—like the preexistence of the Messiah, the divine inspiration of the Torah, the *ex nihilo* creation of the world, and other teachings (some of which are summarized in Professor Patai’s aforementioned book). The problem, of course, is that a number of these supposedly “Jewish” ideas are actually core elements of our evangelical faith!

The first convergence, then, is one that compares the events leading up to Messiah’s coming to the pains a pregnant woman experiences just before she gives birth. The birth of the Baby Jesus in Bethlehem (and the literal labor pains Mary experienced beforehand), therefore, may be seen as a precursor to the figurative “birth pangs” the nation Israel will

experience in the future, just before the coming of her Messiah.

Mary’s labor pains in Bethlehem resulted in the birth of a healthy baby boy. The nation’s labor pains at the end of this age will bring forth a new age of peace, righteousness, justice, blessings, and prosperity for all people (Isa. 2:2-11).

This convergence is placed at the beginning of the list because it helps us understand the remaining convergences. Like birth pains, all of these trends/signs will happen with greater frequency and intensity as we approach the end of the age.



2. The Anti-Israel Convergence

The prophets foresaw a time when the armies of the world would descend on Israel and try to destroy her (Luke 21:20). We infer from this that as we approach the end of this age, we will witness a measurable increase in anti-Israel and anti-Jewish activity worldwide. So how does this align with what we see in the world around us?

According to Wikipedia, the United Nations Security Council has issued more than 200 resolutions that address issues regarding the modern State of Israel. How long ago would you guess the last pro-Israel, or even mildly sympathetic, resolution was passed? The answer: almost 60 years ago, and there has not been a positive resolution since!

Read down the list and a refrain repeated again and again is that the UN believes the Israelis have done horrible things to either the Palestinians or to her Arab neighbors. In these resolutions, the UN “censures” Israel, for instance, or “deeply deplores” something the Israelis have done, or “condemns” the Israelis (see resolutions 248, 251, and 256 for specific examples).

The wording of these resolutions, however, overlooks the fact that virtually all of Israel's military operations in the last 60 years have been in self-defense. This one-sided censorship reveals a blatant and obvious attempt to portray the Israelis as the bad guys in the Middle East. Check it out yourself online at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_United_Nations_Resolutions_Concerning_Israel.

In addition, Neo-Nazi groups (like the so-called "skinheads") are springing up all over the world—especially in Europe. The specter of militant Islamic terrorism has upstaged these supremacist groups in recent years—but they're still out there, and their numbers are increasing.



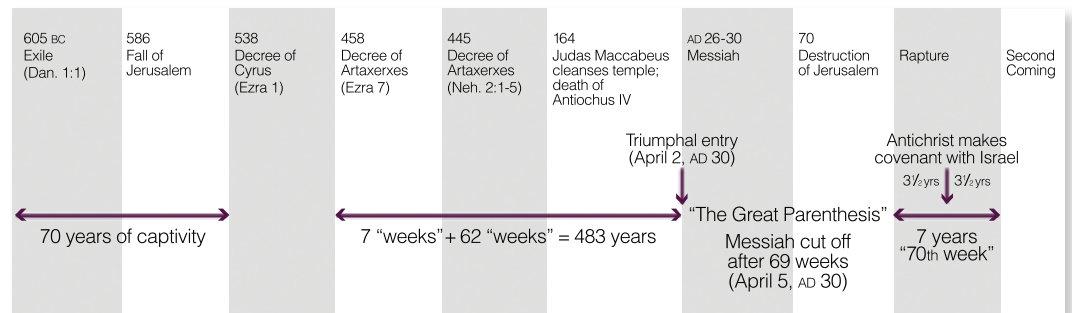
3. The Daniel Convergence

Daniel 9:24 says, "Seventy weeks [lit., 70 "sevens"] are determined For your people and for your holy city, To finish the transgression, To make an end of sins, To make reconciliation for iniquity, To bring in everlasting righteousness, To seal up vision and prophecy, And to anoint the Most Holy."

