



# Olive Press Quarterly

ISRAEL'S ROLE IN WORLD MISSION

The conclusion of God's Kingdom purpose?

by

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'Olive Press Quarterly'*

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*The Editor*

## Israel's role in World Mission

Tim Price

One of the strongest images of God's relationship with Israel is that of Shepherd and in John 10:11,14 Jesus applies that role to himself *"I am the Good Shepherd"* In Ezekiel 35 the Lord indicts the leadership or shepherds of Israel and removes them from tending his flock. That judgment finally comes to pass in the parable of the wicked tenants where Jesus says to the religious leaders, *"I tell you that the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit."*

This is perhaps one of the most misunderstood parables in so far as many within the Church have concluded that this is judgment on the whole of Israel and that the Jewish people no longer have a part to play in the outworking of God's purposes in salvation. Whilst the exclusivity of God's kingdom purpose is taken from Israel and given to another, this does not mean that God has abandoned or forsaken the Jewish people; to do so would break the covenant he made with Abraham

### **Israel's Calling**

The unique calling of Israel from among the nations is that she is a blessing to the nations and her mission is articulated in Exodus 19:4b-6. *"Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all the nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."*

Israel's vocation was to be a nation under God called to bear witness to the reality of the One True God among the nations.

In the Coming of Christ this calling is embodied in the person of Jesus and articulated through the words of Simeon in Luke 2:30-32, *"For my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Nations (Goyim or Gentiles) and for the glory of your people Israel."*

What is clear here is not a sidelining of the nation of Israel, they remain God's glory, but a widening of the mission entrusted to Israel to the whole people of God - both Jew and Gentile, so that the Apostle Peter is confidently able to say to the Christians facing persecution in Rome, *"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."* 1 Peter 2:9

An echo of the promise of what the Messiah will accomplish in Isaiah 9:2, *"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light, on those living in the shadow of death a light has dawned."*

## **Expansion of the Kingdom**

With the coming of Christ what is taking place is an expansion of God's Kingdom from its exclusivity to Israel to include all the nations. An intention in God's original covenant with Abraham, ratified with Isaac and then Jacob, that through you and your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed.

In John 10 we begin to see how this unfolds. Verse 14 says, *"I am the Good Shepherd; I know my sheep and*

*my sheep know me-just as the Father knows me and I know the Father- and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.”* Israel’s calling is to be priest to the nations and supremely in Jesus the High Priest, he embodies that calling.

### **One New Humanity**

In Ephesians we see that expressed in the one new humanity, which comprises neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, neither slave nor free. This does not mean these categories cease to exist, but in Christ the dividing wall is broken down as God creates a unity of that which was once separate. In effect he is creating the one sheep pen.

This is expressed poetically in the blessings given to Noah in Genesis 9:7, *“May God extend the territory to Japheth; may Japheth live in the tents of Shem.”*

There remains a fundamental link between Israel and the nations that is meant to be a blessing to both. Sadly for 2000 years neither Israel nor the Church have really understood this and the outcome has been to detriment of both. Israel has been alienated from her Messiah and the Church has missed out on the blessings of her calling to make Israel envious (Romans 11). God is ultimately working his purposes out concerning the salvation of both Israel and the nations, which since the First Coming of Christ has been invested and entrusted to the Church as the whole people of God.

### **Missiological Priority**

One of the most memorable encounters Jesus has is with the woman at Jacob’s well at Sychar. For in this

encounter the beginning of how God is to accomplish his salvation purposes are revealed. When the woman challenges Jesus over the authentic place in which God must be worshipped. Jesus says *“Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain, (Mount Gerizim sacred to the Samaritans), nor in Jerusalem, (sacred to the Jews). You Samaritans worship what you do not know, we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.”* Jesus knew that with his coming the ancient animosities between Jew and Samaritan, Jew and Gentile will be ultimately set aside in the global sweep of the Gospel leading to the fulfilment of the prophecy that the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters covers the sea. (Habakkuk 2) That said, the manner in which that will be accomplished according to God’s priorities. ‘salvation from the Jews’ remains the missiological priority, to which the Church has largely forgotten or ignored.

In Romans 1 Paul articulates this priority very powerfully like this *“For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”*

I cannot stress this strongly enough, the priority of sharing the Gospel amongst Jewish people first and foremost remains. It is a mission priority.

