

Balaam: Oracle 1a - Israel

*Good morning.*

**SLIDE**

"For no matter how many **promises** God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God. " 2 Corinthians 1:20

**SLIDE: Amen**

(aw-mane)

Have you ever wondered why we say "amen" after we pray? What does it really mean when we say it?

This word comes from the Hebrew word, amen (אָמֵן). Yes you heard it right, this word is literally a Hebrew word; meaning when we say it, we are speaking Hebrew. Congratulations you can now speak Hebrew! The Strong's concordance defines this word as meaning, "verily, truly, so be it." When someone prays and we say, "amen" we are saying, "so be it."

We are agreeing; it is one powerful tool to be used in our life as believers. "Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven." (Matt 18) He takes care of

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every part of our life. For us, our response is quite simple, amen. When we say amen, we are completing the cycle.

This word was used when it talked about Abraham's faith. It reads, "Then he believed (אמן aman) in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness" (Gen 15:6). Abraham believed God. So in a sense when God declared the promise of a son, Abraham said, "amen." In a sense, we agree with God that he has made promises he will keep.

"For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us" (2 Cor. 1:20).

**SLIDE: TITLE PAGE**

Today, we're continuing with Balaam's first oracle to King Balak of Moab – and – as last time – there may be some controversy with what is discussed. However, Jesus spoke the truth, and God willing, so will I.

The setting for Oracle 1 is on the plains of Moab – the nation of Israel is preparing to cross the Jordan River. The King of Moab has hired Balaam – a professional sorcerer – to curse Israel that is camping on his doorstep; Balak fears both for his land and his gods.

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Everything has been prepared, animals have been sacrificed in a ludicrous attempt to bribe Yehovah to change His mind about loving Israel. Balaam, however, is in a no-win situation. He wants to get paid by King Balak, but God has specifically warned him not to speak anything other than what He – Yehovah – tells him to speak – or else! So, Balaam stands up and proceeds to bless rather than curse Israel in a series of Oracles.

A major part of what Scripture is teaching us here is that things are going on behind the scenes of which Israel is totally unaware. The Israelites had *no clue* to what was going on with Balaam and Balak in the mountains overlooking their encampment. Neither Moses nor any other Israelite was on the mountain when the attempts at cursing take place. So, we have a situation somewhat similar to what happened with Job, where the REAL action is hidden *UNSEEN AND OUT OF SIGHT – IN A SENSE, THIS WAS A MYSTERY TO THE ISRAELITES AT THIS TIME. THIS WILL REOCCUR AGAIN LATER ON IN WHAT WE'RE DISCUSSING* in this presentation.

The part of the 1<sup>st</sup> Oracle that I want to look deeper into today is God's statement in verse 9...

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**SLIDE: A NATION APART**

“Behold, a people that lives apart and will not be counted among the nations.” Numbers 23:9

Yehovah – thru Balaam’s mouth – broadcasts to all who could hear exactly how He sees Israel: Verse 9: “Israel... will not be counted among the nations”

- Israel is not like any other nation – still true today. That's why all nations have their eyes on Jerusalem.

Living apart – **separate**. We came across this idea previously when we touched on God’s holiness. The Hebrew word for Holy (Kadosh) means ‘separate’. God is Holy and must be treated completely different that we treat anyone else. Israel likewise must act differently than every other nation.

**SLIDE:** As I did last time, I want to call to attention to Simeon’s prophesy about Jesus. Luke chapter 2 records the event of Mary & Joseph presenting the infant Jesus in the Temple.

As they were in the Temple, a man named Simeon suddenly appears – he is an old man whom God had promised that he would not see death before he saw the Messiah. Directed to come to the Temple THAT DAY by the Holy Spirit, Simeon sees the child and breaks into a beautiful prophesy –

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“Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, According to Your word; “For my eyes have seen Your salvation that You have prepared in the presence of all peoples: a light, for revelation to the *Gentiles*, and for the glory of Your people Israel.”

1. The Light for revelation to the Gentiles, and
2. He will be the GLORY to His People Israel

This is important – Jesus the Light will have do two things for the Nations: (1) He will be for REVELATION to the Gentiles – Israel already had the revelation of the One True God but Gentiles didn't – Jesus would be the Light to reveal Yehovah's majesty.

- (2) He will be **THE GLORY of His people Israel.**

We'll see how this plays out in history in a moment. But just keep this in the back of your mind: Jesus is the Light for Revelation for the Gentiles and He is the Glory of God's people Israel.

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**SLIDE: Outline**

Here's a list of topics that we'll get into today – some to a greater extent than others. All of these topics are prompted by what God said thru Balaam in Oracle #1 regarding Israel.

