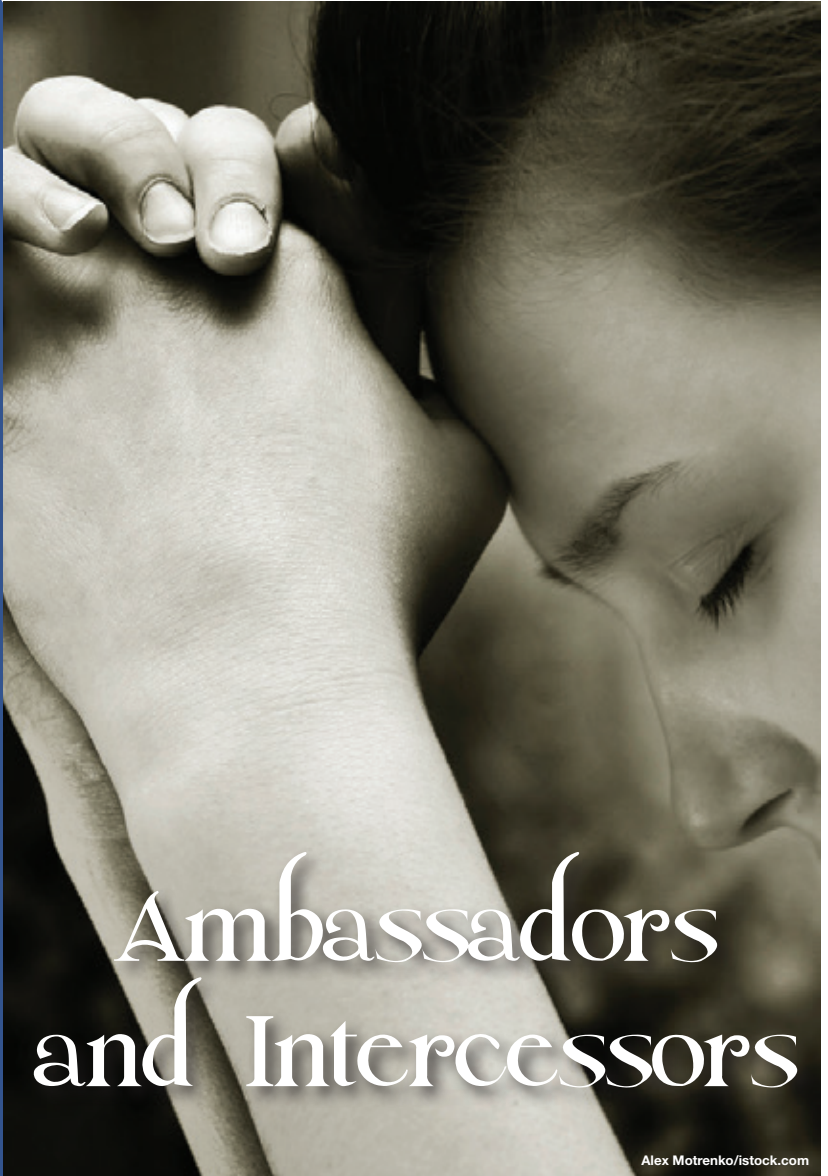


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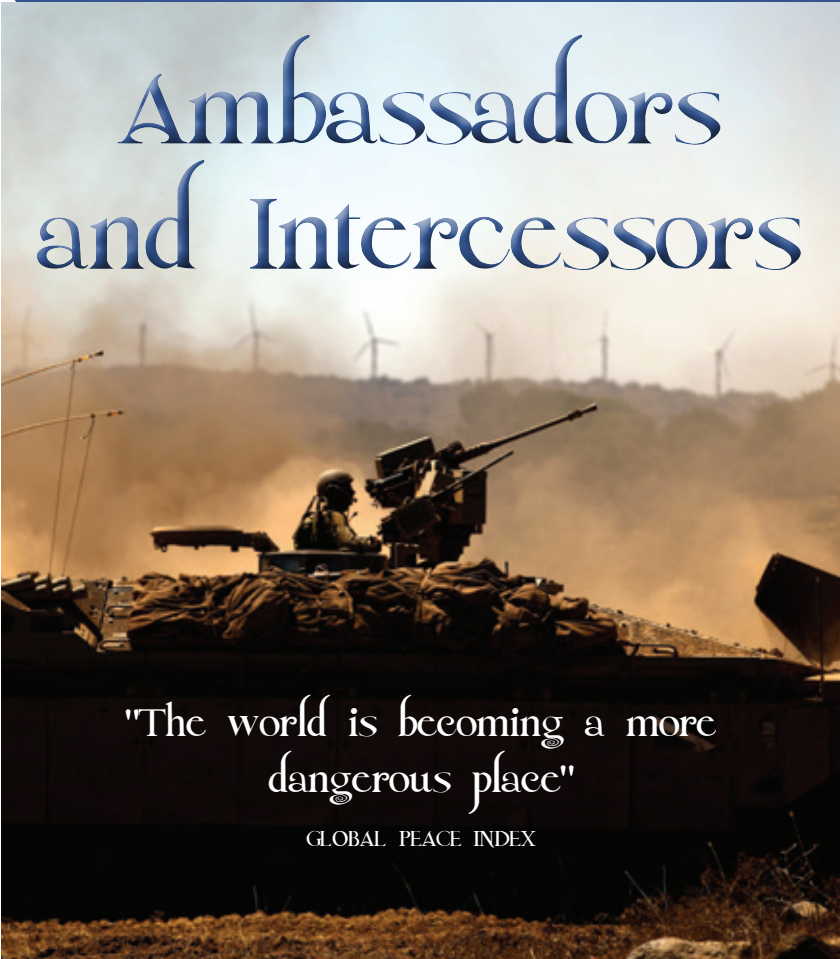
Ambassadors and Intercessors