## Early Church

It is to the Jewish disciples of Jesus that the Great Commission is given in Matthew 28. It is to the representatives of Israel, in the form of these disciples, that the original mission of Israel to the nations is to be given a dramatic new impetus on the Jewish Feast of Shavuot or Pentecost. Today Jewish people look back on the Giving of the Torah at Mount Horeb at this festival and Christians celebrate the Coming of the Holy Spirit, the very Spirit which Jeremiah says is to write God's Law upon our hearts. There is a remarkable correlation that with the Giving of the Law over 3000 are slain as a result of rebellion while Moses is receiving the Law. On the Day of Pentecost over 3000 Jewish people are swept into the Kingdom, as the Holy Spirit is poured out on Israel.

The Church began as an 'All Jewish' affair, that with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the Jewish religious world was shaken to its foundations. It is reckoned that the Notzrim, the followers of Jesus were such a force in Jerusalem, that they shaped much of the agenda. Some even believe that James, the brother of Jesus, became High Priest before he was murdered. Sadly the largely Gentile Church of today, has forgotten the strength of the Jewish Church in its early years. It has forgotten that it was the Jewish Church that came to a mind that the Holy Spirit has 'gone even unto the Gentiles' following the conversion of Cornelius.

Thousands perhaps even millions of Jewish people recognised and followed Jesus as Messiah even though Israel leaders never did so and so brought the whole nation under judgement.

## **First to the Synagogue**

When Paul began his mission beyond Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, he always went first to the synagogue in each town or city he visited, thus enshrining the principle of “to the Jew first”. It was also as he embarked on these same missions, he observed something that profoundly led to the moving chapters of Romans 9-11 as he wrestles with the apparent stalling of the Jewish Mission in Rome.

At the end of Acts as Paul finally arrives in Rome he calls together the leaders of the Jews in the city, and thus obeying the missiological priority. It is in this discourse when many of the leadership harden their hearts to the message of the Gospel, Paul concludes. *“There I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen”*

Many have concluded that statement was the final nail in the coffin of Jewish mission, and although, as in Rome, individual Jews can and will still come to faith, the priority has moved to the Gentile world.

Thank goodness that wasn’t Paul’s conclusion and although he realised that the ‘tilt’ point had moved decisively towards the Gentiles God had not abandoned the Jewish people.

## **Romans 9-11**

Through Romans chapters 9-11 Paul wrestles with the apparent rejection by God of his own people and in so doing the Christian world gains a powerful insight into God’s ultimate purposes in seemingly setting aside the Jewish people.



In Romans 9:30 Paul poses a question, *“What then shall we say? That the Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith, but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness has not obtained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the “stumbling stone”. As it is written: “See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”*

As Israel regathers from among the nations in their ancient land, many Jewish people are struggling as to why the dispersion or diaspora lasted so long. The last 2000 years since the destruction of the Jewish state by the Romans has been known as “The Great Exile”. In recent years there has been a reappraisal of the person of Jesus, with many Rabbinic schools whilst still not recognising his claim to be the Messiah, nevertheless are recognising him as one of their own, after so many years when he was seen as a largely Western and Gentile leader of another ‘Faith community’.

### **Jewish resistance to the Gospel**

Here then Paul is tackling the whole question of Jewish resistance to the Gospel and his own anguish over their rejection of Jesus as their Messiah

In the opening verses of chapter 10 Paul pours out his heart over the hardness of Israel and says, *“Brothers, my heart’s desires and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved”*

In the next verses he makes a clear argument that there is no impediment for any Jewish person receiving the Gospel as he says, *“There is no difference between Jew and Gentile-the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him”*

He then goes to ask whether they have heard it or understood it and concludes that they clearly have and therefore there is no appeal not to have heard or indeed understood the Gospel.

At the beginning of chapter 11 Paul takes a different tack as to why Jewish people are failing to accept the Gospel and Paul goes on to ask whether the fault lies in a decision by God.

*“I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. He then goes on to assert quite categorically “God did not reject his people”*

Paul is crystal clear the blame does not lie with God. It is not God who is rejecting his people. A fact not acknowledged by the Church Fathers who were very forthright in expressing the opinion that God had finished with the Jews.

