

Blessing Israel

This weekend has been a horrible time for the people of Israel. On a quiet sabbath, at the end of the feast of Tabernacles, the people were surprised with a well-coordinated attack on several communities. Border crossings were attacked and breached, police stations and military installations were targeted, and even private homes and citizens were attacked. Several hundred Israelis have been kidnapped, injured, or killed in these attacks by Palestinian terrorists. The nation is at war, in a very similar fashion to how the 1973 Yom Kippur War started 50 years ago. How are we as Christians supposed to respond to this? Why should it matter to us?

I start with Psalm 122:4-9, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! May they be secure who love you! Peace be within your walls and security within your towers! For my brothers and companions' sake I will say, 'Peace be within you!' For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good." This is one of the Psalms of Ascent, written by King David to be used as worshipers made their way towards Jerusalem on the high holy days. If we love God's people, we should be praying for the peace of Jerusalem, as this psalm commands.

Some may question why we should love the people of Israel. After all, weren't they the ones who rejected and killed the Messiah? Paul, writing to the church in Rome (9:4-5), described the people of Israel in this way: "They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is over all, blessed forever. Amen." Why did Paul say these things? Because he desired above all else that they would receive the blessing of salvation, which all those things pointed to.

He mentions the covenants, and I want to go back to the very start of those. In Gen 12, God called Abram to leave his land and people, promising to make of him a great nation, to bless him and make him a blessing. In v. 3, God stated "I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

This is our starting point with regards to Israel, the descendants of Abraham. There are two options – we bless them or we curse them (dishonor them). This reminds me of a similar statement by Jesus – whoever is not with me is against me. There is no middle ground, and we see this worked out in nations and peoples today – they are either for Israel or against Israel – seldom do we find people or nations who are between the two poles. With either choice we see a result – we can be blessed by God or we can be cursed by God. I for one want God's blessing, and that certainly cannot be gained by dishonoring His chosen people.

An example of God's blessing and curse can be found in Numbers 22-24, the story of Balaam. When the people of Israel were camped in the plains of Moab, before they entered the promised land, Balak, the Moabite king, sent for Balaam the seer to come and curse Israel. Balaam was from northern Syria, and God told him (22:12) "You shall not go with them. You shall not curse the people, for they are blessed." After being asked more times, God gave Balaam permission to go with the messengers from Balak, but said (22:35) "speak only the word that I tell you."

When Balaam arrived, he had seven altars built, and offered seven sacrifices, then delivered this oracle (23:7-10) from God: "From Aram Balak has brought me, the king of Moab from the eastern mountains:

Come, curse Jacob for me, and come, denounce Israel! How can I curse whom God has not cursed? How can I denounce whom the Lord has not denounced? For from the top of the crags I see him, from the hills I behold him; behold, a people dwelling alone, and not counting itself among the nations! Who can count the dust of Jacob or number the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the upright, and let my end be like his!" King Balak was incensed, and tried again.

Balaam again had altars built, and offered sacrifices, then delivered a second oracle (23:18-24): Rise, Balak, and hear; give ear to me, O son of Zippor; God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it? Behold, I received a command to bless: he has blessed, and I cannot revoke it. He has not beheld misfortune in Jacob, nor has he seen trouble in Israel. The Lord their God is with them, and the shout of a king is among them. God brings them out of Egypt and is for them like the horns of the wild ox. For there is no enchantment against Jacob, no divination against Israel; now it shall be said of Jacob and Israel, what has God wrought! Behold, a people! As a lioness it rises up and as a lion it lifts itself; it does not lie down until it has devoured the prey and drunk the blood of the slain."

A third time Balak tried to get Balaam to curse Israel, and this time the Spirit of God had him say (24:3-9): "The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor, the oracle of the man whose eye is opened, the oracle of him who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down with his eyes uncovered: How lovely are your tents, O Jacob, your encampments, O Israel! Like palm groves that stretch afar, like gardens beside a river, like aloes that the Lord has planted, like cedar trees beside the waters. Water shall flow from his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters; his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. God brings him out of Egypt and is for him like the horns of the wild ox; he shall eat up the nations, his adversaries, and shall break their bones in pieces and pierce them through with his arrows. He crouched, he lay down like a lion and like a lioness; who will rouse him up? Blessed are those who bless you, and cursed are those who curse you."

Notice how he finishes this third oracle with the very statement God spoke to Abraham in Gen 12? God took Balak's intention to curse Israel and made it a blessing. He declared how Israel would respond to the attacks of Moab, rising like a lion to devour the prey. Israel is back in the land of promise today because of God's prophetic plan, and He will not allow them to be destroyed. The reconstitution of the nation of Israel in modern times is a fulfillment of Ezekiel 37, the vision of the valley of dry bones. The nation that was dead and scattered has been brought back together. Flesh has come onto the bones, and God caused them to live. Verse 12 says "I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord." In the 6 Day War, the Yom Kippur War, and others, despite overwhelming odds, international opposition, etc., God repeatedly gave Israel victory over their enemies, because He has promised them to be in the land when the Messiah returns, and He has promised to fight on their behalf. The people of Israel have seen miraculous, divine intervention before, and I believe they are going to see it again, in order to bring them back to faith in God. The last portion of Ezekiel's prophecy, where God puts His Spirit within them, is yet to be fulfilled.

The things we are seeing happen in our world today are preparations for God's prophetic program. We don't know the specifics of time or how it will all come about, but we can be sure God is at work. This

isn't a political position or statement, it is a spiritual, theological one. We are starting to see alignment of nations that match what God told us to expect in the last days. I think we are likely to see major changes in our world occurring at a rapid pace, all connected with Israel, and pointing to the rapture of the church just prior to the great tribulation.

What is our responsibility as Christians? Pray for the peace of Jerusalem, support the people of Israel, bless the people of Israel. When we do that, we can expect God's blessing in our own lives. Pray for God's protection on the people and the land of Israel. Pray for the spiritual salvation of the people of Israel. They need to know Jesus as their Messiah. Make your support for Israel known in tangible ways. With an awareness of the times, we also need to be preparing ourselves and others for what is to come. The first preparation is to be sure of your salvation. To know your sins are forgiven, that you are a child of God through faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, is the most important thing anyone can do. Second, ask God what He would have you do as His child, His representative. Be faithful in serving Him, come what may. Finally, keep looking for the soon appearing of Christ.