



Bridges for Peace
Your Israel Connection ®

- International Headquarters
P.O. Box 1093
Jerusalem, Israel
Tel: (972) 2-624-5004
intl.office@bridgesforpeace.com
- Australia
P.O. Box 1785, Buderim
Queensland 4556
Tel: 07-5453-7988
adminaust@bridgesforpeace.com.au
- Canada
P.O. Box 21001, RPO Charleswood
Winnipeg, MB R3R 3R2
Tel: 204-489-3697, bfp@mts.net
- Japan
Taihei Sakura Bldg. 5F
4-13-2 Taihei, Sumida-Ku
Tokyo 130 0012
Tel: 03-5637-5333, bfp@bfpj.org
- New Zealand
P.O. Box 768
Whangarei 0110
Tel: 09-430-2943
bfpnz@orcon.net.nz
- South Africa
P.O. Box 1848
Durbanville 7551
Tel: 021-975-1941
info@bridgesforpeace.co.za
- United Kingdom
18 Heol Ty Gwyn Industrial Estate
Maesteg, Wales CF34 0BQ
Tel: 01656-739494
ukoffice@bridgesforpeace.com
- United States
P.O. Box 410037
Melbourne, FL 32941-0037
Tel: 800-566-1998
Product orders: 888-669-8800
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BRIDGES FOR PEACE

Israel Teaching Letter

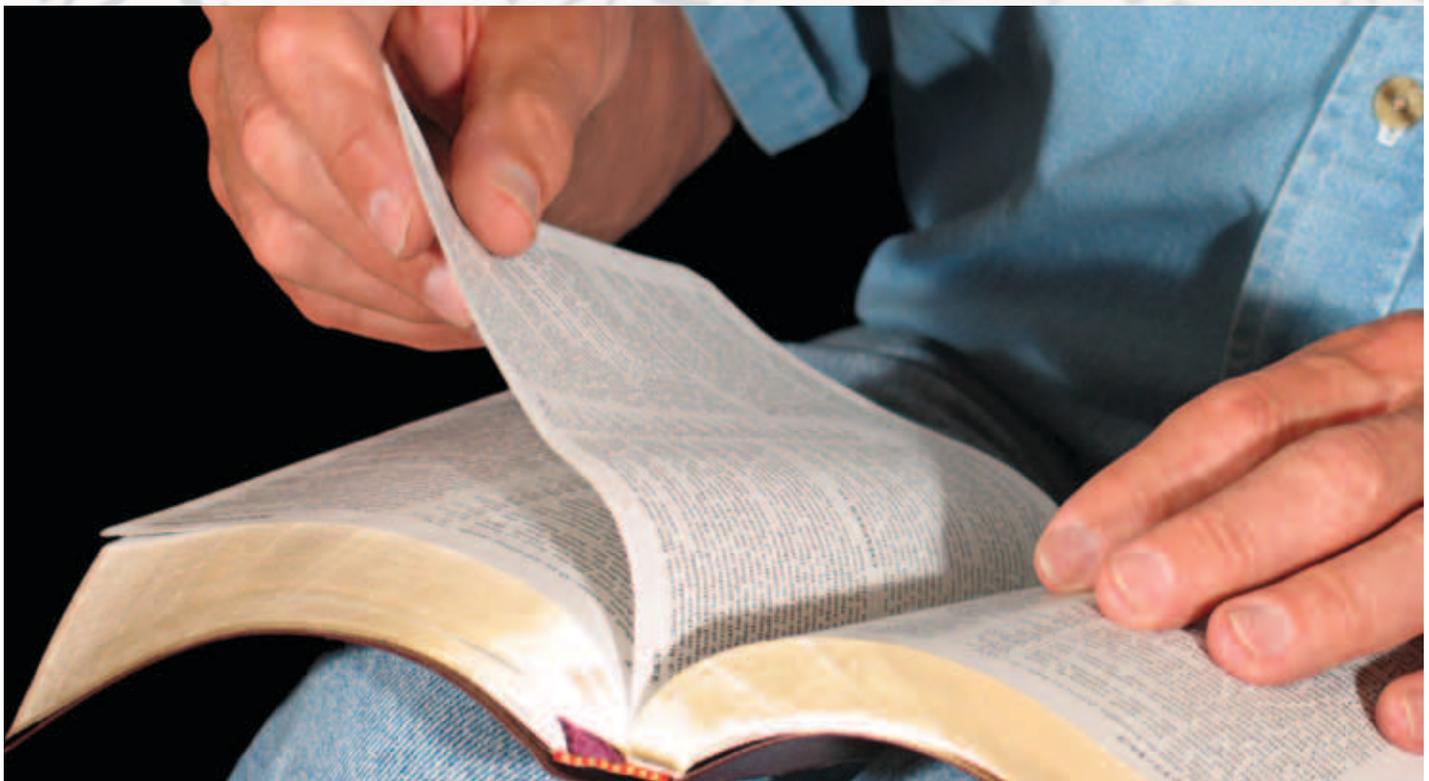
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*The Scriptural
Basis for*
SUPPORTING ISRAEL