Paul aware that his people have stumbled over the rock of offence of Jesus asks whether their position is unrecoverable, *“Did they stumble beyond recovery?”* Have they gone *past the point of no return* and Paul categorically states, *“Not at all”*

He then goes to heart of the controversy and says, *“Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles”*

Why? - to make Israel jealous ! (‘envious’ – NIV)

## Setting aside is redemptive

God has never ceased in his faithfulness or love of Israel and indeed even his seeming setting aside has a redemptive purpose. The spread of the Gospel to the Gentile world was to make Israel envious of the blessings she thought were hers by right.

How sad that for the last 2000 years, the Church rather than making her jealous has alienated Israel from her Messiah and made even the name of Jesus a name of offence and a curse to Jewish people.

How much the Church needs to repent for its own appalling attitude towards Jewish people during the long years when 'Shem has been dwelling in the tents of Japheth', as Israel has been in diaspora among the nations. She needs to repent of her ingratitude and of her failure to acknowledge the debt owed to Israel, and of her failure to make her envious

Over the last two millennia amazingly there has always been a Jewish presence within the Church. When I go to churches on deputations, invariably someone comes to me, to say they are Jewish. There are a number of Jewish clergy within the Church of England.

Yet the vibrant Jewish presence with which the Church began has been suppressed through the long years of Gentile domination within the Church. How sad that at the ecumenical council of Nicea, no Jewish bishop was present. Even sadder that all Jewish connections were largely severed thereafter. Any Jewish expression marginalised or deliberately excised.

Is it any wonder that many Jewish people fail to recognise in the Church anything that will draw them to their Messiah?

## **The Mission of Israel**

The theme of this booklet concerns on the one hand the restoration of Israel to their Messiah and on the other the completion of the mission entrusted to her in bringing the nations to acknowledge the One True God. In Romans 11:12 Paul says, *“But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring?”* or in verse 15 *“For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?”*

Here we see a two fold action, if through their transgression and setting aside great blessings have come both to the world and to the Gentiles, how much greater will be the blessings when as it were God turns his eye back upon the Jewish people.

It is similar thought in the correlation between the reconciliation that has come to Gentiles through the rejection of the Jewish people and what it will mean when they embrace and accept Jesus as their Messiah. Whatever “life from the dead” may mean it certainly sounds like something special for the world when they are back within the fold.

### **Olive tree analogy**

In using the analogy of the wild olive branch in referring to the Gentiles being ingrafted into the stock of Israel, Paul concludes that it is a much easier thing to graft in the natural branches back into their own olive tree.

We forget that as Gentiles it is we who were once the outsiders looking in on Israel's blessings. It was no mean thing for God to bring us into his purposes, it went against the grain. As Paul makes clear in Ephesians 2:11, *"Remember that you were separate from Christ, excluded from the citizenship in Israel, foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. That was what it meant to be to be a wild olive branch, cut off from all the nourishment of the natural olive tree. But as Paul goes on to say "But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ"*

### **Don't take it for granted**

Israel has been hardened for the express benefit of us who are non-Jews, and Paul reminds us not to take this for granted in our attitude towards the Jewish people and their status before God. Paul gives express warning, which the Church has ignored, not to be arrogant towards the Jewish people if we are not to suffer the same fate or worse. In Romans 9:4,5 Paul itemizes each and every benefit the Jewish people receive as an ongoing commitment by God to his covenant people, *"Theirs is the adoption as sons, theirs is the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ who is God over all, forever to be praised"*. They have the whole 'bang shoot', it is no big deal to graft such a cultivated branch back in. It is no wonder that Paul is so full of hope when he reflects upon what their inclusion will mean for the spread of the Gospel.

As the Church grew out from its Jewish heartland the Jewish branch eventually withered as the Gentile branch came to dominate. Although Jewish people formed part of the Church, they became a minority, with Gentiles values dominating. The question of any future role for Jewish people was either ignored, forgotten or suppressed. In the sad history of Christian anti-Semitism, the forced conversion of Jews to the Christian faith must mark its nadir as thousands were either exiled, murdered or *forced* to embrace the Christian faith.

