

TO THE JEW FIRST
Reasons to Support Jewish Ministry

Well you should have received in your email this week an article I wrote for our church about why Christians should not support the Black Lives Matter organization. Obviously, black lives do matter because all lives matter in all stages of life – we’re all made in the image of God – but supporting the idea that black lives matter is complicated by everything that this recently popular and powerful organization stands for. If you didn’t read the article but would like to, it is available on our Facebook page or website blog page. I tried to expose a little bit about how this organization, in the name of something good like justice, is actually diametrically opposed to God and His creational order and His institutions that keep society sane such as the nuclear family, the Church and the government as a minister of good.

Oddly enough though, I have also been working on another somewhat controversial message for us this week on why we should support another organization that reaches a specific ethnicity with the gospel message. Just this last month our church board and missions committee decided to support a ministry many of us are familiar with, **The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry** – a ministry that primarily ministers to the Jewish people. Biblically, this world can be classified into 3 groups according to 1 Corinthians 10:32: **Jews** (Israel), **Gentiles** (anyone not Jewish) and Christians (the **Church** – which is comprised of Jew & Gentile believers, mostly Gentile). And even though God is mainly working with the Church these days, He is not done with ethnic Israel and still does have a unique relationship with them. His having a unique relationship with them does not mean they are a superior race by any means or that we Gentiles are second class citizens, Ephesians 2 says we are one in Christ, but God has chosen them to have an honorable and respectable position in His redemptive plan.

The nation of Israel is one of the smallest nations on earth. I read that it constitutes just 1/10th of 1% of the world’s population and that there are cities that are larger than this entire population of people!¹ Yet for some reason, Israel and the Jews always seem to be right there in the world’s spotlight or on the edge of it. Why is that? Have you ever wondered why that is? Why is it that this little teeny, tiny nation of Israel has so much interest and love to some and yet cause so much fury to others? Why is there and has there been so much persecution and oppression of the Jewish people over the centuries? The most familiar and recent example being the Holocaust...Why would Jews be singled out for extermination like in the Holocaust? Only the Bible can help you understand why that is – why this little nation could be so disputed world in this world. What we’re going to talk a lot about today, involving their special place in God’s program, will certainly change the way you see the world.

And it is important for us to take time to study Israel because they dominate the Old Testament, they are still clearly a major player in the New Testament and a major player in future prophecy. God is not done with them. However, as of lately, I have been impressed or depressed by the lack of support for Israel, even among Christians. To say that the Jews or Israel have lacked support and love and care from the Church throughout history would be an understatement. As Andy Woods has said, we’ve received an F minus in our treatment of the Jews and if you don’t believe me please go online and order yourself a copy of the book called “The Coming Apocalypse” by Renald Showers and see all the examples of it he cites. Just recently, the Danish Bible Society’s removed several references to the nation of Israel from their Bible translation and replaced it with more vague terminology instead, apparently in an attempt to discard the nation of Israel today. After talking with a missionary with Friends of Israel recently, he acknowledged to me that many pastors my age are not supporting Israel but instead are heading the exact opposite direction.

Much of this is due to a rise in what is termed **Replacement Theology or Supercessionism** – the idea that the Church, primarily made up of Gentiles has replaced Israel for good (forever) and all the covenant promises to them like the land even, are spiritualized and received only by the Church.

In recent times, such as in 1948 when after nearly 2,000 years, Israel became a nation again, there was a resurgence of support for Israel and interpreting prophecy dealing with the nation literally, but with time and recent trends it appears to be on the decline again. So with that being said, **our church board and missions committee desires to be a part of bearing ministry fruit among the Jewish people.** At this church we often pray for our nation's leaders to stand with Israel, but we need to put our money where our mouth is when it comes to owning our role in supporting Israel and Jewish ministry. We don't want our church to receive an F minus, you could say. In the past our church supported Jewish missionaries and ministries but through various circumstances let that go several years ago and I'm pleased to say that the decisions have been made to get back to it. And to get us back in that swing of it, I want to step away from our journey through Mark and remind us of several reasons why this is important.