Here, the Prophet Daniel reveals something quite remarkable: God's future dealings with Israel (and by extension, with the world) will take place over a span of 490 years (that is, 70 "sevens" of years). Then he continues, explaining that these "sevens" (or "weeks") of years occur in segments.

There is evidence that a gap exists between the 69th and 70th weeks because we are told that certain things will occur *after* the 69th week but they won't be in the 70th week (9:26-27).

The only way something can happen after the 69th week without being *in* the 70th week is if there's some time between the 69th and 70th weeks.



The next verse tells us when the 490 years will begin: "Know therefore and understand, That from the going forth of the command To restore and build Jerusalem Until Messiah the Prince, There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; The street shall be built again, and the wall, Even in troublesome times" (v. 25).

Scholars like Sir Robert Anderson (*The Coming Prince*) and, more recently, Harold Hoehner (*Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*) have calculated the 490 years down to the day, using various dates in March of 444 BC as the *terminus a quo* (beginning point) for this prophecy. March of 444 BC is when King Artaxerxes I of Persia granted safe passage back to Israel (or what was left of it) for Nehemiah and a Jewish remnant so they could rebuild the city and its walls (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary* [Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985], Vol. 1; p. 1362).

Counting days (173,880 of them, to be exact), converting the calendar to 360-day years, and adjusting for the transition from BC to AD is tedious work, and not all scholars calculate the same result. But what's interesting is that they all end up *within four years of each other*—somewhere between AD 29 and 33, just before Passover, which matches the NT account with remarkable accuracy (John 6:4).

For instance, I personally prefer the year AD 30 (3790 on the Jewish calendar), which fits the biblical scenario very well (even though, with all due respect, it means that Anderson's and Hoehner's calculations were slightly off).

Therefore, we can say with a high degree of certainty that Daniel's prophecy pinpoints the time when Messiah would be presented to the nation ("until the arrival of Messiah the prince," 9:25) and later be killed (or "cut off"; v. 26)—sometime between AD 29 and 33.

The important point here is this: The Prophet Daniel predicted that the Messiah would be presented to the People of Israel (and subsequently be

executed) at a time that just happens to fall near the end of the earthly life of a rabbi from Nazareth named Yeshua.

The prophecies in the Book of Daniel (including this one about the arrival of Messiah the Prince in Israel) are so clear and unmistakable, liberal critics (who reject the possibility of future prophecy) have felt that their only option is to try to convince us that most of Daniel's predictions were written *ex eventu* (i.e., after the fact) by a forger who used Daniel's name and was trying to make it look like prophecy. After all, they reason, how else could he have known so far in advance about what would happen to the Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman empires (Chapters 7–11)? This is their dilemma.

And to make matters even worse for the liberals, modern scholarship has largely discredited the critical view of



Daniel. We now know, for example, that the Hebrew and Aramaic linguistic forms found in Daniel are *not* from the second century BC, like the liberals claimed for years. Many other underpinnings of the critical view have melted away under the heat of scholarly scrutiny (see Edwin M. Yamauchi, "The Archaeological Background of Daniel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* [volume 137, issue 545], 1980). Also, see www.tektonics.org/guest/danielblast.html, where David Conklin details 84 specific liberal-critical objections to Daniel's historicity that have been discredited by modern linguistic, historical, and archaeological research.

What we are left with, then, is a fifth century BC document in which a Jewish prophet named Daniel predicts with uncanny accuracy the future course of world history (including the rise and/or demise of the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman empires). He also foresees the time when the Messiah would arrive in Israel and be killed (the first century AD). Then he outlines the events leading up to Israel's final Tribulation (Daniel's 70th "week"), which we now know (with the benefit of hindsight) follows an interlude (between the 69th and 70th "weeks") of some 2,000 years.