- Making Assumptions
- The Church & Politics
- Is God finished with Israel?
- Mysteries behind the curtain
- God's Promises

OK - in verse 9 of Numbers 23, God stated that Israel was not like any other nation – they were a nation apart, holy to Him..

**SLIDE: TWO PEOPLES IN THE WORLD**

This is God making a declaration to the world about HOW HE sees things: **THERE IS ISRAEL, AND THEN THERE IS EVERYBODY ELSE.**

- God says that Israel is a people who will dwell apart and not be reckoned as among the *goyim* (nations).

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Israel in the OT is referred to as God's "people", His "*ammi*"; and all other people on the planet (gentiles) are called "nations", *goyim*.

Israel is entirely different from *everyone else* in God's eyes/

- NOT BETTER than gentiles, but distinct from gentiles and with a distinct purpose (– which they didn't realize yet – they would bring forth the Messiah).

Israel – although is it alone among the nations – is not an orphan. The God of the Universe promises to dwell in their midst.

- God chooses and separates. God chose Israel and set them apart – and since He is sovereign, He didn't have to ask our permission!

\*\*\* OK – here we go – put your seatbelts on and let's jump into a situation that has at times been a source of consternation here – but doesn't have to. It centers on the following question that is prompted by God's statement about Israel in Oracle 1:

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Q: IS GOD FINISHED WITH ISRAEL TODAY?

This topic has come up in some discussions in the church and it has resulted in some hurt feelings. I think it's time that we looked at the issue in light of Scripture – and since Jesus is the Light for the glory of Israel, as we read in Simeon's prophesy, He will be at the center of the discussion.

Before we get into the question, I want to start by laying a foundation. Let's first consider the term 'assumptions'.

SLIDE: ASSUMPTIONS

Noun: #1 meaning: Something taken for granted; a **supposition**

- May be "a correct assumption" or "an incorrect assumption" for example:
  - The electricity is off
  - The ice on the pond is thick enough
  - I've tried my best, so God will accept me

CLICK: We all bring certain assumptions to the table.

Some of them are right and based on Scripture – some are not.

< **Assumptions DO matter** >

- 
- Wrong assumption – thought Mary was pregnant!



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The Bible begins with a majestic assumption that it does not try to prove – that God does interact with us – He spoke creation into existence, He talked with Adam. God is a Personal Being. That's the Scripture's starting point and it's ours as well.

- **But what if** your assumption is different – what if you assume that God does exist but he is NOT Personal? That He does not interact with man.

**SLIDE: JEFFERSON**

**That's exactly the assumption that Thomas Jefferson had.**  
Jefferson was a Deist.

**Jefferson believed** that God did exist and created the world, but He does not intervene with the functioning of the natural world in any way; He allows it to run according to the laws of nature. For Deists, human beings can only know God via reason and the observation of nature, but not by revelation or supernatural manifestations (such as miracles) In other words – He's hand-off regarding how things run.

Now, Jefferson did believe that the ethical system of Jesus was the finest the world has ever seen, but he didn't believe in miracles or other supernatural elements because

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this would have meant the intervention of a Personal God into nature. So, Jefferson took his scissors to his Bible and cut out all the New Testament passages that recorded the miracles or healings of Jesus, anything really supernatural (demons and angels) and anything that did not agree with his assumptions about God and judgment.

Then, in 1820, Jefferson produced his version of the bible entitled "*The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth.*" If you read it online, you find the story of Jesus' death and burial...

*"And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen cloths with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulcher, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus, And rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulcher, and departed."* Chapter 17:60-64

<http://www.angelfire.com/co/JeffersonBible/jeffb17.html>

Sounds OK. Then you turn the page and see ... **nothing. Just nothing.**

In Jefferson's Bible, there is no account of the beginning and the end of the Gospel story. There is no story of the annunciation, the virgin birth or the appearance of the angels to the shepherds. The resurrection is not even mentioned. Jefferson saw Jesus as "a man, of illegitimate birth, of a

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benevolent heart, (and an) enthusiastic mind, who set out without pretensions of divinity, ended in believing them, and was punished capitally for sedition by being gibbeted according to the Roman law.”

CLICK:

- No resurrection. No power. No ascension into the clouds of glory. No promised return.
- And no need for a Savior. How tragically sad.

**CLICK:** So – Assumptions do matter and – when they are wrong – they can be **lethal to life in this world and the next.**

OK – I mention all this regarding the importance that our assumptions being in line with Scripture because they play an important part in our relationship with the world and within our own Christian body. Take for example the following question:

**SLIDE:** Is God finished with Israel?

Ok –let’s get to the question: *“IS GOD FINISHED WITH ISRAEL?”*

- I think we all recognize that this is a controversial subject and that it has *Political* overtones to many people.