Reason #1 – The Scriptures and the Savior came through Israel.ⁱⁱ (Rom. 1:3; 9:5)

Two main spiritual provisions! Clear back in Genesis 3 when sin entered into the world God made a promise that He would send a Redeemer to redeem mankind from sin's penalty and curse. And in Genesis 12, according to His sovereign plan and grace, God specifically chose a man named Abraham out of all the people on earth at the time and made a covenant promise to him that this Redeemer was going to come through him and his descendants – that God was going to bless the entire world through him (Gen. 12:1-3). Eventually through his son Isaac (26:24) and Isaac's son **Jacob, whose name God changed to Israel** (32:28; 35:10), God created a special nation to Him known as the Israel. Up until God chose Abraham, there were no distinctions like Jew & Gentile. But it is important to point out that God chose Jews with the intention of reaching everyone through them – revealing Himself to the world by the way He relates to Israel – why they're called Israel My Glory – God is glorified through His dealings with them. A prime example being, God gave the Law (Torah/Pentateuch) on Mt. Sinai which revealed in writing the One True God and what He is like.

Actually, it was through the Jews that we have received not only the Law, but the entire Scriptures. The only biblical author that may not have been Jewish is Luke, who wrote the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, and there's some debate on that too. So out of 66 books, at least 64 are written by Jews. **We have the Jews to thank for faithfully writing down and passing on Scripture. The Spirit of God spoke through them.** Mostly everything concrete we know about God comes from the Scriptures they wrote and preserved.

But as I mentioned, **the Savior came through the Jews as well.** It was through the Jewish people that Jesus, the Savior of the world was born, the expected Redeeming descendant of Abraham. Jesus is God and He is a man but it's important for us to note **He is also a Jewish man.** He grew up in Israel, under the Law, according to the Law. He was born a Jew and died a Jew and will return to rule as the Jewish King over Jerusalem. So, to love Jesus is to love a Jew. As Ty Perry, a missionary with FOI wrote, He cannot be separated from His Jewishness.ⁱⁱⁱ

Our faith is Jewish (Rom. 11:17). We believe in a promise made to the Jews about a Jewish Messiah from a book written by the Jews. The spiritual blessings of Scripture and the Savior have come through them and more blessings will come through them in the future so it is no surprise to see Anti-Semitic Satanic activity throughout history and today aimed at exterminating them or delegitimizing them

through the propaganda wars. That sort of thing reaches as far back as Genesis 26, Haman and Esther, Hitler, and Iran today who vows to wipe them off the map and push them into the Mediterranean Sea. But God has preserved them because they are beloved by Him and the existence of the nation today is one of the greatest proofs of God's existence.

Reason #2 – They are beloved of God for the sake of their forefathers. (Rom. 11:28-29)

The apostle Paul talks a lot about God's relationship and working with the ethnic nation of Israel in Romans 9-11. After explaining so much about the Gospel and Church things in Romans 1-8, the question naturally arises, "So what about Israel then? Has God rejected them?" And Paul's answer in Romans 9-11 is an emphatic "No! By no means!" He says in Romans 11:28-29 they still have a special relationship with God because of the promises made to their forefathers Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. "From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake [the Church was heavily persecuted by unbelieving Jews early on], but from the standpoint of God's choice **they are beloved for the sake of their fathers**; for the gifts and the calling of God are **irrevocable**." In other words, once God made those promises to Abraham in the OT, there was no going back for Him or changing His mind. His character and His veracity is at stake in this issue of whether or not He keeps His promises to them. There are some things God can't do – like He can't lie and He can't not break promises.

So they are still beloved. He is still working with them. The covenant promises are **irrevocable** and still on the table but sort of off to the side for now. What are some of these gifts? Romans 9:3-5 explains, "my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are the Israelites, to whom belong the **adoption** as sons, and the **glory** and the **covenants** and the giving of the **Law** and the **temple service** and the **promises**, whose are the **fathers**, and from whom is the **Christ according to the flesh**, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen." The promises and covenants still belong to them and are still in play.

And His unconditional, covenantal love for us is demonstrated for us through the way that He has continued to choose them despite all of their disobedience. They are like the proof of our insurance policy.^{iv} If He won't break His promises to Israel, He won't break His promises to us. And even though they may be disciplined for disobedience, You'll never see Him ever give up on them. As the prophet Jeremiah put it, the only way God will ever be finished working with Israel is if the fixed order of the universe falls apart or someone can measure it. "Thus says the Lord, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the seas so that its waves roar; The Lord of hosts is His name: 'If this fixed order departs from before Me,' declares the Lord, then the offspring of Israel also will cease from being a nation before Me forever." Thus says the Lord, "If the heavens above can be measured and the foundation of the earth searched out below, then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel for all they have done," declares the Lord." In other words, they'll never be cast off totally. Not even the most powerful telescope has measured the universe and found an end to it. And no man, even with the finest drilling machines, has drilled very far into the earth's crust. We've barely scratched the surface of it. We've gone no further than 41,000 feet into the earth's crust. They still need to drill 60,000 more feet to get through the crust alone and then another 21 million feet to reach the center of the earth. God won't be done with Israel anytime soon.