If our interpretation of the Daniel convergence is correct, the next prophetic sequence on God's calendar is the catching up (or "rapture") of believers worldwide (1 Thess. 4:16-17) at around

the same time a comprehensive, seven-year peace accord is ratified in the Middle East (Dan. 9:27). This treaty will most likely be mediated by the Anti-messiah (or Antichrist; that is, the "he" mentioned at the beginning of verse 27).



4. The Jerusalem Convergence

We have already seen that anti-Semitic and anti-Israel movements will gain momentum as we approach the end of the age (see second convergence). One specific point of contention will be the ancient city of Jerusalem. Much of the history of the modern State of Israel, beginning in the 1940s, reflects the ongoing Arab-Muslim/Israeli dispute over the ancient city. Much of the world has sided with the Arabs in this ongoing dispute. As we approach the end of the age, the Jerusalem controversy will accelerate: "*And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it*" (Zech. 12:3).

So whose land is it, anyway? Well, first and foremost, the Land of Israel belongs to God (Psalm 24:1). The question then becomes: to whom has God entrusted it? Everyone seems to have an opinion on this. Some people say that Israel has no right to her Land (or to Jerusalem) because she is currently in a state of unbelief. And while it is true that the Bible makes a distinction between Israel's *ownership* of the Land (which is unconditional because it's rooted in the Abrahamic Covenant) and her *possession* of it (which the Torah conditioned on obedience), it is nonetheless up to God to decide when His people should be in their Land.

It is a mistake to assume that because Israel is currently in unbelief, they have no more right to the Land than anyone else does. They are, after all, the rightful *owners* of the Land, even when they aren't in *possession* of it. (The only people with a prior claim on the Land would be the Canaanites—and they no longer exist.)

In biblical times, God disciplined His people in various ways. One method was to allow them to be expelled from their Land altogether—as He did during the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, in 722 and 586 BC respectively, and finally in AD 70, at the hands of the Romans. Another way was to apply pressure from rival nations while Israel was in the Land—as He did throughout much of the OT period through the Canaanites, Philistines, and others of her ancient enemies. During these times, the people of Israel went through a repetitive cycle: sin followed by judgment, then repentance, restoration, and finally, blessing. Then the cycle started over with another sin. So dwelling in the Land *per se* didn't always equate to righteous living. But dwelling in the Land *in peace and security* did.

Since 1948, God has been dealing with His people in the Land, although in reality they currently possess only a fraction of the territory they were originally promised in the Abrahamic Covenant. So it's not really accurate to say (as some do) that Israel is enjoying the benefits of the covenant promises without bearing the responsibilities of obedience.

What are the benefits of the covenant promises to Israel? They include peace and security (2 Sam. 7:10), permanency (Jer. 31:40), renewed spirituality for the entire nation (vv. 31-34), and a Land extending from the Sinai in Egypt all the way northward to Damascus (Ex. 23:31).

Now compare this with Israel's current predicament. The Israelis are constantly under the gun—literally. They are surrounded by hostile nations. The Israeli people don't know from one year to the next what the future holds. The coming Tribulation is mostly about applying even more pressure to Israel to bring her to the place where she needs to be spiritually. That's why it's called "the Time of Jacob's Trouble" (Jer. 30:7). So one can hardly say that Israel is "home free," or that she is enjoying covenant blessings, simply because she has had a land of her own since 1948. She has had (and continues to have) many serious problems, and her current borders



encompass only a fraction of the territory she's been promised.

During the Tribulation, in fact, the Anti-messiah will very cunningly appeal to the tiny nation's insecurities. Israel will be receptive to his overtures after decades of warfare, terrorism, and uncertainty. But her seven-year pact with the Malevolent One will only result in more grief and tragedy (1 Thess. 5:3).

Israel, like all of us, should remember that it is folly to trust in man (Psalm 118:8). Only the Lord God of Israel can fulfill the covenant promises and usher in all of its promised blessings. That will happen when His people cry out to Him in true repentance and faith in Yeshua the Messiah (Rom. 11:26; cp. Matt. 23:39).

