

THE NATIONS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO ISRAEL

Given in 1988

Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of Jehovah is risen upon thee. For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And nations shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: they all gather themselves together, they come to thee; thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be carried in the arms. Then thou shalt see and be radiant, and thy heart shall thrill and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be turned unto thee, the wealth of the nations shall come unto thee. (Isaiah 60:1-5)

And foreigners shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee: for in my wrath I smote thee, but in my favor have I had mercy on thee. Thy gates also shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee the wealth of the nations, and their kings led captive. For that nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted. The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir-tree, the pine, and the box-tree together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious. And the sons of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee The city of the Lord, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel. Whereas thou hast been forsaken and hated, so that no man passed through thee, I will make thee an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations. Thou shalt also suck the milk of the nations, and shalt suck the breast of kings; and thou shalt know that I, the Lord, am thy Saviour, and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob. For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron. I will also make thy officers peace, and thine exactors righteousness. Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, desolation nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation [in Hebrew, "Jeshua"], and thy gates Praise. (Isaiah 60:10-18)

Shall we have a word of prayer together:

Heavenly Father, we want to bow here in Your presence. We believe this disturbance we have had this evening is the enemy's attempt to mar and spoil this last evening of these days we have had together. We would pray now for an especial anointing to be upon the rest of our time. We thank you, Lord, that You have made provision for us and when the enemy comes in like a flood, You are the one to lift up a standard against Him.

Now, O Lord, grant we pray that Your Word will come to us in living power. I need it, Lord, if I am to speak Your Word and we need it for our hearing so that Your purpose in our time together be fulfilled. And we shall give You all the praise and all the glory, Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.

ISRAEL: A TESTIMONY AND WITNESS TO THE WORLD

We will be considering this matter of the nations and their relationship to Israel. God originally created Israel as a nation to be a testimony and a witness to the whole world both positively and negatively. In other words, it was not only in the positive sense that they were a witness and testimony when He dwelt amongst them and His glory was manifested in their midst, when deliverances and victories were granted to them, and when His Word was clearly heard and declared, but even when His people were judged, when they were defeated, when they lost the territory that He had given to them, and even when they went into exile. In all these

negative things, Israel was still a witness and a testimony both positively and negatively. This we need to understand if we are to get hold of what I believe the Lord wants to share with us.

THE CHURCH: A WITNESS AND TESTIMONY

In the age in which Israel ceased to be an independent sovereign nation within her own land amongst the nations of the earth, the church became that witness and testimony. I am not referring to the institutional or traditional so-called church, but to the true Church of God, the body of the Lord Jesus Himself—that wonderful organism that the Holy Spirit brought into being on the day of Pentecost and which, in every generation, has been found throughout these last 1,900 years. That Church of His became a witness and a testimony to the nations. But it became only, in one sense, a witness and testimony to unseen and seen powers. That is what it says in Ephesians chapter 3: “To the intent that now unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God” (v. 10). Very largely it was a witness and a testimony to the character of God, to the saving grace of God, and to the salvation of God in and through the Lord Jesus.

Even in her dispersion Israel has still been a witness and a testimony. Wherever she has gone she has been the physical witness and testimony to the fact that God has not deserted her. Strangely enough, her very exile was the evidence that God had not forsaken her, but was only disciplining her, because in the end He had purposes of grace and salvation for her. We have the inestimable privilege, both as Christians of Gentile extraction and those who are Messianic Jews, of witnessing with our own eyes in our own day and generation the raising up again of Israel as a nation—a sovereign, independent Jewish nation, an independent state amongst the other states of the earth. Suddenly she has become both positively and negatively a witness and a testimony in the physical realm, just as the Church is a witness and a testimony in the spiritual realm, in the heavenlies. She is a witness and a testimony to ideologies, to superpowers, to empires, to nations, to all our neighbors, and to everyone in the earth. She is a physical literal witness to the truth concerning God—to the truth of God’s purpose, His power, and His program.