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- Politics – oh oh! Don't worry, I'm not going to get political here – in fact, I want to show some ways for us to defuse a potential hot topic by recognizing whether an issue is political or spiritual at its core.
- OK – What *assumptions* do we bring to the table – either rightly or wrongly – when someone mentions Israel today, or someone asks the question: “*Is God finished with Israel?*” Or someone says “*Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem?*”
- Well – one of the foundation principles of philosophy is Know thyself. *Know thyself* – OK: What's your GUT REACTION TO THE QUESTION – before you even know why a person is asking it?
- Do we have a feeling of irritation rising inside of us?
- Do we assume that the question is probably about:
  - a) Support for the State of Israel in the Middle East? (which is a political issue) – or is it about
  - b) Jewish people who haven't accepted Christ? , or is it...
  - c) A reference to *spiritual* Israel (believers in Christ)?

It could be any one of the three or a combination of them.

OK – let's take the worst-case scenario and assume that IT IS a political question and – besides that – THE PERSON WANTS TO ARGUE. How do we handle it with *Christian* charity?

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An excellent starting point for us is to ask: *How did Jesus handle political questions?*

**SLIDE: RENDER UNTO CAESAR**

The New Testament clearly shows that Jesus did not want to be drawn into arguments over politics. For example, on one occasion Jesus' opponents tried to trap Him into saying something that either the Romans would find objectionable if He answered one way, or the Jews would be offended if he answered in the opposite way. Roman taxes were the issue.

Background – The Roman general Pompey brought the territory of Israel under Rome's control in 63 b.c. when his support allowed one side in a Jewish civil war to gain victory. From that point on, Israel ceased to be an independent kingdom and was ruled by client kings — like Herod the Great — who were loyal to the caesar. In 6 a.d., Rome began to rule directly that part of the land known as Judea through governors, or procurators. With this rule came also a yearly poll tax of one denarius, the normal daily wage, which was levied on every adult from puberty to age sixty-five. Most Jews loathed the poll tax because it symbolized Rome's control of Judea.

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OK – here's the story of the trap as told in Matthew 22:

“Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any. Tell us then, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?” But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, “Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the coin used for the poll-tax.” And they brought Him a denarius. And He \*said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” They \*said to Him, “Caesar's.” Then He \*said to them, “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's.” And hearing this, they were amazed, and leaving Him, they went away.

The Sadducees and Pharisees were no dummies. They just weren't as smart as Jesus. They wanted to “entangle” Him. Most of the time, these two groups could not agree on anything because the Sadducees accommodated themselves to Roman rule while these Pharisees represented those who wanted independence. Yet their common enemy is Jesus, and so they unite to test Him regarding the poll tax.

They think that Jesus is in a no-win situation. The Jewish populace will hate Him if He affirms the propriety of the poll tax. Yet if He declares it unlawful, He can be charged with treason by the Romans.

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Jesus, of course, sees through the ruse. He asks for the coin used to pay the tax. Because the coin has caesar's image on it, Jesus said that it is his and should be given back to him. In a similar manner, what belongs to God must also be returned to Him.

**CLICK – OK: HOW DO WE DISCERN WHAT BELONGS TO GOD AND WHAT BELONGS TO CAESAR TODAY?**

**SLIDE: READ – JESUS' STATEMENT, "MY KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD"**

One the benchmarks by which we can test whether something is God's or not is Jesus's statement. "My kingdom is not of this world."

The difference between Jesus' and the kingdoms of this world is in terms of our weaponry.

- What sets apart the kingdom of God is that the soldiers of the King do not fight with swords and spears. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal. They are, however, mighty to tear down strongholds and every lofty thing that attempts to exalt itself against the knowledge of God.
- The resurrected Jesus said to his apostles that all authority has already been given to Him. (Matthew 28).

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- When we forget this fact, that all authority in heaven and on earth has already been given unto Him, we end up dividing His realm. We think the real kingdom is where the church is, where it is *doing “churchy” things*.
- When we are praying, when we are giving and receiving the sacraments, when we are preaching or hearing sermons, then we have entered into His kingdom. When, however, we are making widgets, buying groceries, or coaching Little League, then we have left the safety of the kingdom and have ventured into the world.
- The truth is, of course, that His reign is universal. We do not move into and out of His kingdom so much as we fluctuate between *recognizing it and failing to recognize it, manifesting it or failing to manifest it*.
- We are to do all that we do as unto Him.

A danger we face today is a movement within the Church that basically denies that all authority has already been given to Jesus.

- This movement, called "kingdom authority" or "dominion rule" seeks to turn Christ's statement of "*My Kingdom is*



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*not of this world*” on its head. It is – If you haven’t heard of it – good, you’re better off., but unfortunately it is growing.