The Scriptural Basis for **SUPPORTING ISRAEL**



“ISRAEL”
is mentioned more
than 2,300 times
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clue that Israel is
the PASSION
of GOD’S heart.

DOES GOD HAVE SOME SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LAND AND PEOPLE OF ISRAEL?

Well, the word “Israel” is mentioned more than 2,300 times in the Bible. How does that compare to other topics on God’s heart? Sin is mentioned 380 times. Love is mentioned 280 times. Actually, the only words I’ve found to be used more than Israel are the various names for God Himself. Maybe there is a clue about the passion of God’s heart in this frequency. I would suggest that He talks most about Himself because His first priority is for us to know Him and understand His heart toward us. Perhaps His frequent references to Israel reveal that His second priority is for us to know and understand His heart toward the Land and people He has chosen as His own.

Some of you reading this may find it like visiting an old friend—warm and familiar. Some of you may find it new and, in some areas, perhaps even slightly uncomfortable. There is an ancient quote that says when you visit a friend, look for three things: a door open for hospitality, a book open for learning, and a mind open to entertain a new idea. As we explore the scriptural basis for supporting Israel, please keep your Bible open to check the accuracy of what I’m saying, and please keep your mind open to entertain a new idea.

As much as we, as Christians, believe that Yeshua (Jesus) is in fact the Messiah, it is our position that God is faithful and is continuing to honor His promises to (or covenants with) the Jewish people. We believe that seeing this faithfulness of God to His Word should encourage the Church, not disturb or discourage us. In fact, I suggest that all Bible-believing evangelical churches today are teaching that God does honor covenants in addition to His covenant of salvation through Yeshua.

Now, bear with me for a moment with that open mind, and let's look at Genesis 9:8-16: *"Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying, 'Now behold, I Myself do establish My covenant with you, and with your descendants after you; and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you; of all that comes out of the ark, even every beast of the earth. I establish My covenant with you; and all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth.' God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant which I am making between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all successive generations; I set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth. It shall come about, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow will be seen in the cloud, and I will remember My covenant, which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and never again shall the water become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the cloud, then I will look upon it, to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth'"* (emphasis added).



The Land Covenant



I think you'll agree that all of our churches teach about the rainbow in their Sunday schools, and that we all find it an encouragement to see God's covenant faithfulness fulfilled when we see a rainbow in the sky. Today, we are also seeing God fulfill His covenant faithfulness, as He restores the nation of Israel and brings the Jewish people back to the Land after thousands of years of dispersion. So, with the possibility that God is doing something wonderful and assuring in keeping His covenant with Israel, let's begin to look at what Scripture has to say about that Land: *"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'"* (Gen. 12:1-3).

Let me call your attention to two items in these passages. First, God asked Abraham to go to a specific land, a place that He would show him. Abraham didn't get to pick. Second, there is a promise made in this passage. It's become quite popular in



Christian circles to have a little book of “God’s promises.” Genesis 12:3 contains the first conditional promise God makes, “I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse.” If we want God’s best for our lives, understanding this promise is important. God tells the reader that if we bless Abraham, we will be blessed, and if we curse Abraham, we will be cursed. Well, since Abraham has been dead for thousands of years, is there any application for us today?

