

# Why Israel?

Biblical understanding concerning God's purposes for Israel and the Church

Studies

## Israel and the Nations

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Israel and the nations is a theme that, as with many of the other issues regarding Israel, has not often been talked about or taught in church history. You won't find many books on Israel and the nations. I hope to take you on quite a challenging journey, because I will touch on things that most of us did not grow up with.

### The calling of Abraham

The starting point is God's famous calling extended to Abraham and His promises in Genesis 12:1-3. 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."

### "Nations" in the Bible

I want to start by focusing on verse 3: I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth (*michpocha*) shall be blessed. Firstly I want to point out that, in terms of blessings and curses, the language used is collective and not individualistic. It talks about the fact that Israel shall be a nation and that through the nation of Israel the nations of the earth shall be blessed. Those who bless you are blessed and those who curse the Jewish nation are cursed. It's all in a language and framework that does not primarily talk about individuals but about *michpocha* - that's the key word in Hebrew - and the word *michpocha* has a very broad feel and spectrum of meaning as most of you would

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know. It has connotations with family, tribe, clan, a group of people or an ethnic group. The modern word for it is nation. Another dimension of interpretation or understanding would be 'generations' and there is a time factor involved throughout the generations. The Bible alternatively refers to families, sometimes to nations and at times to generations. All are correct and all have been correctly translated. The common ground here is collectivism. Family, tribe, clan, ethnic group, nation, generation... It's all more than one. Israel, on the other hand, is spoken of as both a nation and a people.

This issue and theme is complicated because most of us come from a church background where the importance of understanding the collective dimension was not accentuated. I come from a Lutheran background but was born-again in the Charismatic movement and was largely influenced by the primary importance of a personal relationship with Jesus: Jesus and I, I and Jesus. It was all about my salvation and my calling to bring that salvation to as many individuals as is possible.

### **Augustine**

This is something that many of us, in one way or the other, have been brought up with. And it has something to do with church history. It has to do with the Millennium; and Augustine's misunderstanding of the Millennium. Augustine wrote at the time when Christianity became a major factor and the state religion within the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire, which was in the process of falling apart, was being replaced by the Church. And so Augustine indeed understood that development - in a way - as the beginning of the Millennium. This was part of what we now refer to as the development of "Replacement Theology". Jerusalem was replaced by Rome, Jesus was replaced by the Pope as head of the Church, and Israel was replaced by the Church. And then Christian Europe, especially, was supposed to be the manifestation of 'kingdom now' as understood by Augustine and those within a similar framework of thinking as well as those who had the power to implement it.

So, the medieval church and European Christendom was formed by a kind of triumphalism with high and lofty goals of what the Church in the world should be like and also by the struggle for control in Europe between the Pope and the

Emperor (or Keiser) that's been ongoing for hundreds of years. This brought us the Reformation. The Reformation was partly a reformation back to the Bible and partly a reformation back to the days of the church fathers. And, especially as far as Luther was concerned, back to Augustine. But it was not a reformation back to the Word of God.

### **The Reformation - mixed blessings**

We had a mixture in the Reformation times. There was the Catholic version of understanding and - speaking from a Lutheran background as a German person - there were Luther and Calvin with their different versions of understanding. We had German and Lutheran dukes, earls and princes whom were followed not long after by Lutheran bishops. Amongst the secular leaders there was a famous practice that, depending in which area of government you worked, you had to follow the faith of the leading duke or earl. In Catholic surroundings you were to live as a Catholic and in Lutheran surroundings as a Lutheran. That was true even of nations. France was Catholic. Sweden was Lutheran. The nations were struggling whether to follow the Lutheran or Catholic paths, and that gave rise to wars. The worst war during that period of time was the Thirty Year War from 1618 to 1648. It was a religious war. It was about either remaining Catholic or becoming Catholic again due to the counter reformation that was taking place or about remaining or becoming Protestant. It was a vicious war. One third of the German population was completely obliterated in those thirty years and it was similarly devastating for the many other nations that were touched by this war.