In the meantime, the continuing controversy over Jerusalem will heat up even more as we approach the end of the age. As it stands right now, most of the world wants Israel to give up East Jerusalem (as part of a pullback to the pre-1967 borders) so the Palestinians can make it their capital (the UN has issued resolutions to that effect). Many Israelis, however, have vowed that such a transfer would only occur over their dead bodies. Sadly, there are many in the Arab world who would be only too happy to oblige them.



5. The Messianic Convergence

The Prophet Jeremiah says the time is coming when Israel's sins will be forgiven (31:34). The nation will be restored because each individual comprising the nation (or at least the vast majority of them) will come to faith in the Messiah (note the repetition of "each man" in this passage, as well as the phrase "all of them"; v. 34). This

is important because it means that no one is saved simply because he or she is Jewish. John 3:16 applies to Jewish people just as it does to anyone else. Each of us must believe for himself. No one else can believe for us.

The same passage provides geographic markers strongly suggesting that Israel's future restoration will also have a physical aspect, extending to the Land itself (Jer. 31:38-40). In other words, Israel will be restored to her God (inwardly) and also to her Land (outwardly).

Notice, however, that this process of restoration doesn't happen suddenly or overnight. It occurs in stages, as we see in Ezekiel's "dry bones" prophecy: "*So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to bone*" (37:7).

The Prophet Ezekiel introduces us here to the principle of *graduated fulfillment*. The idea is that God works methodically, in stages, when He is dealing with His people Israel. We don't have to guess about the interpretation of this prophecy because Ezekiel himself explains it: the whole story is a metaphor in which the dried-out bones in the graveyard represent the nation Israel (v. 11). Something strange and wonderful happens in that vast graveyard. First, the eerie silence is broken by a "noise" and a "rattling" (indicating movement; v. 7a); then the bones come together (v. 7b); next, the muscles and tendons cover the bones (v. 8a); and finally, these bodies receive the breath of life and stand upright (v. 10).

This is how God will restore Israel—He will do it in stages. So if we believe that "all Israel" will come to faith in the Messiah at the end of this age (Zech. 12:10-14; Rom. 11:26), it is entirely reasonable for us to expect to see movement in that direction (a rattling of the bones, as it were) ahead of time. And we do!

Noise in the Graveyard

Originally, of course, the "Christian" and "messianic" movements were one and the same because the early (first century) church was Jewish. "*And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, 'You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law'*" (Acts 21:20). The early Jewish believers, in fact, convened a council in Jerusalem so their leaders could consider the

question of how non-Jews might be admitted into the Church (Acts 15).

But within a couple of centuries, the shoe was on the other foot and Gentile church authorities were laying down the rules for Jewish believers. They became an endangered species; and by the seventh century or so, Jewish Christians had all but disappeared



from the religious landscape (Carol Harris-Shapiro, *Messianic Judaism* [Boston: Beacon Press, 1999], p. 18). For centuries, Jewish Christianity (or the messianic movement) was virtually non-existent.

Then about 500 years ago, things started to change. Thanks to the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in the mid 1400s, and the efforts of reformers like Tyndale and Luther in the early 1500s, New Testaments were available to almost anyone who wanted one—and Jewish people were taking notice. Some of them read the NT, believed the Good News, and became believers in Jesus the Messiah.

These first Jewish Christians of the modern era got right to work. Some of them were *marranos* (that is, Jewish people who "converted" to Catholicism to avoid persecution or expulsion during the Inquisitions but secretly continued as practicing Jews), so they

may or may not have been true believers in the Lord Jesus. But many others were. And those who were, wasted no time in making their mark on the Christian movement.

In the early 1500s, for example, the first Polyglot Bible was produced by three Jewish Christians, including Alfonso de Zamora, a rabbinic scholar who was

Augusti, Paul Weidner, Julius Conrad Otto, and Johann Adam Gottfried. Also, the discoveries of scientist William Herschel, another Jewish Christian, revolutionized astronomy.