- The basic premise is that Christians are mandated by God to change society and take back the authority over territory that was lost to Satan in the Garden of Eden. The prime method for doing this is **by political dominion**.
  - It teaches that Jesus *cannot or will not return* until the Church has taken dominion *by gaining control of the earth’s governmental and social institutions*.
- Without going into these issue right now, let me say that they’re very much mistaken – perhaps dangerously so.
- We must avoid the kind of thinking that fosters the view that government is either our ally (*if it supports our special agenda*) or our enemy (*if it remains opposed or unresponsive to our voice*). When this happens, political strategy becomes the focus of everything, *as if* the spiritual fortunes of God's people rise or fall depending on who is in office.

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- America's moral decline is a *spiritual* problem, not a political one, and its solution is the Gospel, not political dominion that FORCES everyone to do what is right.
  - Being a former Catholic, I would have thought that the Church's experience with the Inquisition should be enough of *a warning of how things that start out with good intentions can go very bad very fast.*
- Jesus lived in a society that was *much worse than today's culture*. Cruel tyrants and dictators ruled throughout the empire.
- Many of His followers – to varying degrees – expected Him to free them from Rome's oppressive rule. But Christ did *not* come as a *political deliverer* or *social reformer*. He never issued a call for such changes, *even by peaceful means.*
- Just as God called ancient Israel to be holy, He has called the church today to be a kingdom of priests, not a kingdom of political activists.

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Now, it may sound like such groups would be on the fringe, but they are not. In fact, there are some prominent Christian leaders who claim for themselves the offices of apostles or prophets who are spearheading the movement.

And therein is the inherent but unaddressed danger:

- mix together **POLITICS, CONCERN OVER THE DECLINE IN AMERICAN MORAL VALUES, AND CLAIMS OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS, WHAT YOU GET IS an FIRST-RATE PETRI DISH for SLICK SPIRITUAL DECEPTION to grow in.**

We all know Jesus' statements as to conditions that will exist in the end time – about wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes and so on – Christians tend to forget that one of the prominent signs of the end of the age **is the proliferation of false prophets.**

- In Matthew Chapter 24, Jesus warned the disciples about what the last days will be like. Three times in this discourse Jesus mentions false prophets. (Matthew 24:4, 5; 11; 24.)
- **Jesus said (Matthew 24:24) that this deception will be so slick that it will *even fool* some of the elect if possible.**

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- I don't know about you, but I've scratched my head over that last statement. You see, I tended to assume – here's that word again – I assumed that I'd be able to easily identify a false prophet because he will primarily be speaking about doctrinal issues, but I've realized that **that's not necessarily so – at least *not initially*.**
- Slick hucksters have always been able to influence people outside of the church. Nowadays, it's also frequently happening inside of the church because it goes unchallenged.
- But, to be successful in promoting false doctrine *within* the Church, you **first** have to gain respect within the church, finding ways to promote yourself and thereby enhance your spiritual reputation and authority. What's better for this than your own show on Christian TV with a title like Prophetic Perspectives?
- Now –Christian pastors and teachers regularly give their perspective on current events and try to relate them to Biblical prophecy – there's nothing wrong with that. But, some then *go further* and relate their dreams and visions and insights they claim are from from God on these events – that's where it gets dicey.

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- The premise is that God has chosen them as a source of revelation, and thus we should heed their council – or at least sent in donations.
- Once they're your BFF (best friend forever) and receive 5,000 likes on Facebook, any doctrinal errors they subsequently promote are often given the benefit of the doubt – and **that's the real danger – when we start to compromise Scriptural truth based on the likeability or reputation of who is speaking, widespread spiritual deception is possible!**
- Now – I do believe in the gift of prophesy today, and Scripture says test all prophesy, not accept it blindly because some claims to be a prophet.
- I've read many of these so-called revelations and insights and have concluded that it is usually the product of a vivid imagination – or else the person had bad Chinese food too close to bedtime.

Here's an example: In 2013, the following was said on a television show claiming prophetic insight into current events:

*"I believe our only hope is a military takeover-martial law-and that the most crucial element of that is who the martial is going to be. I believe there are noble*

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*leaders in our military that love the Republic, they love everything we stand for, and they could seize the government. I'm not advocating this. I'm just telling you what could happen. They could seize it and help restore the foundations, restore the Constitution.”* [comments during the Sept. 30, 2013, edition of his television show “Prophetic Perspectives in Current Events”]

Now – it would be great if America was restored to its religious foundations – but you can be sure that any statement that the *only* hope for this is a takeover by a military leader that meets the host’s moral standards is not coming from the Holy Spirit. But, undiscerning Christians who are eager to see America restored to its heritage might fall for it. For me, until this individual admits that he is wrong, I would not listen to anything he says – the Bible calls him a false prophet.