### **Pietism**

This, in a sense, is the background of the Pietistic Revival that many of us are familiar with. The word 'pietism' refers to that part of Church History in which the Bohemian brothers, Graf Zinzendorf and John Wesley were involved. These revivals were brought about by the Holy Spirit and, for very good reasons, the emphasis was placed completely on an individual relationship with Jesus and on individual salvation. When referring to governments, cities and nations, the collective side of the Biblical testimony became undesirable because it had been abused, misinterpreted and misused. It had lead to the chaos that I have just attempted to describe in a few words. Then, of course, with secularism and enlightenment the individual component was also highlighted from a secular point of view. In the last

few hundred years we have thus ended up with both the secular- and church-views being focused primarily on the individual side of things. These few reasons show why it's not easy to talk about Israel and the nations. It is evident that there have not been many theological reference points and examples over the past few hundred years.

### **Luther**

This, by the way, is one of the main reasons why it is so difficult for some evangelical believers, Bible teachers and pastors to find access to the revelation concerning Israel. It is quite simple for individuals to talk or preach or even to believe within the context of Jews becoming Christians or of Jews being saved because it is part of our frame of reference. But thinking about Israel as a collective entity and "all Israel" being saved (as written in Romans 11:25) is incomprehensible for many Bible believing evangelical Christians. Martin Luther, who was a young professor in Wittenberg during the time of the Reformation (1516, 1517), did a wonderful exposition of the letter of Romans. His students, who took notes, passed it on and we can still read it today. These reliable sources said that when Luther came to Romans 11:25, which speaks about the collective salvation of Israel, he more or less said the following: 'These verses remain dark to me. Who can believe them?'. This took place in 1516 and if you know something about the Reformation history you will remember that one year later, in 1517, he nailed his '95 Theses of Contention' on the door of the Wittenberg Church. It may be known to many of you that Luther became expressly anti-Semitic in the latter part of his life and the theological reason for his aggression against the Jews can be found in this: He just did not have *any* understanding of the collective calling of the Jewish people and of the covenant that God made through Abraham, and the other covenants that followed, with the Jewish people as a collective entity. Nor could he comprehend the salvation of the people of Israel in a collective manner in a time to come in the future that Paul speaks about in Romans 11:25 and the following verses.

And so it remained dark for Luther. He couldn't believe it even though he was a man of the Word. It was completely outside of his framework of thinking. And what was true for Luther was true for many Evangelical, many Pietistic and many Revival oriented believers, teachers and leaders. So this is part of the heritage we have to keep in the back of our minds when we start our journey in discovering the Biblical

testimony and witness about Israel and the nations.

The introduction was important in order for us to obtain the necessary sensitivity and understanding of what, exactly, we are talking about. You do not need to understand everything all at once but my hope is that, from the point of view of being intercessors and Christians with a priestly calling in our respective nations, I can communicate to you something that will create in you a loving concern for your nation and the relationship of your nation with Israel. Also the relevance of all of this in our times. My reason for becoming involved in these thoughts and research, is because of my deep, loving concern for my German people especially, as I am sure you will understand, given the history that Germany has with the Jewish people.

### **Nations in the book of Genesis**

So what does that mean for our nations? Let me pose two questions to stimulate your thinking. The first question is: When were nations mentioned the first time in the Bible? It obviously was not with Adam and Eve but somewhere along the line, nations were created, established or founded in the Bible. The answer is: nations were first mentioned in Genesis 10. After the flood and after God's covenant with Noah that you can read about in Genesis 8 and Genesis 9. Although some say there was a covenant made with Adam and Eve, from the Bible it is definite and clear that the covenant with Noah was the only covenant not made with the Jewish people alone. The Jewish people were not yet in existence at that time. This covenant was made with all mankind and even with all creation. We know that summer and winter will not pass, that sowing and harvesting shall not end and that the flood shall never again occur. The rainbow is a sign of the covenant with mankind and with creation. The rainbow, the covenant with Noah and his family, was a covenant of grace. And this is something I want to emphasize strongly. A covenant of grace. The flood shall never happen again. Summer and winter, as well as sowing and harvesting, shall never end. It is a covenant of blessing for mankind, for humanity and even for creation. A covenant that was an expression of the love of God towards mankind.

And then we read in Genesis chapter 10 that out of the three sons of Noah seventy nations were created and named. Seventy is an interesting number that has some meaning within the Hebrew context. Seven times ten (7 X 10). Two numbers.

Different forms of completion. Seven (7) points to a spiritual completion while ten (10) points more to a visible completion. Seven times ten (7 X 10) indicates that all nations came out from the three sons of Noah. The descendants of Noah are all named in Genesis chapter 10. All the development of the nations - the birth of the nations and the establishment of the family of nations - was under this covenant of grace and blessing that was given to Noah.