In the 1800s, “Felix Mendelssohn, grandson of the great Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, but baptized as a child, writes his overture to

Today, experts estimate that there are “. . . over 150,000 messianic Jews in the United States and more than 250 messianic congregations. There are more than 400 messianic congregations worldwide, with over 50 in Israel representing about 6,000 Israeli believers” (“Messianic Judaism: Its Meaning and Significance” by Dr. David Reagan [*Lamplighter* magazine, November/December 2007], p. 8).

In much the same way that Israel has become the center of the Jewish universe since its inception in 1948, it is also increasingly becoming a major hub of the messianic (Jewish-Christian) world.

The Lord Jesus compared Israel to a fig tree (Matt. 24:32-33). Fig trees, like other trees, can look like they’re *dead* when they’re really only *dormant*. The only way to know the difference is to wait until spring and see if buds begin to appear on the branches. The point of this parable is that when the nation once again begins showing signs of life, both physically and spiritually, it means the Lord’s return is approaching.

Ezekiel’s prophetic graveyard has become a noisy place in our generation! The “bones” are rattling. In fact, there are **more Jewish believers in the world today than at any other time since the first century**—and the momentum is continuing to build. This is yet another one of the convergences that points to the end of the age and our Lord’s return.

Conclusion

Note that each of the five convergences has a direct bearing on the nation Israel. Also, they are all growing in frequency and intensity, and they are converging at the same point in history—right now, in our generation.

Could these things be happening merely by coincidence? Or, are they tangible evidence of an unseen Hand guiding history to a definite and purposeful conclusion?

You be the judge.

Dr. Gary Hedrick
is president of
CJF Ministries.



fluent in Hebrew, Aramaic, Chaldean, and several other languages.

In the 1600s, “Esdras Edzard, who grew up studying Hebrew and the Talmud, and then studied in Leipzig, Wittenberg, and Basel, earns a doctorate and begins working among the Jews of Hamburg. He provides free instruction in Hebrew, helps the poor, and explains to all the gospel. From 1671 to 1708, Edzard leads 148 Jews to baptism in his church . . . and almost all of those baptized stick with Christianity” (“Timeline of Notable Jewish Christians of the Past Five Centuries” by Marvin Olasky [*World* magazine, March/April 2002], p. 34).

By the 1700s, the trickle had become a steady stream. The rabbis’ claim that only uneducated Jewish people were inclined to embrace the Christian faith took a beating during this period due to the testimonies of Jewish scholars like John Xeres, Ludwig Compiegne de Veil, Friedrich Albrecht

A Midsummer Night’s Dream. He . . . composes the *Elijah* and *St. Paul* oratorios, and arouses the resentment of anti-Semites by helping Jewish musicians” (Ibid., p. 40). During this century, Benjamin Disraeli became the Prime Minister of Great Britain. He wrote that he wished his Jewish kinsmen would “accept the whole of their religion instead of only the half of it, as they gradually grow more familiar with the true history and character of the New Testament” (p. 42).

In the early 1900s, messianic congregations (sometimes called “synagogues”) began to spring up in places like Baltimore, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia. Several key figures in the “Jesus Movement” of the 1970s were Jewish believers—including Keith Green, a gifted musician who died in a tragic plane crash in 1982 at the height of his ministry. In the 1980s and 90s, messianic congregations continued springing up all over North America.



by Violette Berger

Fruit from the Harvest



Israeli Soldiers

International CJFM worker and Israeli native Yossi Ovadia pastors a messianic congregation, *Kehilat Hadrech* (The Way) in Karmiel—in the Galilee region of Israel. While teaching a course on evangelism to his congregation, he asked them to think about new ways they could evangelize in their community. A young man suggested reaching out to the Jewish soldiers who pass through the central bus station on their way home.

Pastor Yossi's middle son, and a schoolmate, also expressed a desire to do this. They now go to the bus terminal once a week, and ask soldiers if they would care to answer a few questions. Their survey focuses on spiritual matters, and it soon leads the conversation to Yeshua and the Bible. The young men have had very interesting discussions, and Pastor Yossi asks that we "please remember them in prayer—that God will bless their faithfulness and show fruit from their outreach to the soldiers."