Reason #3 – There is a future for Israel. (Rom. 11:12, 25-27; numerous OT prophecies; Rev. 20)

I want to look at Romans 11:25-32 for this. What you need to remember is that every time Paul has used the word Israel in Romans 9-11 it's always literal Israel. He maintains the distinction between the

Church & Israel throughout it in the use of the words. He says in verse 25, “For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery – so that you will not be wise in your own estimation – that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob.” “This is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.” What Paul is saying here is that for right now, there is a mysterious working of God going on where Israel is undergoing divine discipline like in times past (40 years in the wilderness) according to their transgression (v. 12) of rejecting Christ. At the end of Deuteronomy in Deuteronomy 28, God told Israel is you obey Me and do what I say, you will be blessed – but, if you don’t, you will experience cursing. And what we have seen happen to Israel since their rejection of Christ is a lot of cursing. Starting with Jerusalem being destroyed in AD 70 and their continual trampling by the Gentile nations. In Luke 21:24 Jesus said Jerusalem would be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles *until* the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. The last and ultimate Gentile nation according the prophet Daniel will be the Anti-Christ’s during the Great Tribulation period known as **Jacob’s Trouble**.

During that terrible period is when “all Israel will be saved”. During that time there will be a great turning to the Lord by Israel. God really uses that time to wake more of them up spiritually and recognize Jesus Christ as the Messiah. Many of them, in Ezekiel’s words, will safely pass under a rod of judgment and those who survive will be completely a nation ready to receive Him at His coming.^v

In Matthew 23:37, remember Jesus wept over Jerusalem saying, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! [but notice the temporary nature of their desolation period] For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” So it’s *until* the fullness of the Gentiles comes in and Jesus says *until* they acknowledge Him as their Messiah. According to the New Covenant from Scriptures like Jer. 31:31, in that day God will cause them to walk by the Spirit. Zechariah 12:10 says, “I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him and one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.” Zechariah 13 says, “In that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity.” Zechariah 14 then describes Christ’s setting up His Millennial Kingdom in Jerusalem and ruling over the world as King for 1,000 years as Rev. 20 describes. So spiritual restoration & mourning, then His coming.

Paul considers what is going on with Israel and God right now a mystery but to us it has been revealed to keep us from becoming proud(!) – from thinking we’re better than they because we have faith in the Jewish Messiah. Because they will have their restoration. It was easy for the readers of Paul’s today who experience much animosity and persecution from the Jews to become arrogant towards them but Paul says to not let that get to you and make you arrogant towards them. Anti-Semitism has no place among the Church. That leads us to the next point:

Reason #4 – Our desire should be to reach the Jews for Christ. (Rom. 9:1-5; 11:13-14; 11:22)

In Romans 11:17-24 Paul describes the privileged positions of the Church and Israel before God and their relationship to one another in it like an olive tree. The root, or the stump, of the olive tree is like the Abrahamic Covenant which means it’s a **cultivated Jewish tree** to begin with. The only way for a **wild olive tree (Gentiles)** to produce good olives with much oil is to be grafted into a well cultivated

one. And when the cultivated olive branches rejected Christ, many of those natural branches were broken off and the mainly Gentile Church, comprised of wild olive tree branches, were grafted into that cultivated olive tree. “But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became a partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches. But if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root but **the root supports you**. You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God’s kindness, **if you continue in His kindness**; otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in again. For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree.” It’s important when God talks about being cut off here, He is not talking about salvation. He is talking about **the privileged position we have as the Church of being in the forefront of His redemptive plan at the moment**. Israel has been set aside temporarily and partially for their unbelief and we have been given this incredible privilege of being in God’s blessing place, but Paul doesn’t want that to make us arrogant. He wants us to learn from the past – from Israel’s hardening. He says God could easily graft them back in again and make them the forefront – and I think their regathering as a nation is like a super sign of the end times that we may be getting close. I think you can sum up what Paul is saying here by this thought: **rather than judge them by their present condition we should honor them for their past contributions and future role in God’s plan of redemption.**^{vi} I like that. I like that a lot.