- Now, I’m purposely not mentioning any names here. It is more important for us to recognize what the spiritual quicksand looks like than to point fingers at a person who is probably very sincere. *Sincerity, however, does not protect them nor us from spiritual deception.*

Isaiah (8:20) said: “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, *it is because there is no light*

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**in them."** Basically, Isaiah is saying that if anyone tells you anything contrary to Scripture, then they were not of the Lord.

- The truth is that **NO** human government or organization or political party can ultimately do anything either to advance or to thwart God's kingdom – **JUST AS Balaam and Balak discovered in their absolute inability to curse Israel.**
- The worst, most despotic government in the world cannot halt the power of the Holy Spirit or the spread of God's Word. In fact, God indicated that he sometimes places hated individuals there for His own purpose (eg, Pharaoh).

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- The great twentieth-century writer G. K. Chesterton noted, "At least five times (in Church history)...the Faith has to all appearances *gone to the dogs*. (but) **In each of these five cases, it was the dog that died.**"
- One thing we know for sure about dominion on the earth in the next 100 years – if Jesus should tarry in His return – is that He will still be Lord over all authorities – even without our help.

OK – Enough of a digression – **HOW DO WE DISCERN WHAT BELONGS TO GOD AND WHAT BELONGS TO CAESAR TODAY?**

**SLIDE: Is it a **SCRIPTURE ISSUE?****

I suggest that the initial step is to determine whether the issue – whatever it is – whether the issue is a Scriptural Issue or not.

- If it is solely a political question – I suggest that we should politely avoid the discussion and bring Scripture into the issue.

For the most part, I believe that we here try our best here to *avoid politics* – don't *always* succeed – but we try. Many



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other churches believe that to refuse to get into politics is somehow cowardly. But, I believe that such an attitude misses the primary point of why the church exists. The purpose of the church is to glorify God, help us to grow into the image of Christ, love one another, and to proclaim the Gospel of Christ to a DYING WORLD.

**CLICK:** So, how do we avoid conflict in the church on strongly-held issues that have a **political tinge** to them? Well. We first can try to avoid unnecessary conflict. We need to be able to *distinguish* what is a scriptural issue and what not.

- "Vote democratic", "vote republican"... that's politics - that's an opinion

clicks

- "The President is always right/wrong" -> opinion
- "Taxes are too high"... -> I say 'true' - but it's opinion
- "Only One Way to God?" -> Scriptural Issue
- "I don't need a Savior" -> Scriptural Issue
- "God is not finished with Israel yet"... -> Scriptural Issue

OK - the last issue is the one with which I started...

- IS GOD IS FINISHED WITH ISRAEL? -

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- Unfortunately, this issue has been a major source of contention in Christian circles and even in this body.
- Some assume that anyone who says that *God is not finished with Israel* is implying that there are two ways to salvation – one thru the Mosaic law for Jews and one thru grace for Gentiles; such a premise is seen as heretical, AND IT IS! In reality, it's an unfounded assumption – as I'll explain very soon.
- OK –ASSUMPTIONS – and, as we saw – assumptions can be correct or incorrect. If the assumption that I bring to the table is: “*Yes, God is finished dealing with ethnic Israel as an entity because they did not accept Christ*” – then my view on issues relating to the terms ‘*Israel*’ or “*Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem*” will undoubtedly be different than if my answer is “*No– God is not yet finished with Israel*”.
- Thus, if “*Yes– He is finished with Israel*”, then I will then tend to view the nation of Israel and non-believing Jews just like *any other* group of people or nation.
- However, if my answer is “*NO – God is not finished yet with Israel*”, then it would be prudent to tread lightly and pray that the Holy Spirit assures that I do not act in a way that *hinders God's Plan for Israel* – intentionally or not.

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- Now – like I said, we should try to avoid controversy where possible, but avoidance must not be **our primary concern**. *What does Scripture say?*
- OK –Here’s what we know as **FACT**. God separated Israel away from the other nations to be holy unto Himself (fact). They were to be His chosen people – and thru them, the Messiah would come and thus the whole world would be blessed (fact).
- The Messiah – Jesus – **did come**. Some Jews accepted Him but most did not, so the gospel was taken to the Gentiles. And thus, we Gentiles whom He chose to bring out of darkness – who were once outside of spiritual Israel – have been grafted into spiritual Israel and are now children of God (fact).
- OK ... the question again... Now that Christ has come, **“Is God finished with Israel” – and when I say “Israel”, I’m talking about those who are Jewish *by ancestry* but who *have not accepted Christ*?**
- Let me be clear – I have no intention of making a political statement right now about the *physical* Nation of Israel.
  - So, I’m talking about “ethnic Israel” – those Jews by ancestry who do not accept Christ as Messiah.