Israeli Children

Pastor Yossi also shares the following remarkable story: An Israeli sixth-grader, who is a relative of **CJFM Israel worker Ruth Nessim**, had an opportunity to speak with his teacher about his faith in Yeshua. His teacher, a religious woman—although not a believer—requested that he talk to the entire class about his faith during their social studies hour. She originally designated 10 minutes to the subject, but allowed the discussion to last 45 minutes. The young boy shared biblical prophecy concerning *Yeshua haMaschiach* (Jesus the Messiah), His death, resurrection, redemption for mankind, the love of God, and his personal testimony—his faith in Yeshua. He was then allowed to answer questions from his classmates. Pastor Yossi asks that we "please pray for the children and the teacher, that the seeds sown will grow in good and fertile soil."

From Here to Eternity

Rich Hill, a CJFM missionary (Las Vegas), and his wife Oanh recently took turns witnessing to Edith while she was in hospice. Edith's son, Richard Cooper, is assistant pastor of the *Beth Yeshua* congregation and a CJFM supporter. The Hills and Cooper praise God that Edith prayed to receive the Lord, as shortly thereafter she passed on to be with Him for eternity.

Rich had the privilege of officiating at Edith's funeral service. Knowing that at least 15 unsaved Jewish people were in

attendance, Rich gave a clear presentation of the Gospel message. To his surprise, some of the unsaved Jewish individuals thanked him for a wonderful service. In addition, God used the service as a witness to the Jewish family who assisted in the arrangements and owns the cemetery. Please pray for all the unsaved who heard the Gospel. "*So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void . . .*" (Isa. 55:11).

The Circle of Death and Life

CJFM missionary (Phoenix) Richard Toviah, a Jewish believer, recently led the funeral service for his mother Sophie in Calgary, Canada. The entire service was not only a memorial for his mother, but also an opportunity to present the Gospel message to Richard's unsaved brother Larry and his wife Anna. Knowing that his brother had never heard the testimonies of two family members, Richard shared the details.

The first concerned his older brother Ron who prayed to receive the Lord just five days before passing away from cancer in January 2000. Richard explained God's promises in Romans 10:9-13. His mother became ill following the loss of her first-born son, and ended up in the same hospital. During that time, Richard was able to comfort her with an account of Ron's salvation. He told her that he knew he would see Ron again, and she could have the same hope if she put her faith—just as Ron had done—in Jesus, our Lord and Savior. After sharing the Gospel with her, Richard said that he and his mother held hands as he led her in prayer—just as he had done with his older brother, and thus her eternal destiny was also sealed and secured.

Richard then cited the older covenant—describing how every year the blood of an innocent animal, such as a lamb, had to be sacrificed to atone for the sins of the guilty. But, he added, that this atonement was only temporary until the time when God would send His Son—who became the sacrificial Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world once and for all. Richard explained why the Messiah had to die in our place, and only our faith in Him alone could save us from the death we deserve. When Richard gave an invitation at the end of the service, both Larry and Anna prayed to receive the gift of salvation through the finished work of *Yeshua haMashiach*.

Richard writes, "It's ironic how the death of my oldest brother led to my mother receiving eternal life, then the death of my mother led to my older brother and his wife receiving the same gift. Our prayers have been answered."

Experience for yourself the stunning relevancy and blessing of the 3,500-year-old Passover Seder!