Once we are clear on this, we can begin to understand the relationship of the nations to Israel. It is no ordinary relationship. We are not talking about the relationship of the nations to a superpower like the United States or the Soviet Union, or the relationship of the nations to an ideology like Marxism, Islam, or some other philosophy. We are talking about the relationship of nations to a *particular* people whom God has constituted in their very being to be a witness and a testimony to the coming of the Messiah. Right through until the very last minute of the age when the Messiah returns, this nation—once again a nation and a sovereign independent state within its own territory—is a witness and a testimony to God.

ISRAEL IS THE DIVINE CAT AMONGST THE SATANIC PIGEONS

Now I would like to make a shocking statement to bring home this matter: Israel is the divine cat amongst the satanic pigeons. Let me make another statement which I hope qualifies and explains what I am saying. Some Christians have the idea that the Jewish people, particularly Israel Israelis, are all saints. They think that the Prime Minister is *the Saint Par Excellence*, that every cabinet meeting is a prayer meeting, that no evil thoughts ever flit through any Israeli minds, that there is no such thing as an underground mafia in Israel, and no such thing as dishonesty or wickedness. As a result of this kind of thinking, when some people visit or see the kind of things shown on television they are totally and absolutely shocked to the point of disillusionment. They say, “These are supposed to be God’s chosen people! They are supposed to be the elect people of God. How can this be?!” They altogether forget that prophetic word

which says: “And I will bring the blind by a way that they know not; in paths that they know not will I lead them; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked places straight. These things will I do, and I will not forsake them” (Isaiah 42:16). This cannot be referring to the Church. God is speaking of a nation, a people who are blind, and He is going to lead them in paths they have not known. This He has done. He has made darkness light for them in spite of their blindness. He has made crooked places straight and He has never forsaken them. We have to understand this if we are not going to be disillusioned in all the days that lie ahead. So I would like to share on four ways in which God uses Israel as far as the nations are concerned.

I. ISRAEL IS GOD’S TIME CLOCK TO THE NATIONS

The first way God uses Israel is this: Israel is God’s time clock to the nations. In other words, whether they know it or not, Israel is the means by which God declares to the nations exactly where we are in His program. There is no other way of knowing where we are in the program of God. We do not know how near we are to the coming of the Messiah; we do not know how near we are to the kingdom of God; we do not know how near we are to the end—unless we understand that Israel is God’s time clock. But the moment this dawns upon us we begin to understand where we are.

We sometimes think of human history as a jumbled mass of tangled ends. What kind of sense can you make out of the human history of the nations? However, when we look at Israel, then we begin to understand that God has a program and a purpose. God has a timing of events, and it is by what God is doing with Israel and her people that the nations can know where we are in God’s program.

In His major discourse on His second coming, Jesus gave us certain signs that are heard again and again in Christian circles. He spoke of wars and rumors of wars, nation rising against nation, kingdom against kingdom, earthquakes, famines, pestilences or plague diseases and persecution. From the day I was saved at the age of twelve, I heard about these signs, and before I became in any way an amateur student of history, I used to think, “Well of course the Lord’s coming must be near because look at what is happening. We have had two world wars in less than a century and on every side there is confusion and trouble, nation rising against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There are earthquakes, famines, diseases, and persecution.” But when I became a student of history I found that in the last 1,900 or more years since Jesus uttered these words there has not been a single year in which there have not been wars and rumors of wars, nation rising against nation, kingdom against kingdom, earthquakes, famines, plague diseases, and persecutions. So then someone says, “You do not understand. The Lord did not mean just a war here and a war there and an earthquake here and a famine there, He meant *worldwide* wars.” But how could any generation know that the wars they were in were not the very worst that had ever happened and would ever happen? If you had lived during the Hundred Years’ War which ravaged two thirds of Europe and resulted in famine, plague diseases, and persecution of believers, would you not have thought: “The Lord is coming!”?