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This pertains to more than just the nation of Israel today, because there are **more Jews in NYC than in Jerusalem**. The question pertains to the unbelieving Jewish people as a whole.

Let's get clarification from Scripture on this issue. Paul's letter to the Galatians sheds some light on the issue. Talking about salvation, Paul writes...

SLIDE: GALATIANS 6

"It doesn't make any difference now whether we have been circumcised or not; what counts is whether we really have been changed into new creation. (some translate this as "into a new and different people)

- Now –The correct and wonderful conclusion we draw from this text is: it doesn't matter if we are circumcised (ie: a Jew) or not circumcised (ie; a Gentile) – if we accept Christ for our salvation, then we are a new creation, part of a new people, part of God's family because of faith!
- **And that's certainly the most important point Paul is proclaiming here!** 2 Cor 5:15: Paul writes: "So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; what is old has passed away—look, what is new has come!"
- Praise Jesus!

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**CLICK** But there's more – this text also has an *IMPLICATION* that is usually overlooked in the text...

**SLIDE: THIRD GROUP OF PEOPLE**

Here's a graphic illustration of the text. We saw Israel was separated away by God from the gentile people. (CLICK) Now, after Christ, believers are separated away from both of those groups into a new and different *creation* – a new people. By the way – since Only God can create, if we're a new creation, He did it all by Himself – He didn't need our help. This passage is a statement about the gospel of grace!

OK – this new group to which born-again believers belong is called by several names: the true Israel – *the Israel of God* – *spiritual Israel* – in order to distinguish it from the *Israel “after the flesh” (or “ethnic Israel”)*. The Israel of God is made up of those from ethnic Israel and from Gentile peoples who the Father has called out and who have accepted Jesus as Savior. We are a new creation.

**CLICK: But ... notice carefully** – by noting that believers come from both the circumcised and uncircumcised groups, Paul may (and I emphasize the word 'may' at this

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time) – he *may* be implying that the two former groups *still* remain – and I'll get to this in a minute.

(If this sounds strange – three groups of people – I'll admit that. In one sense, there are still only two groups now – but it is “*us and them*” – “believers and everyone else”. But **one way** of reading this passage – not the only way, I admit – is that Paul has not lumped the non-believing *circumcised* group in with the non-believing *uncircumcised* group.

This is the very point where we can – and recently HAVE – gotten into unfortunate quarrels. “Israel” and “Jerusalem” have become very sensitive terms today, and it seems that when either is mentioned, the topic is assumed to be a political issue to avoid and not a scriptural issue to investigate.

*In Essentials Unity, In Non-Essentials Liberty, In All Things Charity* (or love). In essentials of the faith we must be unified (Acts 4:12), in non-essentials we should have liberty (Col 2:16), and in all things charity, which is another word for love (John 13:35).

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OK – The Apostle Paul specifically addressed the Issue of *whether or not God is finished with Israel* in the Book of Romans. And remember, what we're talking about is **ethnic Israel** or "*Israel after the flesh*" – those who are Jewish by ancestry but have not accepted Christ as Messiah.

In his *Letter to the Romans*, Chapter 11, Paul writes:

SLIDE: ROMANS 11: FULLNESS OF THE GENTILES

"For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you 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."" (Romans 11:25-27)

CLICK – This exact promise/prophesy is repeated three times in Scripture: once by David in Psalm 14 and twice by the prophet Isaiah (Chs. 2 & 59).

Paul, David and Isaiah state unequivocally that Israel (the Jewish people) will come to be saved by the Messiah because God promised this.

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Let's look at several of the terms used by Paul in order that we might get the full impact of what he is saying...

SLIDE: ENLARGED – FULLNESS OF THE GENTILES

- It WAS a Mystery
- Partial hardening
- Until
- Fullness of the Gentiles
- All Israel will be saved

Paul says “I’m going to tell you a **MYSTERY** so that you are not wise in your own estimation”. In other words, “*Don’t be making assumptions because you think you know the whole story...*” Evidently, some Roman Christians were pretty smug and thought they knew all the details of God’s Plan of redemption.

- Paul says **things are not as they appear** – God has been doing something *behind the scenes* that we wouldn’t know about unless He reveals it. This spiritual *behind-the-scenes* activity is similar to what we saw with Job and with Moses concerning Balaam and Balak.
- The Apostle Paul here sounds somewhat like another Paul – Paul Harvey – “*Here’s the REST of the story...*”

Paul says that God has now revealed the mystery about why so many Jews did not accept Christ – & it is this: the hardening of Israel occurred so that YOU Gentiles were able



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to come in. *This has been God's Plan all along* – it was a mystery up to now, but it is now revealed.

- Remember when Jesus was asked WHY He spoke in parables that so many couldn't understand? He explained it in John 12 by quoting the Prophet Isaiah:

"Isaiah said, "He (Yehovah) has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and understand with their heart, and turn to me, and I would heal them."