### **Nations in the book of Revelation**

Second question: When are nations mentioned in the Bible for the last time? I think most of us would say in the Book of Revelation because we are pretty familiar with people from all tribes and tongues coming to worship before the Throne of the Lamb while saying Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lamb! But the interesting thing, at least to me, is that the nations are still mentioned in the very last chapter of Revelation 22 - in the context of the New Jerusalem, the New Heaven and New Earth that is introduced to us in more detail in chapter 21. I want to read Revelation 22:1-3 to you: 'And he shows me a pure river of water of love, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.'

When I first discovered and pondered this consciously, it was mind-boggling! The nations did not become irrelevant when the Great Commission was completed. The nations did not become irrelevant after the Millennium. The nations are still important and relevant to God in the New Jerusalem and in this era of the New Jerusalem. It is amongst the last things God reveals to us through His Word: that the nations are still part of the picture, part of that eon. And again they are mentioned in a very loving way. The Lord made provision for the healing of the nations. And this, to me, is a very important point. It is obvious to me that the Lord Himself has a loving concern for nations. And of course for individuals. I do not reduce or remove that which the Lord has revealed regarding His care for you, for me and for all men on earth. It is not either/or! It's complementary. It's both. He cares for individuals and for nations. But we seem to have 'lost' the other half of that picture. That part of the picture that the Lord God Himself has a loving concern and made provision for the nations from the very beginning to the very end.

Let's digest this and attempt to understand what we have read:

1. The calling out of Abraham, the calling of the Jewish people, and
2. The standard that God is setting between the Jewish people and the nations within that framework.

In summary, I want to 'build a bridge' between Genesis 9 (which covers the Noachitic covenant) and Genesis 12 (which describes God's calling out of Abraham, His calling on Israel and the standard He set). What do we have in between? In Genesis 9 we have the covenant which is a covenant of grace and blessings. In Genesis 10, if I may simplify it and capture the essence, you find the nations evolving out of the three sons of Noah: Ham, Shem and Japhet. Thereafter you have the 70 nations mentioned.

### **Humanism and the Tower of Babel**

And the next thing that happens is the building of the Tower of Babel. The nations would collectively build the tower against God. They put their forces, their ingenuity, their ambition, their power and their unity together and they joined their efforts. They finally wanted to prove that man, and not God, was the deciding factor. 'Autonomous man' we would call it in modern language. The autonomous mind. Humanism. The beginning of Humanism and the mindset of Humanism. This terrible attitude of Humanism strongly displayed their motivation for building the tower of Babel.

It is no coincidence.. and this might be a bomb that I should not ignite, but am going to anyway.. and it is not by chance that one of the famous pictures of the building of the Tower of Babel according to records from the 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> century, was the main inspiration for the architect that planned the house for the Plenary Meetings of the Parliament of the European Union in Strasbourg. The architecture of this pretty impressive Plenary Meeting building was taken from a picture that was painted in the 17<sup>th</sup> century depicting the building of the Tower of Babel as described in Genesis chapter 11. Even today, the spirit of Humanism, that was present in Genesis 11, still has a stronghold in the building up of Europe.

The Spirit of Humanism was thus the driving force behind the building of the Tower of Babel as it is written in Genesis 11. And God judged it. He had to, and He did.

He not only judged it, He did three things: Firstly, He confused the languages - and we continue to suffer from this today. Secondly, He dispersed the people over all the earth. And thirdly, it is important to note, He called a man to form a unique nation amongst the nations. That man was Abraham. This can be viewed as 'God's response' to the building of the Tower of Babel, the attitude of pride and rebellion, of autonomy and the attempt to be rid of God. God's answer was this three-fold response: Languages were confused; people were dispersed, Abraham was called and, through him, the people of Israel was called out of the nations to be a holy and separated nation amongst the nations. They were to be a letter from God to the nations. A nation in which He could reveal His will, His commandments, His power, His love and promises and in which He could reveal His judgments. He could reveal Himself as a message to the peoples who came in rebellion against Him although he loves them and blessed them in the covenant with Noah. If you understand this picture and this scenario, then the relationship between Israel and the nations makes sense.

### **Israel amongst the nations**

That is how it started. And in that context it is said in Genesis 12:3 that those nations, O Israel, that bless you and regard you seriously, I will bless. And those nations that have a regard for Me and My Ten Commandments as well as the revelation of My will, I can and will bless. But those rejecting it, I will curse and judge. And God did.