Let’s continue with the Word, and see what specific land God gave to Abraham: “On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, ‘To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite’” (Gen. 15:18–21).

“I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an **everlasting possession**; and I will be their God” (Gen. 17:8, emphasis added). There is no debate. The land being discussed is the area of both the ancient and modern State of Israel.

Two Sons



In Genesis 17:18–20, Abraham asks God if the covenant can pass through Ishmael: “And Abraham said to God, ‘Oh that Ishmael might live before You!’ But God said, ‘No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My **covenant** with him for an **everlasting covenant** for his descendants after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him, and will make him fruitful and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation’” (emphasis added).

We are told that Ishmael will be blessed, but not by the covenant to Abraham. Some Muslims will agree that the Land is promised to the descendants of Abraham and claim inclusion, as the Arab people claim to be descended from Ishmael. Ishmael’s descendants rule 20 nations surrounding Israel, which contain two-thirds of the world’s known oil reserves. They indeed have been richly blessed, just not with the covenant that includes the Land of Israel.

Later, in Genesis 26:2–6, God appears directly to Isaac and confirms the specifics of the covenant to him: “The LORD appeared to him and said, ‘Do not go down to Egypt; stay in the land of which I shall tell you. Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham. I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws.’ So Isaac lived in Gerar.”

Here, God again confirms and explains His covenant. It focuses on a specific land given to a specific people, the descendants of specific men, and

Map of Arab nations surrounding Israel





includes a blessing to come to the whole earth through these very specific people. Again, some will raise the question that Isaac also had two sons, and doesn't the covenant apply to both Esau and Jacob, and thus to both modern Jordanians and Israelis? However, the Lord seems to have anticipated the question. "Then God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram, and He blessed him. God said to him, 'Your name is Jacob; you shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name.' Thus He called him Israel. God also said to him, 'I am God Almighty; be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come forth from you. The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give it to you, and I will give the land to your descendants after you'" (Gen. 35:9-12).

Everlasting Covenant

Clearly, the covenant involving the nation and people of Israel passes from Abraham to Isaac, to Jacob, and their descendants after them. God uses the same language in Genesis 9:16 about the rainbow that He uses later in Genesis 17:7 about these two covenants. He calls them "everlasting covenants" or in the Hebrew *b'rit olam* (ברית עולם), an unbreakable agreement that will last forever and ever. (See notes at the end from *The Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*.) The bottom line is simply that God keeps ALL His covenants. If you believe that the Bible tells that a rainbow is a sign of God's covenant, then you should have the same expectation that God will give this land to the descendents of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the people we know today as the Jewish people.

Finally, the Bible tells us that God has a unique attachment to this particular piece of real estate, which He does not claim in the same way for any other part of the earth. "The land, moreover, shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are but aliens and sojourners with Me" (Lev. 25:23).

God's covenants are "EVERLASTING COVENANTS," unbreakable agreements that will last forever and ever.

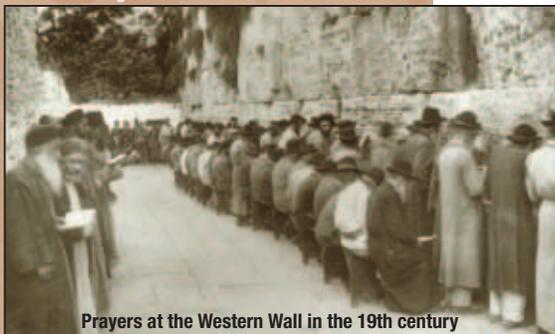
Throughout History

Having established that the Land of Israel was given by God to the Jewish people as an everlasting possession, let's trace that covenant thread through history. In 720 BC, the northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed; many of its people were carried off, and it became a province of Assyria. In 586 BC, the Temple was destroyed, and the southern kingdom of Judah was captured by the Babylonians. Again, many were carried off into exile.