- Then the Apostle John adds: Isaiah said these things because HE SAW CHRIST'S GLORY, and spoke about him."

**Christ's GLORY** - HERE IS WHERE SIMEON'S PROPHECY TIES

IN... "He (Jesus) will be a Light of revelation to the **Gentiles(!)**, And the GLORY of Your people Israel".

- Acts chapter 13, verses 46 and 47. While at Antioch, Paul speaks to a group of Jews: " Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first (That was God's promise); since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. 47 For so the Lord has commanded us, 'I have placed You (Messiah) as a light for the Gentiles,

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That You may bring salvation to the end of the earth.” **(Paul is quoting Simeon's prophecy)**

When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.”

- In 2 Cor 3:14-16, Paul goes on to say: -- **For to this very day, the same veil (Moses wore)** remains when they (Jews) hear the old covenant read. It has not been removed because **only in Christ is it taken away**. But until this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds, but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.

The Scripture is all about Christ, but even though the Scripture was given only to the Jews, the Jews can't see that because there is a **veil over their eyes hiding Christ's glory**. Only in Christ is the veil taken away – and that only when the Father permits it.

**Remember when Jesus appeared to the two disciples walking on the road to Emmaus?** They were discouraged and confused that Jesus had died and now there were rumors of His resurrection. Jesus appeared but they could not recognize Him. After explaining by Scripture why the

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Messiah must die, verse 31 of Luke chapter 24 says: “Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight.”

- The Holy Spirit took the veil off the eyes of those two Jewish disciples and then – *and only then* – they could see who Jesus really was!
- Scripture says that God purposely put it on the Jews so that the gospel would be taken to the we Gentiles. No Jew can see Christ's glory until God first removes the veil.
- **Is that Unfair** of God to put a veil over their eyes – so that we Gentiles might be saved? I guess you'll have to answer that for yourself based on your understanding of the character of God. It's a part of the Mystery that hasn't been revealed yet.
- Paul says that the veil will remain Until...

**SLIDE:** UNTIL = a fabulous word, a hopeful word – a prophetic word! “Stay in your room until 6:00pm.” “You can't have dessert until you finish your vegetables”.

- Paul says ethnic Israel will have a veil over their spiritual eyes until all the “called Gentiles” come into the kingdom.

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- Then, the veil will be removed and Israel will be restored because they will see the glory of Christ and accept Him as Messiah. [Bill – 2 Peter 3 (hastening the coming of Christ)]
- And when Israel as a people do accept Christ, they will be missionaries that turn the world upside down. Paul wrote: Romans 11 vs 29: for “*The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable*”
- This has always been a part of God’s unseen Plan that was only hinted at until now. Things are not always as they seem, but now we have more facts – not all the facts but enough to answer this question. Things that are going on behind the scenes – what we call mysteries – show that God *always* is in control.

One final point on this Israel issue to address:

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SLIDE: TWO WAYS?

*“All Israel will be saved.”*

*Does this mean that there two ways to be saved?*

*(1) for Jews by the Law*

*(1) for Gentiles by Grace?*

CLICK: *No – SALVATION IS THROUGH Christ alone!*

The topic of ethnic Israel being special – even today – is touchy because it is sometimes assumed – **here's that word gain** – it is *assumed* that this means that there are two ways to salvation – in which God deals with the Jews *differently* than He deals with Gentiles regarding salvation.

Well – He has dealt differently with the Jews in many ways – the Irish are not His chosen people (sad to say) – but not on the issue of salvation. **The only way to be saved – for Jews and Gentiles – remains the same – accept Christ!**

- Even before the cross, this was the way it was. Remember Jesus talking about Lazarus dying and going to the bosom of Abraham, which was across a chasm from those suffering in hell. Abraham, the father of faith, had to wait there until Jesus died, rose and descended to lead the captives free with the gospel.

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In Galatians, Paul states that the Law of Moses was not the climax of God's plan of salvation. It had a role in redemptive history, but the cross of Christ has transformed its purpose, rendering it **obsolete** as that which defines His people.

God's people Israel are now defined – *not by ethnicity* – but by faith and trust in His covenant promises that are kept in **Jesus the Savior and Messiah**.

- ✚ Israel will accept Jesus as Messiah! He hasn't given up on them – and it's a good thing, because since that's His Character, *He won't give up on us!*

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**SLIDE:** HOPE AND PROMISES

“For everything that was written in the past **was written to teach us**, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have **hope.**” Romans 15:4

"What is the Christian's hope?" Most people understand hope as wishful thinking, as in "I hope something will happen." We hope the plane is on time, or I hope I win the lottery. There is an element of uncertainty in such a definition of hope. This is not what the Bible means by hope. The biblical definition of hope is "confident expectation." Hope is a firm assurance regarding things that are unclear and unknown

What happens to people when they lose hope? They give up. They quit. Hope and perseverance go together. Hope is a future promise that keeps us going. It is the carrot before the donkey. Hope knows that there is a goal, and that the goal is worth pursuing, even through hardship and difficulty. If we don't have hope, we won't have perseverance.