This is the plumb line, the crimson thread, in the relationship between Israel and the nations of Genesis 12 verse 3, and this plumb line is still relevant today. I want to show it to you from the Bible. We will look at two Old Testament prophets and then to a new Testament reference. Thereafter we will come to some conclusions.

Firstly, we find a number of important indications when Joel talks about the nations and Israel in the end-times and I would like to make particular mention of the time factor here. We shall start by reading Joel 2:28-29:

“And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophecy, your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. And also on My

menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.”

To most of us, who have been touched by the ongoing revival or renewal movement over the last hundred years or so, I think these are familiar verses. These familiar words speak about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We’ve heard that it started at Pentecost where Peter quoted these verses extensively during his sermon at Pentecost. It started and would finish primarily, but not exclusively, with the Jewish people.

### **Pentecost**

The Holy Spirit was poured out on Cornelius and his household in the same manner as on the 120 Jewish people, or 3120 of them, on Pentecost . The outpouring of the Holy Spirit over all flesh, all nations and all peoples goes hand in hand with the fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matthew 28 or Matthew 24:14) as quoted by Jesus in His End Time sermon. And this gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the earth as a testimony for all the nations, and then the end shall come. The end will not come before the Gospel of the Kingdom will be spread over all the nations. This is the same thing as saying that the fullness of the Gentiles has to be completed before all Israel will be saved (Romans 11). These go together. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit started at Pentecost in Acts chapter 2. ‘That which the prophet Joel has spoken about is happening right before your eyes. For these are not drunk as you might think. Prophecy is becoming fulfilled before your eyes.’ That was the starting point of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that will not end before the gospel of the Kingdom has been preached to all ethnic groups and before all Israel will be saved. That is where it ends.

This is one reference point as far as timing is concerned. We can say that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit over all flesh was prophesied and was going to be a New Testament phenomenon. It speaks about things happening in New Testament times, and Peter quotes it in the New Testament in Acts chapter 2. So Joel prophesies about something that was to take place in New Testament times.

Then, in chapter 3 verse 1 we read something very interesting: “For behold in those days and at that time...” Let’s stop here for a moment. In which days and at what time? In the days in which the Holy Spirit is poured out on all flesh. In other words, the prophet says, whatever is described next will happen in *that* time

frame. Those days and those times. We can actually read it as follows: ‘in *New Testament days and New Testament times*’. “For behold, *in New Testament times* when I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem.” Another question: When were those times that the captives of Judah and Jerusalem have been brought back? It is now! And it’s happening before our eyes!

### **The return of the captives of Judah and Jerusalem**

It was not in Roman times for at that time they were dispersed, it was not in Byzantine times or in the time of the Crusaders, and it was not in the time of the Ottoman Empire. It started at the end of the Ottoman period. It basically started in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and has accelerated in the last 20 years especially from Russia and the east. 1.3 Million Jews have been brought to the land of Israel. They come from Ethiopia, they come from the north, from the south, from the east, from the west. They come from the ends of the earth and from the furthest islands of the earth. The largest inhabited island furthest away from Jerusalem, is New Zealand. I personally know some Jews from New Zealand who have made aliyah to Israel.

So, it refers to our times. We read again: “For behold, in New Testament days and New Testament times when I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem..” and here it comes: “I will also gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat”. So, in New Testament times and to be more precise, towards the end of New Testament times, in the times when the captives of Judah and Jerusalem are brought back to the land of Israel, there will be a gathering of the nations. A gathering of the nations in the Valley of Jehoshaphat. Other translators refer to it as the Valley of Decision. We read about this in clear terms in verse 14: “Multitudes, multitudes in the Valley of Decision. For the Day of the Lord is near in the Valley of Decision” Then we read: “The sun and the moon will grow dark. The stars will diminish their brightness...” These words are clear for those who have eyes to see, for those who have ears to hear. These are crystal clear references to the times in which we are living. The End Times. The time immediately before the return of Jesus. There will be a gathering of the nations. They will gather around Jerusalem and there God will have to judge them on the basis of Genesis 12 verse 3.

