

# O Israel: Chapter 1

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I see the events occurring around the world and it stirs me. Once again Israel is in the spotlight. Israel became a nation in 1948 and has occupied much of the limelight of world history since then. We've read in the news lately about skirmishes between Israel and Palestine and also war in Afghanistan- and the two are related. Certainly Osama bin Laden, the Taliban and other terrorist groups and rogue nations have made it clear who their ultimate enemy is: Israel and any country aligned with her. Of course when we look at the nation of Israel, we see that their hands are stained with much blood as well. Things are heating up again in Israel.

Consider the uniqueness of the country and people of Israel. This is no ordinary country or people, is it? What other nationality can claim a unique history like Israel, who was scattered all around the world for 2600 years without a land to call its' own yet was able to maintain it's identity, gather back together and establish itself once again in its' home land? When Israel's five powerful Arab neighbors who outnumbered them more than 20 to 1 attacked Israel in 1947, no one expected Israel to survive and win the war, but they did. I groan to see the conflicts in the Middle East. The Bible tells me to pray for the peace of Israel, yet both sides in the conflict seem to have so little interest in peace and so much interest in vengeance. These events in Palestine and Israel are not surprising to those of us who believe the Bible, for the Bible prophesies that Israel would be the spotlight of world events in the end times. I'd like to take us through a little journey of the land and the nation of Israel and its Messiah from its' beginnings. We will look at four incredible promises to a man called Abram and see how the story plays out through today and to it's endings in the end times. Let us look at current events through the lens of the Scriptures and find understanding, for the handwriting is on the wall.

## **Four Promises:**

If you were asked for one passage in the Hebrew Scriptures that laid out a sketch of the history of the world, which one would you choose? Does such a passage exist? In Genesis twelve, I believe we have such a passage in a prophecy of four incredible promises to Abram 4100 years ago...

"The Lord said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.' So Abram left, as the Lord had told him...and they set out for the land of Canaan [present day Israel], and they arrived there...The Lord appeared to Abram and said, 'To your offspring I will give this land.' So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him."<sup>1</sup> 4100 years ago God gave these four promises to Abram and the rest of the Bible simply builds on these promises, filling in the details of how they would be

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 12:1-8

fulfilled both in the near term and at the consummation of history.

These promises are:

1. God would give Abram and his descendants a land of their own, which we know as Israel.
2. God would raise up a great nation or race, God's own treasured possession, from Abram.
3. God would bless all the peoples of the earth through this nation through a Messiah who would come through the nation and through the land, to reverse the effects of the curse of sin and death.
4. God would bless those who blessed this nation and land and those who clung to the Messiah, but those who cursed the land, the nation and its Messiah would be cursed.

Let's take a journey through the entire Scriptures to see how this wonderful story of four prophecies gets fulfilled, and come to an understanding today of where we are in relation to all these promises. What was it that Abram understood regarding these promises? For many generations stories had been passed down around campfires about the roots of their people. These stories were so ingrained in their culture that they were memorized and some would be written down by a scholar centuries later named Moses.

Let us put ourselves in Abram's shoes, assuming that at a minimum he had all the oral tradition of the stories in Genesis chapters one through eleven. How would Abram have understood and responded to these four promises? Abram understood that there was a God, whose name was the Lord, who created the universe and created Adam and Eve as the crown of His creation, made in the "image" of God- they bore the personality and mark of God in them. He would have understood that they were created sinless and had perfect communion between each other- that they were truly "one flesh"- intimate, naked and shameless before each other and in intimate communion with God as well, whom they communicated with. Abram would have understood that they were given the gift of a free will to choose whether or not to obey God to demonstrate their love and commitment to God, and that they made a willing choice to disobey Him, as did all their descendants. As a result, sin and death entered into the world, destroying their intimate relationship with each other, with God and even affecting their relationship with God's creation.

A vivid illustration of the impact of sin came when God, taking on a physical form, killed an animal before their very eyes, using the skin of the animal to cover up their nakedness. No longer would they be naked and unashamed, for sin had entered the world, and sin was a barrier in personal relationships. The murder of this innocent animal before their very eyes was their first taste of death and the consequences of sin. Sin bore its consequences as God, who was once so near, appearing in physical form and "walking in the garden in the cool of day,"<sup>2</sup> was now distant and rarely taking on a physical form, though revealing Himself through signs and occasionally taking on human likeness in the form of angels or men to communicate to man on special occasions.