When we're going thru something unpleasant, we can get discouraged. We don't like it. A nun once told my class that Jesus said that we'll experience tribulation in this world. Well, she said, if we'll experience tribulation, that means we occasionally will tribulate – so – expect it.

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But, it isn't fun, we get discouraged maybe even sink into despair. (CH Spurgeon?)

One last thing...

**SLIDE: Pilgrim's Progress:**

I remember reading *Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan in Catholic High School. It is an interesting kind of book in that it does not actually present arguments for Christianity's being true. Instead, it simply assumes (here's that word again) it assumes that Christianity is true. The story is about a person's spiritual journey of faith – not physical journey but the spiritual events and discouragements that happen along the way to Heaven.

While walking in the fields one day, a man named Christian (main character) meets a man named Evangelist, who asks why Christian seems to be so worried. When Christian answers that he fears destruction but does not know how to escape it, Evangelist informs him that there is a way: by heading for a light which he can see in the distance, he will arrive at a gate where he will receive further instructions.

Now when he had gone a little ways toward the light in the distance, his family began to cry after him to turn around and come back from the way to the light. Pilgrim put his fingers in his ears, and ran on toward the Celestial City, crying



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**Life! Life! Eternal Life!** So, he flees from the City of Destruction.

There's a particular scene in the book where Christian is stuck inside of the dungeon of Doubting-Castle. He and his companion Hopeful were on the road toward the light but were finding it hard walking. They saw that, just off the road, there was a meadow that would be soft on their feet – so they stepped off the road into By-Path-Meadow because it *looked easier and seemed to be going in the same direction as the Way*. Soon they lost sight of the road and eventually they realized their mistake and began the journey back towards the true Way.

As they traveled, they slept on a Wednesday night on the grounds of a castle that turned out to be Doubting-Castle, owned by a Giant named Despair. When the giant found them, he threw them into his dungeon.

On Thursday, Giant Despair beat them severely and mercilessly. Of course, Giant Despair is just a symbol of the character Christian's state of mind during this time. **On Friday, Giant Despair told them to commit suicide**, since there was no hope for them. On Saturday, angered that they had not committed suicide, he showed them the bones of those he had previously murdered by tearing them to pieces. He assured

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them that their end would come soon in the same manner. Then he beat them again.

At midnight on Saturday, despite their wounds, Christian and Hopeful began to pray (like Paul and Silas in Acts 16:25), and they continued this prayer throughout the night.

Then, I read of their amazing escape: “Now a little before it was Day, good Christian, as one half amazed, broke out in this passionate speech;

“What a fool I have been, to lie like this in a stinking dungeon, when I could have just as well walked free. In my chest pocket I have a KEY CALLED PROMISE that will, I am thoroughly persuaded, open any lock in Doubting-Castle.” “Then,” said Hopeful, “that is good news. My good brother, do immediately take it out of your chest pocket and try it.” **Then Christian took the KEY from his chest and began to try the lock of the dungeon door; and as he turned the key, the bolt unlocked and the door flew open with ease, so that Christian and Hopeful immediately came out.**

This is the message of the Book of Romans – having traveling companion called Hopeful and a key called Promise – God’s Word that is hidden in our hearts can give us hope (Psalm 119:11, 105). If we use the key called Promise in the

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same way – we can open the heavy dungeon door within Doubting–Castle and walk out!

There are times in life when we have to **FIGHT** to believe what we know to be true. We can get beaten up by life and slip into seasons of doubting and questioning our faith. We forget that we are never promised that we will *not* encounter a giant called Despair in the Christian life -- what we are told is that we have the **key** to unlock the doors to his dark discouraging dungeons.

- God's promises.

The Puritan Thomas Brooks wrote, “Three things are called precious in the Scripture:

- **the blood of Christ** is called ‘precious blood,’ 1 Peter 1:19;
- and **faith** is called ‘precious faith’ 2 Peter 1:1;
- and **the promises** are called ‘precious promises,’ 2 Peter 1:4.”

Jesus made a Precious Promise to us...

John 14:18–2: “**I will not leave you as orphans**; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves

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me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them."

Breathe out simple prayers for help to the LORD: "God have mercy..." "Help me, O God..." "I need Thee, O Lord..."

John Bunyan, the man who wrote Pilgrim's Progress.).-

**"When you pray, rather let thy heart be without words than thy words be without heart"**