### **Judgment of the nations**

What are the criteria for the judgment of the nations? We find this mentioned in Joel directly after what we've read so far in the beginning of chapter 3. I shall repeat verses 1-2 before I continue: "Behold, in those New Testament days and that New testament time, in that time, when I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem (which is our times and time) I will also gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat, which is the Valley of Decision, and I will enter into judgment with them there on account of My people, My heritage, Israel."

Regarding the three reasons for God's judgment of the nations, the prophet is precise and specific. They will be judged in respect of what they did with the Jewish people. The people of Israel whom they - and that is the first reason - have scattered amongst the nations. In the second instance, they have also divided My land and thirdly, they have cast lots for my people. Number one and two are pretty clear. Number three possibly needs to be explained.

### **Scattering of the Jewish people**

Number one speaks about the 'scattering of the Jewish people'. Historically speaking and in the first instance, it happened when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and when the large dispersion took place in 70 AD, and in 135 AD. The two rivals were crushed and scattered as also prophesied by Jesus in His End Time discourses: the scattering of the Jewish people among all the nations. It happened one to two generations after Jesus' time but subsequently they were scattered repeatedly. They were driven out of Great Britain at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. At the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century they were driven out of Spain and Portugal. In Germany they were driven out of regions by regional leaders and kings and dukes and earls. Sometimes they were invited to settle for a generation or two and then driven out again. They drove them out time and again from different parts of Germany as well as from Eastern- and Western Europe. France drove them out at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. There were dispersions in Romania and Poland, there were pogroms here and there. The dispersion is not limited to the Roman times but is an integral part of European history. If there is no repentance and no redemption, then we as Europeans should be very concerned about the fate of our nations in the light of the history that lies behind us. Countries outside Europe, such as Africa, of course,

has a different history in that respect.

### **Division of the land**

The second criteria, namely the 'division of the land', is a current and acute matter. There is pressure on Gaza, Judea, Samaria and even Jerusalem to be divided and those who are putting pressure on Israel to do so, are on a collision course with the Word of God as it is spelled out here. There is grave danger in what the United States of America, the European Union and all the other nations are doing in order to add to the pressure on Israel to divide the land. It is dangerous for both Israel and those they give in to. We have to pray for Israel that they will remain strong and steadfast. This is the second criteria for judgment.

### **Casting lots for My people**

The third and last one mentioned here is 'casting lots for My people'. This has been well explained in prophetic language: "You have given a boy as payment for a harlot and sold a girl for wine that they may drink". What is meant by this prophetic language? I would suggest that what is meant is this: Jewish lives have been regarded to be worth little by the nations. They were completely worthless during the Holocaust in Germany and wherever Germany was in charge. A prostitute was worth more than the life of a Jewish man or woman. And that is what is being referred to here. A Jewish life was not worth more than the fee it cost to go into a harlot or the price of a bottle of wine that could be consumed within an hour. Jewish life is treated cheaply. These are thus the three criteria for judging the nations: Scattering the Jewish people, dividing the land and esteeming and treating Jewish life cheaply.

### **Jerusalem**

The prophet Zechariah is more precise and gives a framework and context. We read in Zechariah chapter 12 verse 9: "It shall be in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem". It is evident in this verse that the prophet Zechariah talks about exactly the same thing: The gathering of the nations against Jerusalem and then the judgment of the nations that have gathered against Jerusalem. It cross-references with Joel 3.

Now, let us take a closer look at the overall scenario. It is written in Zechariah 12:2-3: "Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding

peoples, when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem. 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.” Zechariah 12: 9-10: It shall be in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. “And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced.”

Zechariah 13:1: “In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness.”

Zechariah 14:2-4: “For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; The city shall be taken, The houses rifled, And the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, But the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth And fight against those nations, As He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives.”

Wow, what a scenario! What a picture. Let me rephrase this in order for us to better understand the deeper meaning.. Phase one: that’s chapter 12 verse 2. It speaks of the surrounding nations and about Jerusalem being a cup of trembling. There are different ways to understand that cup but in the language of the prophets in antique times, a cup of trembling was more or less generally understood to be a cup of wine which contained poison or drugs. It caused the most terrible lunacy. It was also a way for someone to take their own life as Socrates did or to take to take the life of someone else. It was a common way to kill a king or an unpleasant person. Cup of trembling. Cup of poisoned or drugged wine that causes you to lose your mind. Causes you to become crazy, irrational, furious and difficult to deal with. Jerusalem becomes that cup for the surrounding nations. Does that ring a bell? Have you been watching the news and reading the newspapers?