Look at Paul’s heart for Israel in Romans 9:1-5, Paul said, “I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites.” Paul says I wish I could be cursed for their sake! That ‘I be separated from Christ for their sake!’ That was his heart for the Jewish people even though they had beat him up several times and left him for dead! Why is his heart that way? Because he once was one of them. He used to be a Pharisee of Pharisees and a persecutor of the Church and the hardest heart in Israel but if Christ can reach him, He can reach anybody. Paul hadn’t forgotten his own hardness of heart and neither should we. And He knew that if God could save him, He could save others. Paul said in 11:13, “Inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them.” Paul understood the next point:

Reason #5 – God is still saving a faithful remnant of the Jews. (Rom. 11:1-5)

In Romans 11:1-5, Paul gives **two examples** that explain God is working among the Jews. First, he points to himself and then he points to an example from Elijah’s day to support his divine knowledge of what God is doing. “I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? “Lord, they have killed Your prophets, they have torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they are seeking my life.” Elijah’s mindset was not correct. He had the idea that he was the only faithful Israelite but Paul says, “But what is the divine response? “I have kept for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” In the same way there has come at

the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace."

The point is clear: God is sovereign and is still working among the Jews and saving Jews. And I think that became Paul's encouragement to seek to be used by God to reach them. One of the books I've enjoyed reading recently is "Experiencing God". It's a great book for those seeking a fresh perspective of God's will for them and who are walking through a time of transition. One of the major points in the book is that if you want to experience God and see Him work, **get involved where He's already working**. Sometimes you can just see it. And if God says He is working among the Jews, then why wouldn't we want to join in on that like Paul? If somehow we might be a part of saving some?

Reason #6 – Jewish evangelism is a biblical priority. (Rom. 1:16)

Romans was one of the later books Paul wrote and even then, after much rejection from the unbelieving Jews and understanding that he was going to be used to reach mostly Gentiles, he still considered Jewish evangelism a priority. Romans 1:16-17, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, **to the Jew first** and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith."'" In chapter two, he says it two more times: **to the Jew first and also to the Greek**. What does he mean by that? Well there's certainly something to be said about the chronological order in which the gospel went out – to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles. That's obvious from the sequence in Acts. There's also something to be said about his methods of ministry as he entered towns and cities – he went to the Jewish synagogues first.

But remember, Paul is writing to Romans who have developed this smug attitude toward the Jews who have been hard on Christians. And he is saying look, don't forget who supports you spiritually. Israel has been set aside, but don't dismiss them. Don't give up on them. Learn from them. Later, in Romans 15:26, he even calls on them to support the saints in Jerusalem who've undergone much persecution themselves – "For Macedonia (Turkey) and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. **For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they also ought to be of service to them in material blessings.**" Isn't that something? And that's exactly how FOI got its start as a ministry after in 1938 helping Jews flee the horrors of the Holocaust. We don't have much of a Jewish community around here or any synagogues but we can still support those who are trying to reach them. It should at least be a priority on our spiritual radar.

Reason #7 – God promises blessing to those who support Israel and cursing to those who don't. (Gen. 12:1-3)

When God chose Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 He made this promise in this covenant that belongs to his descendants, "Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." Aside from our main point a bit, God wasn't kidding when He said He would make the descendants of Abraham a blessing. Other than Scripture and the Savior, this world is constantly blessed by Israel. Even though they are a such a small fraction of the global population, I quote, "they have

received nearly 23% of all Nobel Prizes for their contributions to the world in literature, chemistry, medicine, physics, peace, and economics. The Jewish people have blessed the world in ways that are hugely disproportionate to their small size.”^{vii} They are some of the most influential people in history and today.

And in the future when Christ returns, they will receive all of the covenant blessings God promised them, including the land (which is mentioned more than 130 times), and they will be the means by which the whole world is blessed. Through blessing Israel, He blesses the world. They’ll be a blessing in the midst of the earth (Is. 19:24; Zech. 14) where Jesus Christ will reign.

But not only are they a blessing, God promises to bless those who bless Israel and curse those who curse Israel. This is why we pray our leaders would stand with them. Scripture is clear God keeps tabs on that sort of thing (Obad. 12-15; Zech. 1:7-17). Blessing and cursing reminds us of kindness and severity again doesn’t it? I’m willing to take God at His word on these things. All of these Scriptural truths and the belief that God blesses those who those who bless Israel, is just further motivation for us to use our privileged position in God’s redemptive plan to be a blessing to them.

ⁱ Ty Perry, *10 Reasons Why Christians Support Israel* (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry), under Reason #3.

ⁱⁱ Ibid, under Reason #1.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid, under Reason #4.

^{iv} Amir Tsarfati, *Teaching on To the Jew First*, accessed 19 June 2020.

^v John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Romans 9-16* (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute, 1994), 128.

^{vi} Chuck Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Living Insights: New Testament Commentary, Volume 6, Romans* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2015), 256.

^{vii} Perry, under Reason #3.