So, what then became of God's promises of an everlasting covenant? We know that there was a gradual return of exiles from the Babylonian captivity, as recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. There was a brief reappearance of Jewish sovereignty over the Land under the Hasmonean dynasty, following the Maccabean rebellion, which is commemorated in the celebration of Hanukkah (Feast of Dedication or Festival of Lights). History records that there has been a continuous Jewish presence in the Land since 720 BC, despite wars, massacres, expulsions, and exiles. But are these the fulfillment of God's promises and the visible example of His faithfulness to the world? Again, let's



The Assyrians deported thousands of Jewish captives.



Prayers at the Western Wall in the 19th century



Yemenite Jews returning to Israel



Thousands of Ethiopian Jews were airlifted to Israel.

see how Scripture enlightens us: *“Then it will happen on that day that the LORD will again recover the second time with His hand the remnant of His people, who will remain, from Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And He will lift up a standard for the nations and assemble the banished ones of Israel, and will gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth”* (Isa. 11:11–12).

If the return from the Babylonian captivity was the first time He regathered His people, when was the second? If following the Babylonian captivity, Jewish people were in the East, when did God bring them back from the West and the four corners of the earth? Since the 1880s, millions of Jews have returned to Israel. Could it be that we are seeing God fulfill His covenant? *“Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’ and to the south, ‘Do not hold them back.’ Bring My sons from afar and My daughters from the ends of the earth”* (Isa. 43:5–6).

Recent History

During the last century, Jewish people in the North were persecuted under communist rule in the Soviet Union. In the 1970s, a growing wave of protest began, demanding that Jewish people be allowed to leave the Soviet Union and return to Israel. The Soviet grip began to slip, and in the mid-1980s, Mikhail Gorbachev agreed to allow an increasing number of Jews to leave. The North had begun to “give them up.” In the early 1970s, under a new Marxist government, Ethiopia began to harass and punish its Jewish population, refusing to let them emigrate. From 1984 to 1991, over 22,000 Ethiopians immigrated to Israel. The South was no longer able to hold them back!

Could it be that today, in the 21st century, we are seeing the Lord bring back His people from all the nations of the world? In Ezekiel 37, we read the famous vision of the “Dry Bones.” Could it be that in the modern State of Israel, we are beginning to hear these bones being assembled? *“Therefore prophesy and say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD God, ‘Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people’”* (Ezek. 37:12–13).

"O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the LORD God to these bones. 'BEHOLD, I WILL CAUSE BREATH TO ENTER YOU THAT YOU MAY COME TO LIFE.'"

Ezek. 37:4–5



In the book of Exodus, we are told there were 600,000 Jewish males who were brought out of Egypt, when God delivered His people from slavery and restored them to their land over a period of 40 years. Various scholars place the total number who left Egypt and moved to the Promised Land at an estimated 2 to 3 million people. However, the Jewish population of Israel today is slightly over 5.3 million people, up from a base of about 60,000 Jewish residents in 1914 before the outbreak of World War I. In the past 100 years, we have seen the number of Jews in Israel grow by over 5 million people, as God has brought them home from over 100 countries around the world. Perhaps, we are seeing something even greater than that first Exodus from Egypt happening today, as God returns His people to the Land He promised them in greater numbers than ever before in history.



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“I will also plant them on their land, and they will not again be rooted out from their land which I have given them,” says the Lord your God.”

Amos 9:15

I used to ask God to help me. Then, I asked if I might help Him. I ended up by ASKING HIM TO DO HIS WORK THROUGH ME. J. Hudson Taylor