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<sup>2</sup> Genesis 3:21

From the time God killed that first animal for Adam and Eve sacrifices were recorded as key events in establishing their descendant's covenant relationship with God. Noah made sacrifices and Abram did as well. Both understood and believed by faith that sin bore the consequences of death. Somehow an innocent third party would pay the price through its death, though this was a mystery how it all fit together. Somehow sacrifices would make them right before God, but they had to be offered again and again to make payment for sin. Abram also understood that God promised that through Eve's offspring that one would come one who would reverse the curse of sin and death, dealing a deathblow to Satan, but in the process this Messiah would be wounded somehow.<sup>3</sup> I wonder if Abram had any idea that this Messiah would Himself be a sacrifice. This would become clearer to Abram's descendants as the prophecies unfolded. It was made clear to Abram that this Messiah would be born through the lineage of Seth, Noah, Shem, Terah and Abram<sup>4</sup> and that God chose these people due to their faith and their actions of righteousness prompted by faith. Abram ran with his faith and took action, packing up his bags and leaving the land of his forefathers, the city of Ur of the Chaldeans, modern day Iraq, and journeying with his family to Canaan (modern day Israel) merely on four promises from God. Nearly ten years later in Abram's old age, God appeared to Abram again in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."<sup>5</sup> Abram reminded God of His four promises and that he was an old man and his wife Sarai was beyond childbearing age and Abram's only heir was Eliezer, who wasn't his child. How would God fulfill His four promises? The Lord replied, "'This man [Eliezer] will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir.' He took him outside and said, 'Look up at the heavens and count the stars- if indeed you can count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.' Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness. He also said to him, 'I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it...know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions.'"

## **Hagar and Ishmael, the Birth of the Arab Race**

Now you would think that Abram's faith here would be enough to sustain him. That faith would lead to action by helping his wife Sarai to conceive and patiently waiting upon God to do what He promised to do. After years of failed attempts to get Sarai pregnant Abram begin to doubt God and "help" God to fulfill the promise. (How often do we doubt God and seek ways to "help" Him to keep His promises?) "Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar; so she said to Abram, 'The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her. Abram agreed to what Sarai said. So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. He slept with Hagar, and

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<sup>3</sup> Genesis 3:8

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 3:15

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 4:3, 6:8, 18, 7:1, 9:9, 11-17, 26, 11:10-26

she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. Then Sarai said to Abram, 'You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the Lord judge between you and me.' 'Your servant is in your hands,' Abram said. 'Do with her whatever you think best.' Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her."<sup>6</sup> Through Hagar and her child Ishmael were born the Arabs. This was the beginning of tension that has existed throughout history between the Arabs and the Israelis. God promised Hagar and her descendants many blessings through an angel that visited Hagar, "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count."<sup>7</sup> In the midst of promises of blessings, however, was a prophecy that the descendants of Hagar through her son Ishmael would be in conflict with the descendants of the child of promise that the Lord had promised through Sarai, whose name would be Isaac. "The angel of the Lord also said to her: 'You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael for the Lord has heard of your misery. He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers.'"<sup>8</sup>

What was Sarai thinking in proposing that her maid sleep with her husband and become his wife??? What was Abram thinking in going along with the idea and introducing this friction and competition into the home? Can there ever be peace in a house with two women vying for one man? This passage lays the foundation for today's Arab-Israeli conflict: it all started out as a family feud. What would have happened if Abram and Sarai had just trusted the Lord and waited on Him for a solution to Sarai's barrenness? Instead, there was friction between Hagar and Sarai and between their sons, Isaac and Ishmael, and then their descendants. Through Ishmael we can trace the Arab people, who, as prophesied here, have ever since been enemies of Israel, the descendants of Jacob, Abram's grandson through Isaac.