### **Double anti-Semitism**

This attitude of the Church historically has made the task of Israel's restoration to her Messiah more complex and certainly today, there are many who oppose any Jewish evangelism precisely because they believe the Church has forfeited its right to share the Gospel as the outcome of its own historical animosity towards the Jewish people. Thus Jewish people face a double discrimination concerning the Gospel. They are subject to a double antisemitism. On the one hand they have been alienated from the Gospel by their own rejection of their Messiah, but they are further alienated by the Church's own oppression of the Jewish people which is now embarrassed or inimical to sharing the Gospel with Jewish people. Despite the hostility of the Church to Jewish mission, there have been many down the ages who have remained firmly committed to the view that the Jewish people will be restored to their Messiah.

## **The Reformation**

What marked a key turning point in which the concept of Jewish mission began to take on a renewed urgency? It could be said to have begun in part with the Reformation.

Luther was convinced that with the rediscovery of the understanding of God's grace as the means of salvation, this would be the catalyst for the conversion of the Jewish people. When they failed to respond, he turned violently against them and believed there would never be a great conversion of the Jewish people. This was also the view of Calvin. However not so Calvin's followers who came to a belief that with the conversion of the Jews, widespread revival would occur among the Gentiles, before the Return of Christ

## **The Puritan Hope**

The Puritans had a significant role to play not only in the birthing of the missionary movement, but also in their views concerning the restoration of Israel. I want to quote from the writings of these from a book called "The Puritan Hope-Revival and interpretation of prophecy by Iain Murray.

Iain Murray quoting Peter Martyr's commentary on Romans 11:15 and 26 written in 1568 referring to all Israel being saved says "He sheweth that the time shall come that the whole nation of the Jews, though not everyone particularly, shall be joined to the Church of Christ."

The probability is strong that Martyr's careful exposition of the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of Romans prepared the way for a

general adoption amongst the English Puritans of a belief in the future conversion of the Jews.

Closely linked as English Puritanism was to John Calvin, it was the view contained in Martyr's commentary that was received by the rising generation of students at Cambridge.

Among those students was Hugh Broughton (1549-1612) who had the distinction of going as the first missionary to the Jews in the Near East and also the first to propose the idea of a translation of the New Testament into Hebrew for the sake of the Jews.

Broughton's ardour for the conversion of the Jews found no sympathy, however, with the English bishops whom he had earlier offended by his Puritan leanings. Thus the early possibility of a mission to the Jews was thwarted by Church authorities.

Intriguingly although he was given no preferment in the English church, he was so well known in the East on account of his learning that the Chief Rabbi of Constantinople wrote to him in 1599 and subsequently invited him to become a Public Preacher there.

Another Puritan William Perkin 1579 spoke plainly of a future conversion of the Jews The Lord said " All the nations shall be blessed in Abraham". Hence I gather that the nation of the Jews shall be called, and converted, to the participation of the blessing; when and how, God knows: but that it shall be done before the end of the world we know.

Puritans who followed Perkins included Richard Sibbes. In his famous book 'The Bruised Reed' Sibbes writes, "The Jews are not yet come under Christ's banner: but God that hath persuaded Japheth to come into the tents of Shem, will persuade Shem to come into the tents of Japheth (Gen 9:27)



Perkin then goes on to say that the fullness of the Gentiles is not yet come in (Romans 11:25) but Christ, that hath the utmost parts of the earth given to him for his possession (Ps 2:8) will gather all the sheep his Father has given him into one fold, that there may be one sheepfold and one shepherd (John 10:16) The faithful Jews rejoiced to think of the calling of the Gentiles, most notably Simeon, and why should not we joy to think of the calling of the Jews.

What is clear is that within English Puritan theology post Calvin there is a strong belief in the conversion of Jews prior to the Second Coming of Christ. However the timing and significance of their conversion was subject to debate.

### **Timing and reason for their regathering and restoration**

Some saw the conversion of the Jews to their Messiah as the last act of the Great Commission prior to the return of Christ. Thus the gathering in of Jewish people at the beginning and end of the Great Commission were the bookends of world mission.

Theologians such as John Stott in his commentary on Romans come to a similar conclusion that the Gospel will be embraced by the Jewish people as the final act of world redemption.

Others, however, saw the conversion of the Jews as the catalyst for the greatest world evangelisation ever seen. An evangelisation that would lead to the nations finally acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah both of Israel and of the world.