The surrounding nations are irrational. They are in a state of mind that is impossible to handle with Western diplomacy. Their state of mind prevents all rational dialogue. If you read about the uproar resulting from publication of the Mohammed cartoons in Denmark - not that I think publishing them was a

particularly clever thing to do - but the response was absolutely irrational and, dare I say it, almost demonic. The type of fury that it unleashed from the neighboring Islamic-Arabic countries, including Iran, was absolutely irrational. Jerusalem is that prophetic 'cup of trembling' or 'cup of fury' that causes you to lose your mind if you drink from it. And the full power and the full involvement of the conflict is still before us. Conflict around Jerusalem.

Regarding the neighboring nations, they are characterized by being irrational. Being out of their minds concerning the issue of Jerusalem. That's verse 2. Now, in verse 3 we have a different description. Jerusalem is again referred to but in this instance not only the surrounding nations are referred to, but all the nations. It's the next phase. It's the phase we are coming up to very quickly in my understanding.

And then a different picture is used to represent Jerusalem. It is not the cup of trembling any more. Now it's a heavy, burdensome stone. A stone that someone wants to displace. As far as I understand prophetic language in this instance, it's a border stone. And the nations of the world are united in their effort to change a border stone that God Himself has set there. God has set this stone. God has set, revived and repopulated Jerusalem. God has given back dignity to Jerusalem. He is rebuilding Jerusalem back to its original status, calling and meaning to the world. When we read Isaiah 62 - pray for Jerusalem and He has set watchmen around the walls of Jerusalem - we are to pray for the promises of God concerning Jerusalem to come into completion, fulfillment and fruition. And "Jerusalem" means, in the first instance, the physical city Jerusalem.

This is what's happening in our time. A hundred years ago Jerusalem was a meaningless city in the desert of Judea and apart from religion, politically speaking, it was completely irrelevant to the 20,000 or 30,000 inhabitants. Not of any relevance, apart from religious reasons to anybody. Newspapers in the 1880's or the 1890's would refer to Jerusalem once or twice a year. And then it was a territorial report. That's it. Completely opposite to today.

But... what are the nations up to? They want to change the status of Jerusalem. God has given Jerusalem the status of a priestly city, a prophetic city, the city of the Great King who will return to Jerusalem and more precisely, to the Mount of

Olives, as we've just read. And the nations do not like that status. They want to change that status. They want to internationalize and divide it, or whatever they have in mind. And that, in prophetic language, is changing the significance of the stone that God has set in Jerusalem. They want to change that stone. But God has said that whoever tries to put that stone, which is very heavy, in some other place, will be wounded. And that is exactly what is meant when it says in verse 9: 'it shall be that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem'. There will be judgment for peoples, tribes and nations who try to change the status that God has set as a cornerstone, as a boundary stone. Whoever tries to change that, will be injured.

### **Grace, supplication - and judgment**

This is the context of time within which we are living. It is written in verse 10 that one day, in the middle of this End Time conflict, the spirit of grace and supplication will be poured out. The Holy Spirit will be poured out on the whole nations. On the surrounding nations and all nations. In a very special and unique way. And they will see Him whom they have pierced. And the fountain will open up, cleansing of sin and of unrighteousness. (Zechariah 13:1) It is the same fountain that cleanses us from our uncleanness. That is the blood of Jesus.

But then the turmoil and conflict continues. And from what I understand in chapter 13, there is a cleansing within the Jewish people. I do not understand how 100% of the Israeli population will be saved in an instant, but there will be a national revival and a collective salvation. Israel will have a future. Israel is the ONLY nation in the world that has a Biblical promise about an eternal future. All the other nations are in danger... are in question. We don't know yet. Depending on how they treat Israel, they will have a future or their national identity will be wiped out. As it has been in the past with many nations. Many nations that were there in Biblical times are no longer there. They have been removed. That is judgment.

Having a national identity in the redeemed way is a blessing dear friends! It is not easy sometimes for us as Europeans to grasp, but it is a blessing to live in peace with your national identity. As much as it is a blessing to have peace with your gender identity. To have peace about being a male or female is a blessing. It's good. If you have peace within your family heritage it's good and it's a blessing. If

you find peace in your national identity, it's a blessing. If you do not have peace, it is difficult. I know what I'm talking about as a German. I came to these things in digesting our history and my personal connection with that history. It's not nice to be restless about your identity on whatever level. So healing for the nations, that is spoken about in Revelations 22, is what I desire for my German people. I really do! And for all the peoples as far as I am concerned. But that will depend on how the German people treat Israel and the Jewish people both now and in the End Times.