## **Isaac and Jacob, the Promises to Abram Continue**

Later the Lord sent three angels to Abram to reassure Abram that He would still provide Sarah a son in her old age, though she was barren, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son."<sup>9</sup> Just as promised, Sarah gave birth to a son and named him Isaac. Hagar mocked Sarah at the birth of her son and Sarah said to Abraham, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac."<sup>10</sup> Abraham was greatly distressed over all of this, for he loved Hagar and Ishmael as well. The Lord told him, "Do not be so distressed about the boy and your maidservant. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. I will make the son of the maidservant into a nation also, because he is your offspring."<sup>11</sup> So Hagar took

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<sup>6</sup> Genesis 15:1

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 16:1-6

<sup>8</sup> Genesis 16:10

<sup>9</sup> Genesis 16:1-12

<sup>10</sup> Genesis 18:10

<sup>11</sup> Genesis 21:10

Ishmael and they left and through Ishmael many great nations were formed. Thus the four promises to Abraham would indeed pass through Isaac while Ishmael and his descendants would be blessed as well. Indeed the Hebrew Scriptures records blessings through Ishmael- that out of him would come great nations and blessings. Surely these have been fulfilled and God has blessed the Arabs with abundance in their land, particularly lately with oil.

God changed Abram's name to Abraham, meaning, "Father of many." God then tested Abraham's faith by asking him to offer his son Isaac on the altar as a sacrifice, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."<sup>12</sup> Imagine what must have been running through Abraham's mind that night, "Here you give me a son and I love him dearly. You've told me that this son Isaac is the promised one. How can you now ask me to offer him up? I've already lost one son. Now will I lose another?" As Abraham wrestled with this, he came to a resolve of obedience. Though he didn't understand what God had in mind, he believed that since God was miraculously able to give him a son in the first place that God would still somehow make it all work out, for his faith had grown confident that God always fulfilled His promises. With faith, early in the morning Abraham arose, packed for the journey and went to mount Moriah with his son. Isaac asked him, "Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"<sup>13</sup> To which Abram replied, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." Just when he was about to sacrifice Isaac on the altar, God called out, "Abraham! Abraham...Do not lay a hand on the boy...Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." "Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, 'On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.' The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, 'I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.'<sup>14</sup> God had tested Abraham's faith, devotion and love and found it solid- he was willing to sacrifice that which he loved the most on the altar in obedience to God. If that was the kind of test that God used to test Abraham's love, is it not reasonable that God would demonstrate His love sacrificially in the same way? Surely God's love for Abraham and for the world far outweighed Abram's sacrificial love for God and it would likewise be demonstrated by an extreme sacrifice to pay for the sins of the world.

Abraham never did obtain the four promises he was given- they would have to wait for his descendants. The rest of Genesis expands on these promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob through whom the four promises to Abraham would be fulfilled. In the midst of

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<sup>12</sup> Genesis 21:12-13, cf. 28:14

<sup>13</sup> Genesis 22:2

<sup>14</sup> Genesis 22:7

these stories are many references to the four promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to grow into a great nation and inherit the land of Canaan (I encourage you to go back through the footnotes and trace all of these references)<sup>15</sup> Jacob's name was changed to Israel<sup>16</sup> from whom the nation (people) Israel would be born. On his death bed Jacob makes this prophecy: out of the lineage of Israel's son Judah a line of kings would be established that would end with a final King who would command the obedience of all the nations. He would be the Messiah and establish His throne forever and reign as King over all the earth. "The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his."<sup>17</sup> Genesis ends by telling the story of how seventy of Isaac's family ended up in Egypt, setting the stage for four hundred years of slavery and the Israelite women becoming very fertile, filling the land with babies to set the stage for the fulfillment of one of the Lord's promises to Abraham<sup>18</sup>.

The next book in the Hebrew Scriptures (Exodus) then records the fulfillment of God's first promise, to make Abraham into a great nation. After 430 years the Israelites went from a population of seventy to over four million. The second promise to Abraham is then fulfilled: to lead the Israelites out of slavery to a land flowing with milk and honey. "The Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous, so that the land was filled with them."<sup>19</sup> "During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them...I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey- the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites."<sup>20</sup> Thus in every way God consistently acted toward Israel according to the covenants or agreements that He made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Consider how appropriate it was that Pharaoh and Egypt hardened their hearts towards the Israelites. If they hadn't, there would have been no desire for the Israelites to leave Egypt to claim all that God had for them in Canaan. Instead, they cried out to the Lord for deliverance and when the time was ripe, God prepared Moses to deliver them. Consider the birth of modern day Israel in 1948. What precipitated it? There was a stream of Jewish settlers returning to Palestine before World War II broke out due mainly to the persecution of Jews in Russia. Once news got around about Hitler's atrocities, Jews from all over Europe flooded into Palestine, a safe haven under British control. Just as God hardened Pharaoh's heart, can't we say that God used the evil men Stalin and Hitler to accomplish His purposes of creating once again the nation of Israel? This is not new information! Just recently on MSNBC I heard Israel's Prime Minister Sharon