People such as Sibbes rather than seeing an ever darkening picture concerning the future of the Church, saw that the greatest days of the Church would only come about once the Jewish people had embraced their Messiah and become fully part of the Body of Christ

In the larger Catechism of the Westminster Confession the question is asked, "What do we pray for in the second petition of the Lord's Prayer?"

Answer " We pray that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed, the Gospel propagated throughout the world, the Jews called, the fullness of the Gentiles brought in and that Christ would rule in our hearts and hasten the time of his Second Coming."

So then there was a divergence of view that the conversion of the Jews would take place very close to the end of time The fullness of Gentiles in Christ's kingdom will have reached its fullest development, indeed its consummation, by the time Israel is called.

Others took a different view they believed that the calling of the Jews would be part of a new and brighter era of history and not the end.

Another Puritan Elnathan Parr said " The casting off of the Jews was our Calling, but the calling of the Jews shall not be our casting off, but our greater enrichment of grace and that two ways First, in regard of the company of believers, when the thousands of Israel shall come in, which shall doubtless cause many Gentiles which now lie in ignorance, error and doubt, to receive the Gospel and join with them. Secondly, in

respect of the graces, which shall then in more abundance be rained down upon the Church.”

This would concur with several prophetic passages concerning the missionary role of a regathered Israel most notably in Isaiah 2 which finds its echo in Micah 4:7,

*“Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths. The law of the Lord will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”*

Thus the Fullness of the Gentiles which leads to the fullness of the Gentiles leads to the even greater fullness of the Gentiles.

Iain H Murray in ‘The Puritan Hope’ concludes the Puritan treatment of Israel in Romans 11 by summarising the views which came to prevail says

1. The salvation now possessed by a remnant of believing Jews is yet to be enjoyed by a far greater number of that race.
2. At the time when Paul wrote, this was not to be expected until a considerable number of the Gentiles had been evangelised and their evangelisation would thus hasten the day of Israel’s calling: ‘blindness in part happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in’.
3. In the economy of salvation there is an interaction appointed by God between Jew and Gentile, Gospel blessing came to the world by Israel’s fall, a yet greater blessing will result from her conversion.

4. Nothing is told us in Romans 11 of the duration of time between the calling of the Jews and the end of history. 'The end of this world shall not be till the Jews are called, and how long after that none can tell.' (Parr)
5. The quotations from Isaiah and Jeremiah, confirming Paul's teaching, indicate the full extent of the Gospel blessing predicted by the Prophets is yet to be realised. 'As Isaiah, and other of the prophets, do put over this great flourishing of the church to the days of the Gospel, the apostle, Rom 11, doth point at a more precise time when this in larger measure shall be made out.' (Robert Fleming)

The Puritans then had a very high view of the impact of the conversion of Jewish people in rejuvenating and revitalising the Church to complete its global task. However they were strongly against any notion of Israel having any role apart from the Church and so issues that concern so much of the Christian world today concerning the political or theological implications of a restored Israel would have been seen as anathema. Any restoration of the Kingdom to Israel would have been seen only as incorporated within the whole people of God. Israel and the Church becoming One in the completion of the mission to bring the nations under the sovereignty of Christ.

### **The Coming of the One New Man**

For the last 2000 years when the Gentile Church has been centre stage in the purposes of God and Israel sidelined, the Gospel has gone out among the nations and continues to spread. This period of time is known

as the 'fullness of the Gentiles', but there is coming a time once again for the Jewish people, 'the fullness of the Jews', to resume their pivotal role in the completion of the Great Commission not as separate from the Body of Christ but integral to the whole Body.

It is the time, which, we are beginning to glimpse certainly within the Messianic movement in Israel of the One New Man in Christ. It is the emergence of the complete expression of Christ's body that I believe will be the catalyst for the greatest evangelisation the world has ever witnessed. It is the time when I believe we will see the greatest outpouring of God's Spirit as God gathers in the final harvest among the nations.

### **Between Pentecost and Tabernacles**

The Great Commission takes place within the metaphorical parameters of two of Israel's feasts, Pentecost and Tabernacles.

In Israel's agricultural cycle Shavuot or Pentecost marked the gathering in of the initial harvest after the early rains and corresponds in spiritual terms to the initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit and harvest of believers following the day of Pentecost.