Michelle Beadle

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First Haitian Baptist
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Dover, FL 2/28
New Beginnings Church
of God
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Tampa, FL 3/1
Tampa Neighborhood
Lighthouse
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First UMC of Amite
(985) 748-5353

Denham Springs, LA 3/7
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Woodland Presbyterian
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First Baptist
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Castor, LA 3/14
Castor Assembly of God
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Baton Rouge, LA 3/22
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Sheraton Galleria
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McComb, MS 3/31
Faith Assembly of God
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First Baptist of New Orleans
(504) 482-5775

New Orleans, LA 4/2
Bethany UMC
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Barry Berger

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Ponderosa Baptist
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Phoenix, AZ 3/26
Moon Valley Bible
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Eric Chabot

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Westerville Free Will Baptist
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First Baptist
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Washington Ct. House, OH 3/7
Sugar Grove UMC
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Ashland, OH 3/14
Little Flock Church
(419) 368-7705

St. Mary's, OH 3/14
Calvary Christian Fellowship
(419) 394-7276

Utica, OH 3/17
Utica Church of Christ
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Zanesville, OH 3/21
Tree of Life Community
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New Philadelphia, OH 3/21
New Philadelphia Church
of the Nazarene
(330) 343-7144

Hannibal, OH 3/23
Hannibal Clarington UMC
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N. Ridgeville, OH 3/28
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Fredericktown, OH 3/28
Christ the King Community
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N. Royalton, OH 3/30
State Rd. Community
Church of the Nazarene
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Gretna Brethren
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Logan Church of the
Nazarene
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Akron, OH 4/4
Legacy Church
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Gahanna, OH 4/11
First Baptist
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Richard Hill

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Calvary Chapel
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Reno, NV 3/14
Reno First Assembly
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West Craig Road Baptist
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Aliente Community Baptist
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Liberty Baptist
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Shadow Mountain Christian
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Beth Yeshua
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New Song Church
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Las Vegas, NV 4/2
New Horizon
(702) 614-6045

Las Vegas, NV 4/4
Southern Hills Baptist
(702) 388-7422



John Kanter

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Abilene Bible Church
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Koloa, HI 2/24
Koloa Assembly of God
(808) 742-9956

Canyon Lake, TX 3/14
Hill Country Bible
(210) 415-2365

Round Rock, TX 3/21
First Baptist
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Frisco, TX 3/24
Life Changing Faith
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Van Alstyne, TX 3/28
Community Bible
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Hurst, TX 3/28
First Baptist
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Paris, TX 3/31
Paris Bible
(903) 784-7696

Plano, TX 4/2
Collin Creek Community
(972) 618-2222

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The Passover Seder is a retelling of a timeless story. The word seder means "order," and refers to the sequence of events in the annual Passover observance as outlined in the Haggadah and revolves around four cups of wine.



photo: corbis

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Parkas**

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Island Baptist
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Honesdale, PA 4/1
First Presbyterian
(570) 253-5451

Dallas, PA 4/2
Fellowship Evangelical Free
(570) 492-7584



**Richard
Toviah**

Kingman, AZ 1/15
Emmanuel Christian
Academy
(928) 681-4220

Lake Havasu City, AZ 1/16
Havasu Christian Church
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Glendale, AZ 2/21
Christian Worship Center
(602) 677-0641

Globe, AZ 2/28
Maranatha Baptist
(928) 425-4198

Quartzsite, AZ 3/7
Quartzsite First Assembly
of God
(928) 927-5808

Show Low, AZ 3/14
White Mountain Christian
(928) 537-7926

Winslow, AZ 3/21
Winslow Church of the
Nazarene
(928) 613-8777

Leupp, AZ 3/21
Leupp Church of Nazarene
(928) 380-0007

Mesa, AZ 3/27
Mountain Vista Bible
(480) 358-9851

Phoenix, AZ 3/28
Adventure Community
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Pine, AZ 3/28
Church on Randall Place
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Cottonwood, AZ 3/31
Verde Baptist
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Globe, AZ 4/1
Central Heights Baptist
(928) 425-5303

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Florence Baptist
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Scottsbluff, NE 4/3
Bethel Baptist
(308) 631-4471

Hyannis, NE 4/4
Church of the Sandhills
(308) 458-2708

Phoenix, AZ 4/11
Heaven Gate Praise
Fellowship
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Phoenix, AZ 4/25
Desert Christian Fellowship
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