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<sup>15</sup> Genesis 22:11-12

<sup>16</sup> Genesis 22:13-18

<sup>17</sup> Genesis 24:7, 26:3-4, 24, 28:3-4, 14, 32:12, 35:11-12, 45:7, 46:3, 48:4, 21, 50:20, 24

<sup>18</sup> Genesis 32:28

<sup>19</sup> Genesis 49:10, cf. Numbers 24:17, 19

<sup>20</sup> Genesis 47:27

comment on the establishment of the kingdom (it was a news clip from earlier years). The Jews consider the events that have taken place in Israel as a direct fulfillment of prophecy!

The covenants God makes are everlasting covenants that will never change. We must remember this as we approach the end times, for the promises that God has made toward Israel are everlasting and must be taken literally, not symbolically. To stress this, God repeated these promises towards Israel in nearly every book in the Hebrew Scriptures and reinforced these points in the New Testament. Because God is faithful in His promises to Israel, we can take great comfort as well that any promises God has made to us can be trusted to be fulfilled as well, "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?"<sup>21</sup>

After God delivered the Israelites out of Egypt through miracles and signs, they were tested for their faith in the desert. They had seen the mighty hand of God make them into a great nation and deliver them out of Egypt as He had promised. He had also promised to help them conquer the land of Canaan, destroying the nations that were there, but their hearts grew faint when reports came back from spies that the enemy was powerful. In the heat of the desert they doubted, so God let them wander in the wilderness for forty years until a faith filled new generation was ready to claim the land. I wonder how often we doubt the promises of God in the heat of our deserts? There God is, waiting for us to live the blessed life He is offering us, full of wonderful promises, but in our lack of faith we fail to go "into the land" and conquer the "enemy"- that enemy often being doubt, the enemy of faith. God calls us not to shrink back but to claim His promises and live our lives in the spiritual land of milk and honey, the blessings of a life that has yielded itself by faith to God. The land of Canaan was a gift from the Lord to the Israelites. All they had to do was claim it. How many gifts from God do we miss out on because of our lack of faith to claim them?

### **The Miracle of the Birth of Israel and God's Four Promises to Abraham**

Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy (the 2nd through 5th books in the Hebrew Scriptures) lay out how Israel was to live in the land and distinguish themselves as God's chosen people, a holy nation set apart for His purposes to accomplish the four promises given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. All of this raises many questions to Gentiles (non-Jews) like myself. Why? Why would God choose a nation like Israel? What's so special about them? They certainly aren't the strongest nation! They don't seem to be extraordinary regarding morality- they seem repeatedly throughout their history to reject God's calling upon their lives. Why Israel? God had come up with a plan to use a nation and a land to reveal His Messiah, One who would bless all nations, but why Israel?

At twelve years old I organized neighborhood tackle football games. At the start of each game was the ritual of determining who would be on which team, as each captain chose players. Those were awkward moments when the passion for victory overcame loyalties to friends! It was a painful process for some. Those times I wasn't the captain I would always hate it if I wasn't picked first. Isn't that a natural tendency in life for all of us?

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<sup>21</sup> Exodus 1:7, cf. 1:11-12, 20

We hate not to be the chosen ones, don't we? God has revealed a master plan for the salvation of mankind through a nation, Israel. Isn't there a natural tendency to say, "Why Israel?" Throughout history Jews have been picked on. They have been a natural scapegoat- there has always been something different and unique about them, an identity that different groups at different times tried to erase, such a Hitler's campaign to extinguish them from the earth, or the Arab's desires these last fifty years to eliminate them in war, or various crusades carried out against the Jews "in the name of Christ" during the middle ages. Some preachers even have a tendency to make America out as if it is the chosen country, a light to the world, and apply the Bible promises of Israel to our country. They are greatly mistaken in their ethnocentrism! I suspect other cultures tend to do this as well. The Muslim religion focuses its attention on the Arab peoples as the chosen race, setting themselves up as enemies of the Jews. There's a natural tendency in each of us to covet that which isn't ours. None of us wants to be 2nd in line. The Lord made a plan to choose the nation of Israel. Can we accept that plan as God's perfect plan?