Alex Motrenko/istock.com

By Rev. Terry Mason, *Deputy-International Development*

Bridges for Peace...Your Israel Connection®

Ambassadors and Intercessors

A photograph of a soldier in a tank, silhouetted against a hazy, orange-tinted sky. In the background, several wind turbines are visible on a distant hill. The scene suggests a juxtaposition of modern warfare and renewable energy.

"The world is becoming a more
dangerous place"

GLOBAL PEACE INDEX

WE ARE IN A TIME in world history when the confrontation between the forces of good and evil, light and darkness, seems more pronounced than ever before. Recently a major think tank, The Institute for Economics and Peace, published its annual Global Peace Index. Their less than surprising conclusion was, "The world is becoming a more dangerous place." According to their findings, of the 195 countries in the world only ten (5%) are currently free from conflict. By their measure the global lack of peace increased in both 2015 and 2016. We shouldn't be surprised. Daniel 11 and 12 describe the difficulties and distress that will accompany the end of days. In the Gospel of Matthew (24:4–13) we find the same warning when Yeshua (Jesus) told us that there will be wars and rumors of wars, increasing natural disasters and that lawlessness will increase. Clearly, the Bible tells us that all of these things will happen with increasing frequency as the end of the age draws near.

The battle is over values. Individuals, families and whole nations must choose on which side of this cosmic battle they will take their stand. Every day we are each faced with choices; our responses to those choices will show our allegiance, strengthening one side or the other. Ultimately it is a spiritual battle that is as old as mankind. One side holds to the moral values given to the world by the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Their calling is to be a light and blessing to all peoples, showing by example the blessing and peace that come by following God's loving instructions. The other denies God's existence, walking contrary to His moral standards, caring not for the poor, abusing the weak and proclaiming that "might makes right." This attitude is often referred to as the spirit of Amalek. [For more on this spirit, especially its connection to anti-Semitism, read "Amalek," our July 2011 Teaching Letter at <http://www.bridgesforpeace.com/letter/amalek/>]

As the world becomes more chaotic, how should we, as people of faith, respond? The Bible, as God's holy Word, has much to teach us about this cosmic conflict, because, prevalent as it is today, it is not new. Many of our favorite biblical characters were actively engaged in the same battle. King David was no stranger to this conflict of the ages and his writings in the book of Psalms have much to teach both Jews and Christians about the battle and the victory.

David Nekrutman, the Executive Director of the Center for Jewish-Christian Understanding and Cooperation, teaches that if you really want to learn what the Jewish people believe, study the *Siddur*, the prayer book of the nation. If you do, it will quickly be apparent to you that psalms are some of the most often quoted passages. And Christian scholars tell us that the Writing of the Apostles (New Testament) contains over 100 quotations from Psalms as well. The relevance of these beautiful verses to each new generation is part of what makes them so timeless.



One example is Psalm 2. Let's see what we can learn about this psalm and how it applies to our lives today in light of the escalating battle between good and evil in the world.

Psalm 2

Who wrote Psalm 2? Both Psalms 1 and 2 launch directly into the text of the songs without any title or author given. We are left to conjecture about age and authorship. The norm in the first two sections in the book of Psalms (chapters 1–72) is to include a title and usually an author. In fact, 38 out of 41 psalms in the first section are directly attributed to David. So, should we assume that the compiler did not view this psalm as David's? Rabbi Pesach Wolicki, Associate Director of the Center for Jewish-Christian Understanding and Cooperation, teaches that if something is omitted from the biblical text which would normally be there we need to ask, "why?" Unfortunately, in this case, it is impossible to know for sure. The Jews, however, have always regarded it as Davidic; and there is evidence in the Christian writings that the early Church leaders were of the same opinion—*"who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, 'Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples devise futile things?'"* (Acts 4:25).