Succot or Tabernacles was the major Autumn festival celebrating the final and much greater ingathering of the Harvest which I believe corresponds to a much greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit and spiritual harvest of believers that will take place at the completion of the Great Commission.

Ever since the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, we have been living in what are known as the 'Last Days'. As we have seen in Israel's cycle of feasts it is that period between Pentecost and Tabernacles, which in terms of the year is a not insubstantial period about 5 months. For us it has been a long time since the day of Pentecost, but in God's calendar just a couple of days (one day is like a thousand).

For the majority of that time Jewish influence within the Church has been negligible, yet down through the long years of a largely Gentile dominated church, part of the Church has faithfully believed that God would fulfill his promises to the Hebrew prophets and regather Israel from among the nations amongst whom they have been scattered. Israel would be restored for the final outworking of God's mission to bring the nations under the Lordship of Christ, the theme of our first session.

This was one of the heartbeats of CMJ during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. In a conference between Mission agencies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the agenda was to decide the priority for Mission, the President of CMS wrote a note to the president of CMJ saying in effect "15 billion Moslems, 15 million Jews-no contest. The president of CMJ wrote back "but what if the conversion of 15 million Jews means life for the dead of the 15 billion". Thereafter apparently the President of CMS became a supporter of CMJ.

All the promises concerning the regathering of Israel from the nations are beyond the scope of this booklet it is the significance of God's purpose in regathering and restoring Israel that is central to our understanding concerning the completion of world mission.

## **The Sanctification of the Name**

The prophet Ezekiel says, *“Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone.’”*

God has attached his name and character to Israel. He is known as the God of Israel and so ultimately the restoration of Israel is about the sanctification of God’s name among the nations. Ezekiel goes on to say, *“I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord, when I show myself holy, through you before their eyes”*.

## **A Paradigm Nation**

Archbishop Rowan Williams in his paper ‘Holy Land and Holy People’ (5<sup>th</sup> Sabeel International Conference 2004) says of Israel that she is a ‘paradigm nation’ which needs a place or land to be a nation. Part of nationhood is having land, and the acknowledgement by other nations that you are a nation. While the Jewish people were scattered among the nations, they were unable to be a nation, even though the name Israel remained to describe them as a people group.

The regathering of Israel to their ancient land is a sign not only of God's faithfulness to his covenant, but also the vehicle through whom the nations will ultimately acknowledge that the God of Israel is the true God. God is concerned both for the salvation of individuals and of nations. It is the nations that are given to the Messiah as his inheritance (Psalm 2)

For the last 2000 years the Gospel has moved out from its Jewish heartlands to practically all the nations of the world. It is significant that within the House Church in China there is a movement called "Back to Jerusalem" which has the vision of evangelising the peoples groups along the old silk route, back to Jerusalem. This is in the 20/40 window of some of the most unevangelised nations on earth.

The regathering of Israel is part of the global mission to bring the nations under the Lordship of Christ and perhaps we are moving to the most decisive phase of world mission.

### **Paradox**

It is somewhat of a paradox that many Mission agencies are struggling for support at this time. Money for aid and relief is huge, but not for mission.

Although God, of course is interested in the wellbeing of people, and therefore aid is very important, nevertheless it is not to the detriment of the proclamation of the Gospel and to the completion of the Great Commission.



## Israel's National Repentance

The restoration of the Jewish people to their Messiah is critical to this final phase of world mission. It is noteworthy that the final ingathering of the harvest at Succot takes place only a few days after Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur is the most solemn day in the Jewish year; it is the day of national repentance and when the temple stood, the day when the High Priest made atonement for the nation of Israel.

How significant then that the prophet Zechariah describes the time when Israel is restored to her Messiah as a time of mourning and supplication "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a first born son" Zech 14:10. How significant too that when Jesus prophesies over Jerusalem he says, *"You will not see me again, O Jerusalem until you say the Messianic Greeting "Baruch haba b'shem Adonai" – "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord"*

## Conclusion

To conclude then the restoration of Israel to her Messiah is about the bringing together of Jew and Gentile as the One New Man in Christ, of the One sheepfold, the completion of God's kingdom purposes for the nations. The regathering of Israel and her embrace of her Messiah are about the faithfulness of God to His covenant and to the sanctification of his name among the nations.

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