Let us see the establishment of Israel as a country at circa 1400 B.C. as nothing short of a miracle. "Ask now about the former days, long before your time, from the day God created man on the earth; ask from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of? Have any other people heard the voice of God speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived? Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by miraculous signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes? You were shown these things so that you might know the Lord is God; besides him there is no other...Because he loved your forefathers and chose their descendants after them, he brought you out of Egypt by his Presence and his great strength, to drive out before you nations greater and stronger than you and to bring you into their land to give it to you for your inheritance, as it is today."<sup>22</sup> These people, accustomed to a life of slavery and numbering about four million, had no military experience. They were led across a desert into a heavily fortified land, part of the "fertile crescent", a land "flowing with milk and honey" that was jealously guarded by the nations that were there. What chance did a rag-tag group of nomad ex-slaves with virtually no weapons (and any they might have had they didn't know how to use) have of taking this land filled with the latest technology of chariots, horses and fortified cities? It would take nothing less than a miracle to make it happen, and that's just what the Lord gave them. "You may say to yourselves, 'These nations are stronger than we are. How can we drive them out?' But do not be afraid of them; remember well what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt. You saw with your own eyes the great trials, the miraculous signs and wonders, the mighty hand and outstretched arm, with which the Lord your God brought you out. The Lord your God will do the same to all the peoples you now fear. Moreover, the Lord your God will send the hornet among them until even the survivors who hide from you have perished. Do not be terrified by them, for the Lord your God who is among you, is a great and awesome God. The Lord your God will drive out those nations before you, little by little. You will not be allowed to eliminate them all

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<sup>22</sup> Exodus 2:23-25, 3:7-9, cf. 3:17, 6:4-5, 8, 32:13, Numbers 14:9, Deuteronomy 1:10, 34:4



at once, or the wild animals will multiply around you. But the Lord your God will deliver them over to you, throwing them into great confusion until they are destroyed. He will give their kings into your hand, and you will wipe out their names from under heaven. No one will be able to stand up against you; you will destroy them.”

“When you go to war against your enemies and see horses and chariots and an army greater than yours, do not be afraid of them, because the Lord your God, who brought you up out of Egypt, will be with you. When you are about to go into battle, the priest shall come forward and address the army. He shall say: ‘Hear, O Israel, today you are going into battle against your enemies. Do not be fainthearted or afraid; do not be terrified or give way to panic before them. For the Lord your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory.’”

“This very day I will begin to put the terror and fear of you on all the nations under heaven. They will hear reports of you and will tremble and be in anguish because of you.”

Repeatedly the Lord reminded Israel that their confidence lay in the fact that He was a covenant God who would not abandon the four promises that He made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, “See, I have given you this land. Go in and take possession of the land that the Lord swore he would give to your fathers- to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob- and to their descendants after them.”<sup>23</sup> God has responded to Israel throughout history, not because of their faithfulness, but because He is a covenant keeping God! He had a plan to use this unlikely nation, a nation that was weak and stubborn and through them be a blessing to the whole world!

## **Why War? Judgment on Canaan**

One of the reasons God chose Israel to conquer and destroy the people of Canaan was a simple one: the people of Canaan were an extremely wicked people and God used Israel to mete out judgment against them. These peoples were involved in despicable practices such as temple prostitution and offering their firstborn child on the altar to their gods<sup>24</sup>. The Lord warned Israel not to follow in their practices, but to drive out these wicked people, that He might establish the Israelites as a separate people, set apart for His holy purposes.