Most Jewish and Christian commentators agree that the psalm is Messianic in nature. We can see this from the four places where it is referred to in the Writings of the Apostles (Acts 4:25, 13:33, Heb. 1:5, and 5:5). However it may, to a certain extent, apply to David, he cannot exhaust its allusions and it must refer to the Messiah as well. For example, some the surrounding nations were "given" to David and served him, but only a small portion of "the nations," even those of his time. So, we can be fairly certain that Psalm 2 was composed by King David and that it contains clear Messianic significance.

Psalm 2 Today

As for its relevance today, the psalm opens with, *"Why are the nations in an uproar and the peoples devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the LORD and against His Anointed..."* (vv. 1–2). That reads like a page out of today's news headlines and describes what the United Nations, European Union and many others incessantly try to do against Israel. There is a renewed effort by most of the nations in the world to rage against Israel and devise any means possible to delegitimize its right to exist. There is a spirit, a mindset, of unwillingness to accept the God of Israel and His sovereignty over the Land that He chose as His own.





Besides the fraught physical and political considerations, I believe that ultimately many of the nations are indeed taking their stand and taking counsel together against the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They are opposed to His kingship over the world and its peoples. They deny Him as the Creator of all. They deny His authority to give guidelines for living, even when the instructions are for their own good. Verse three states their goal, *"Let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us!"*

The original, historic context of the psalm is probably a reference to the Philistines' plan to sever the agreement made between David and the recently united tribes of Israel. However, it also has a more expansive meaning. The *Artscroll Tanach Series* commentary on *tehillim* (psalms) gives the following understanding of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, one of the leading *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.) scholars of the 19th century, who stresses that, "the yoke of God's anointed hangs heavily upon the necks of the gentile nations also. The מוסר (moser), cord of the Messiah is the מוסר (musar), moral self-discipline which he teaches, thus inhibiting the unbridled desires of mankind and saddling man with duties. These limitations are repugnant to the nations who yearn to free their conscience from any inhibitions." If God is indeed the Creator King, then He has the right to give guidelines. But though His guidelines are proven to produce blessing and wholeness to both individuals and societies, those who deny God chafe against them.

If God is indeed the Creator King, then He has the right to give guidelines.



Throughout Psalm 2 there are different people speaking. Who is speaking to whom? In the opening verses the psalmist set the stage so to speak. Then, in verse six God Himself makes a decree when He says, *“But as for Me, I have installed my king upon Zion, My holy hill.”* The next speaker (vv. 7–9) is the one about whom the decree was made. *“I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, ‘You are my Son; today I have begotten You.’”* (Ps. 2:7). Do you see why it is important to know who the author is? If it is David, he could be referring to himself in verse seven as the one about whom God made the decree.

As is true with many prophetic passages, the “decree” can be understood on various levels. It can refer to both David and the Messiah who would come through his line. Some feel that the “decree” referred back to God’s promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:14, where God says to David concerning his heir; *“I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to Me.”* That promise, in its original context is multi-level as the complete passage states, *“When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall*



endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever” (2 Sam. 7:12–16). Some parts obviously refer to Solomon as David’s immediate heir to the throne. But other aspects are far reaching and must refer to the Messiah, a future descendant of King David.

In verse eight God is quoted again, “Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as your possession.”

What a great promise! What an encouraging word!

But to whom was it made? Is it relevant for us today?

I find that sometimes in the Christian community we tend to take a certain verse or portion of Scripture and “make it our own.”

That is not always a bad thing, but we must also remember that the verse was originally given in a certain context; to a certain group or individual. A prime example of this is Jeremiah 29:11 which says, *“For I know the plans that I have for you,” declares the LORD, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.’”* While God was originally speaking to Judah through His prophet it is also true that in His omniscience He knows the good plans that He has for those who are His children in every generation. I believe that Psalm 2:8 is very much relevant to us today in the same multi-layered way. It starts with a command, *“Ask of Me.”* The implication is that if the one who is installed as king on Mount Zion in verse six doesn’t ask, then He won’t receive the nations as His inheritance. It is a clear command, *“Ask,”* but what does the word actually mean? As it is used here in Hebrew *shá’al* (שאל) means to *inquire*; by implication to *request*.