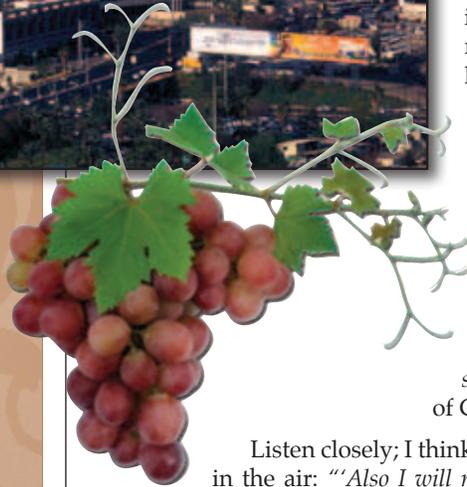


Our Responsibility

If God today is indeed fulfilling His covenant with the Jewish people and fulfilling prophecy in front of our very eyes, what responsibility does that put on us? Does it matter if we help, or not? Let's look at a few more passages from the Word: *“Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of My pasture!” declares the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel concerning the shepherds who are tending My people: ‘You have scattered My flock and driven them away, and have not attended to them; behold, I am about to attend to you for the evil of your deeds,’ declares the LORD. ‘Then I Myself will gather the remnant of My flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and bring them back to their pasture, and they will be fruitful and multiply. I will also raise up shepherds over them and they will tend them; and they will not be afraid any longer, nor be terrified, nor will any be missing,’ declares the LORD”* (Jer. 23:1–4).



As much as the rainbow is a sign of God's covenant faithfulness, so is the modern State of Israel.



"For behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat. Then I will enter into judgment with them there on behalf of My people and My inheritance, Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; and they have divided up My land" (Joel 3:1-2).

J. Hudson Taylor said the following: "I used to ask God to help me. Then, I asked if I might help Him. I ended up by asking Him to do His work through me." Today, God is fulfilling His promises and demonstrating His faithfulness to His covenant with the Jewish people by restoring to them the Land of Israel as an everlasting possession. Like Taylor, our opportunity is to see what God is doing today and become part of it. Part of that work is to support the people of Israel as they rebuild a nation. They are, of course, fallible human beings just like you and me. They have and will make mistakes, and as honest friends to them, we should not pretend they don't.

God loves all people—you, me, the Palestinians, and all others. As Christians, we're told in John 3:16: *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."* That's a promise we claim and proclaim! I believe that God is also calling us to proclaim His covenant to the Jewish people of Genesis 17:8: *"I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."* As much as the rainbow is a sign of God's covenant faithfulness, so is the modern State of Israel.

Listen closely; I think we can hear the words of the prophet Amos being whispered in the air: *"'Also I will restore the captivity of My people Israel, and they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them; they will also plant vineyards and drink their wine, and make gardens and eat their fruit. I will also plant them on their land, and they will not again be rooted out from their land which I have given them,' says the LORD your God" (Amos 9:14-15).*

By Rev. Jim Solberg, National Director, United States

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everlasting, Strong's Hebrew #5769

5769 (עולם) [owlam, `olam /o-lawm/] n m. From 5956; TWOT 1631a; GK 6409; 439 occurrences; AV translates as "ever" 272 times, "everlasting" 63 times, "old" 22 times, "perpetual" 22 times, "evermore" 15 times, "never" 13 times, "time" six times, "ancient" five times, "world" four times, "always" three times, "alway" twice, "long" twice, "more" twice, "never + 408" twice, and translated miscellaneous six times. 1 long duration, antiquity, futurity, for ever, ever, everlasting, evermore, perpetual, old, ancient, world. 1a ancient time, long time (of past). 1b (of future). 1b1 for ever, always. 1b2 continuous existence, perpetual. 1b3 everlasting, indefinite or unending future, eternity.

covenant, Strong's Hebrew #1285

1285 (ברית) [bâriyth /ber-eeth/] n f. From 1262 (in the sense of cutting [like 1254]); TWOT 282a; GK 1382; 284 occurrences; AV translates as "covenant" 264 times, "league" 17 times, "confederacy" once, "confederate" once, and "confederate + 1167" once. 1 covenant, alliance, pledge. 1a between men. 1a1 treaty, alliance, league (man to man). 1a2 constitution, ordinance (monarch to subjects). 1a3 agreement, pledge (man to man). 1a4 alliance (of friendship). 1a5 alliance (of marriage). 1b between God and man. 1b1 alliance (of friendship). 1b2 covenant (divine ordinance with signs or pledges). 2 (phrases). 2a covenant making. 2b covenant keeping. 2c covenant violation.

Strong, J. 1996. The exhaustive concordance of the Bible: Showing every word of the text of the common English version of the canonical books, and every occurrence of each word in regular order: (electronic ed.). Woodside Bible Fellowship: Ontario

Scriptures are taken from the New American Standard Bible.