The story ends when, as the nations gather around Jerusalem, Jesus himself will return and make an end to the battle. In the first part of chapter 14 we read about the judgment Jesus will bring those nations into and in the second part of the chapter we read about Jesus' redemptive acts as King in Jerusalem. That is the scenario.

### **Judgment of the nations**

I am convinced that there is one New Testament reference, although not many see it and I'm not sure how you are going to handle it, but let's go to Matthew chapter 25. I think it's evident where I'm heading to... The judgment of the nations in verse 31-33: '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. 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. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left'. I think most of us are familiar with this parable but I also think most of us probably struggle with the full implication of this parable. At least, I did for quite a while. I really struggled with it and did not fully understand it. When reading through this familiar parable, it is quite easy to see it from the point of compassion for the weak, the poor, the naked, lonely and imprisoned.

Although I want to ensure you that none of that is irrelevant, I do want to suggest that it is not the complete meaning of the parable. In my understanding it is not even the core meaning. You see, many people, and even scholars, treat the contents of this parable of the goat and sheep on the same level as the parable of the Good Samaritan. They come to more or less the same conclusion by saying that the lesson Jesus taught in both the parables, is to be kind and love your neighbor

as yourself. Yes, it is relevant and important but that is not all there is to it. Maybe it is not even the most important aspect.

Why did Jesus start the way he did? Why did He start talking about the Son of Man's second coming in glory and all the holy angels with Him? That He will sit on his Throne of Glory which, in this instance, becomes a Throne of Judgment for those nations in question? This speaks about the second coming of Christ. That is a very clear indication you see. The parables of the Ten Virgins and the "sheep" and "goat" nations have to be seen in the context of what is spoken about in chapters 23 and 24. There Jesus talks about the birth pangs of the End Times. Diseases, upheaval and all the thing you are familiar with. Then it continues with the two parables: what to expect and how to behave in the End Times. I suggest that in the parable of the Ten Virgins He speaks about individual behavior while the parable of the sheep and goat nations refer to collective behavior. About how the nations should behave in End Times in view of the coming judgment, of the Valley of Jehoshaphat and in view of the Valley of Decision that is before them.

You see, when the Bible speaks about judgment of the nations from all the Old Testament references it is absolutely clear that is almost always has to do with how the nations treat Israel. I am convinced that this parable of Jesus builds upon the Old Testament revelation in respect of Israel and the nations especially as far as the End Times and judgment of the nations are concerned. There is a whole line of Biblical revelation that starts with Genesis 12, in the context of Genesis 9 to 12, and it runs through the Old Testament. Joel and Zechariah are the most prominent and explicit examples of this. You could go to almost any prophet and find indications within that context.

Now, why should that not be relevant in New Testament times? The nations remain relevant right up to the end. Even to the last eon that we have knowledge of (Revelation 22). Therefore, in my view, when talking about judgment in an End Time context, Jesus builds upon, and refers back to, the line of revelation and teaching of the Old Testament in respect of Israel and the nations of the Old Testament.

## United Nations

Let me conclude. There is an immediate question that arises when we talk about these things. On the one hand the Bible speaks about all nations being judged or coming into the Valley of Jehoshaphat and on the other hand, it talks about “sheep” and “goat” nations which imply that there is an opportunity for being spared of the judgment. How does it then fit together? I would like to give you my own personal understanding and opinion and that is how it should be taken and evaluated: I believe that there is a representation of the family of nations that is called the UN. We have recent history about how the UN can become active militarily and a prime example would be the first war against Saddam Hussein after his invasion of Kuwait. That is the first time that there was not only a UN resolution or a resolution of the Security Council and then of the Plenum. It was the first time that the UN said that a resolution is not enough. That action must be taken. And then what happened next? The vote was cast. The next question was who should participate against Saddam Hussein and Iraq and I think 13 nations participated militarily. My point is that individual nations will have a choice when it comes to the decision how to treat Israel, and in particular the question of Jerusalem. But it will take courage to go against the tide of world opinion.

Will your nation have that courage when the time of decision comes? And will you, as an individual Christian in your nation, have played your role in encouraging your government to stand on the side of God’s people and His holy city?