Many people have lumped together Christianity and the Bible as just another religion and holy book that causes war. Let us take a close look at this and see that there is a complete lack of understanding in this regard. People complain about Christianity and the Bible: “Were there not people killed in the Bible all in the name of God?” “One needs to be watchful of fundamentalists in any religion- they're the ones causing the wars.” “What about the crusades?” “What about Northern Ireland?” “I read in the news of an abortion clinic being bombed- all in the name of religion.” The general idea these people argue is that wars over religion can all be lumped together. Those making such statements don't

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<sup>23</sup> Numbers 23:19

<sup>24</sup> Deuteronomy 4:32-38

want Christians to point out the differences between Christianity and other religions regarding war, human rights and love for one's neighbors, for that would burst their "politically correct" world view that "All religions are basically the same. There are many ways to God. What matters is not what you believe, but that you believe. One can't be narrow minded!" This issue must be addressed- both through understanding the wars that took place as Israel established itself as a nation and later on as we come to an understanding of what Christianity teaches about loving one's enemy and a Christian's social/political responsibility.

Let us start with a correct understanding of why the Lord had Israel drive out its enemies from the land of Canaan. The Lord told Israel, "If you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you. Everyone who does any of these detestable things- such persons must be cut off from their people. Keep my requirements and do not follow any of the detestable customs that were practiced before you came and do not defile yourselves with them. I am the Lord your God."<sup>25</sup>

## **Why War? To Keep Israel as God's Set Apart People**

The Lord told Israel, "When you cross the Jordan into Canaan, drive out all the inhabitants of the land before you...but if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land, those you allow to remain will become barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides. They will give you trouble in the land where you will live."<sup>26</sup> The Lord was a "jealous God" who didn't want Israel to "prostitute" herself<sup>27</sup> to other gods, but instead Israel was to be "separate from things that make them unclean, so they will not die in their uncleanness for defiling my dwelling place, which is among them."<sup>28</sup> God made clear that He would make a "distinction between my people and your people"<sup>29</sup> and that they were to be a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation,"<sup>30</sup> a "treasured possession,"<sup>31</sup> "singled out,"<sup>32</sup> who were to "be holy...because I, the Lord, am holy"<sup>33</sup> because the Lord "set his affection on your forefathers and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations."<sup>34</sup> Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures Israel is the apple of the Lord's eye<sup>35</sup>. He is a holy God and those who worship Him must separate themselves for His purposes, as a wife separates herself to her husband in marriage.

Once a year Aaron the high priest entered the Holy of Holies, God's permanent presence among His people, to offer sacrifices for the sins of all the people. Aaron wore a garment "with the names of the sons of Israel over his heart on the breastpiece of decision as a

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<sup>25</sup> Deuteronomy 7:17-24

<sup>26</sup> Deuteronomy 20:1-4, cf. 20:1-4, 10-18, Exodus 23:20, 30

<sup>27</sup> Deuteronomy 2:25

<sup>28</sup> Deuteronomy 1:8

<sup>29</sup> Deuteronomy 12:29-31, 18:9-13

<sup>30</sup> Leviticus 18:28-30, cf. 18:3-5, 20:22-24, Genesis 9:18-27

<sup>31</sup> Numbers 33:51-56

<sup>32</sup> Exodus 34:10-16

<sup>33</sup> Exodus 34:15

<sup>34</sup> Leviticus 15:31

<sup>35</sup> Exodus 8:23, cf. Numbers 23:9-10

continuing memorial before the Lord."<sup>36</sup> This is a visual demonstration of the love of the Lord for His chosen people. Has not God called us out today as well to live a life of holiness and not involve ourselves in the detestable practices of our world and our culture? Jesus graphically challenged us, "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell." \_

How easy it can be to let a little sin remain in our lives and it catches up to us and eventually destroys us. The Lord knew that Israel's evil Canaanite neighbors would be a snare to them, enticing them and destroying Israel from the inside out through immorality. Thus they had to be driven out through war and purged from the land. Peter reminds us of the parallel between God setting Israel apart for His purposes and God setting apart Christians for His purposes, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."<sup>37</sup> Are we setting ourselves apart today from the sin that wages war against us? This was the desire God had for Israel- to set them apart from the sinful practices of the Canaanite nations.

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<sup>36</sup> Exodus 19:3-6, Deuteronomy 28:9-10

<sup>37</sup> Deuteronomy 7:6-9, 26:18-19

## **References Continued**

1 Kings 8:52-53

Leviticus 20:26

Deuteronomy 10:14-15, cf. 26:19, 28:1

Deuteronomy 32:9-10

Exodus 28:29

Matthew 5:29

1 Peter 2:9-12