Understanding Our Part

God desires for His people, both Jews and Christians, to be a light to the nations bringing them into faithful knowledge of His guidelines for life as given in Scripture. In Exodus 19:5–6 God says, *“Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”* These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.” Through the prophet Isaiah, God tells Israel, *“You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “and My servant whom I have chosen”* (Isa. 43:10). In the Apostolic Writings Peter expands this passage to all who are of God’s household when he says, *“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation”* (1 Pet. 2:9–12).

So we are to be God’s witnesses, His ambassadors. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks says “When Jews are faithful to their mission, when they live and lead and inspire, as Jews, then God’s name is exalted. The fate of God’s “name” in the world is dependent on us and how we behave. No nation has ever been given a greater or more fateful responsibility. And it means that we each have a share in this task.” As believers in the God of Israel, who have chosen to take our stand with the Israel of God, we take upon ourselves the responsibility to be God’s ambassadors. Yeshua said, *“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven”* (Matt: 5:14–16).

As we make the one true God known by living and teaching His compassionate righteousness and moral justice, the nations of the world will be brought into right relationship with Him. Those who currently oppose His authority will have to admit that blessing comes from acknowledging the one true God and living according to His principles. Psalm 126:2 records the response of other nations when they see God’s blessing on those who walk according to His ways, *“Then they said among the nations, ‘The LORD has done great things for them.’”*

Our Response

As those who acknowledge the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as the sovereign King of this world which He created, we have a responsibility to advance His kingdom. We must live exemplary lives which will shine before others. We also need to act on Psalm 2:8 and ask for, to intercede on behalf of, the nations.



"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" Matthew: 5:14-16



The spirit of Amalek, which refuses to acknowledge God, is strong. However, Yeshua taught us, *“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who **asks** receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good **to those who ask Him!**”* (Matt: 7:7–11, emphasis added).

The Greek word used in verse seven for “ask” is *aiteō* (*ah-ee-teh’-o*). In general: ask, beg, call for, crave, desire, require. The implication is a demand of something due. We, as God followers, who are trying to bring about His kingdom in this world, have the right to ask for the nations as our inheritance. I would even go so far as to say that He expects us to do so and we fall short if we fail to ask in prayer for the nations. We know that it is God’s will for all of mankind to walk in His ways and be blessed. So when we intercede on behalf of the nations, praying against the spirit of Amalek, we can know that we are praying according to God’s will.

In James 4:2 we are told, *“You do not receive because you do not ask.”* Many cultures have proverbs about this truism of “asking.” For instance the Basotho nation in southern Africa says, “The baby that refuses to cry will die of hunger on its mother’s back.” The English say, “Many things are lost for want of asking.” An Azerbaijani proverb states, “It’s not shameful not to know, but it’s shameful not to ask.” And finally in Japan they use, “To ask is a temporary shame; not to ask, an eternal one.”

John reminds us, *“This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him”* (1 John 5:14–15).

His Word tells us that ultimately, *“All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will worship before You. For*



the kingdom is the LORD's and He rules over the nations" (Ps. 22:27–28). What an exciting challenge and blessing! By how we live our lives, and by our intercession or lack thereof, we can have a direct influence on the final outcome of this cosmic battle.

God promises that ultimately He will overcome the spirit of Amalek in this world and bring the fulfillment of Psalm 22:27–28, causing all people to acknowledge and worship Him. But He also expects us to play our role. Rabbi Shlomo Riskin points out that God says, *"I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven"* (Exod. 17:14). He Himself will do it. Then, in Deuteronomy 25:19 God tells the Israelites to do it, *"Therefore it shall come about when the LORD your God has given you rest from all your surrounding enemies, in the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you must not forget."* Just two verses earlier He had commanded them, *"Remember what Amalek did to you along the way when you came out from Egypt"* (Deut. 25:17). Rabbi Riskin asks, *"How can the Jewish people be commanded to both remember Amalek's actions and blot out their memory?"* Not by annihilating them, but by converting them; by winning them over to walk in compassionate righteousness and moral justice, following the one true God. Then the very memory of their former anti-God attitude will be completely renounced and forgotten.

God chose the Jewish nation as His special people among all the peoples of the earth. God chose them for a reason which He gives us in His Word. *"For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him"* (Gen. 18:19). He commanded them to be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation that would be a blessing to all the families of the earth (Gen. 12:3) by reflecting God's character. If you believe in the God of Israel and have committed to join His mission to transform the world then live a life that shines God's glory and ask for the nations.

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The final outcome is sure. God will accomplish the final redemption, bringing all things back into right relationship with Himself. But how we get there largely depends on us and our willingness to actively participate in bringing His kingdom to reality.

“Choose this day Whom you will serve...” Joshua 24:14–15



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