Learn the parable of the fig tree

So why did the Lord give us signs which are almost (if I may be so irreverent) nonsensical? He summed it all up in this word: “Now from the fig tree learn her parable: when her branch is now become tender, and putteth forth its leaves, ye know that the summer is nigh; even so ye also, when ye see all these things, know ye that he is nigh, even at the door” (Matthew 24:32-33). In other words, the Lord Jesus summed it all up in the parable of the fig tree. Now some people tell me that this parable of the fig tree simply signifies that when the fig tree puts forth its leaves

summer is coming. In fact the fig tree is one of the last trees to put forth its leaves in Israel. It is not like the almond tree, the real harbinger of a coming summer in which there are at least a couple of months before the long dry season begins. But when the fig tree puts forth its leaves, which it does very quickly over a day or two, then the dry summer season is actually upon us. Within a week or two it will come.

So what did the Lord Jesus mean? The fact is that the previous day those disciples saw something to do with the fig tree as they were walking with Jesus. They were going from Bethany up over the Mount of Olives and would then come down into the city. Somewhere on the top of the Mount of Olives Jesus went over to a fig tree and looked for fruit, saying He was hungry and He made a show of looking for fruit. Now this is an extraordinary thing because it was March or at the very latest mid-April, and anyone who lives in this land knows that fig trees do not have figs on them until at least July or August. In many cases the fig tree has not even put out its leaves in March. So how could Jesus—who spoke about flowers and the lilies of the field, about reaping, sowing, harvesting, birds of the air and all the other things—have been so amazingly wrong as to look for fruit from a fig tree in March or April? Was He so tired that He made such a terrible mistake? Of course liberal theologians tell us that He was hungry, and that when a man is hungry, he is irritable. Thus Jesus was hungry and in a fit of irritation because He could not find any fruit on the fig tree, cursed it and the poor fig tree died.

We Have Passed into the Last Era of World History

When Mark tells of this incident in his book, he says: “And it was not the season for figs” (see Mark 11:13). It was a *parable* of the fig tree. Jesus then went into the temple and had His great contention with the ecclesiastical authorities: “And he saith unto them, It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer: but ye make it a den of robbers” (Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11: 17). The next morning, the very morning of the afternoon in which Jesus said, “Learn the parable of the fig tree,” they went past that same fig tree. And Peter, one of the four who heard Jesus say, “Learn the parable of the fig tree,” later that afternoon said, “Master, look the fig tree is dead!” (Mark 11:17-21; Matthew 21:12-20). Jesus must have had something more in mind when He said “learn the parable of the fig tree” than just a picture of coming summer. He must have had a people, a nation in mind.

And it is very interesting that Luke, who was a doctor and often added details, recorded it like this: “behold the fig tree and all the trees” (Luke 21:29) as if there is a two-fold significance to the fig tree, something that happens to the fig tree which is common to all the other deciduous trees. And this means that when you see these things—war and rumors of war, nation rising against nation, kingdom against kingdom, earthquakes, famines, plague diseases and persecutions, then you will know that summer is nigh. Then you will know the kingdom of God is at hand, the Messiah is on His way. He did not just say, “And all the trees...” In other words, there is a validating sign. If that sign is not present, then the wars and rumors of wars, nation rising against nation, kingdom against kingdom, earthquakes, famines, plague diseases and persecution are invalid. They are not operative as signs. In other words, the sign of a renewed, replanted, recreated, Jewish state has to be present. And if at the same time there are wars and rumors of wars, nation rising against nation, kingdom against kingdom, earthquakes, famines, plague diseases and persecution, *then you know* you have passed into the last era of world history.

My dear friends, there is no other sign given to us. This is not just the word of some writer in the New Testament (even though I personally believe all of it is inspired), it is the word of the Lord Jesus Himself Who said: “Learn the parable of the fig tree.” But He added something even

more according to Luke which is of infinite interest to us. He said: “and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (Luke 21:24). So it is not only the recreation of a sovereign independent Jewish state, but it is the *status* of Jerusalem. When Jerusalem is no longer trodden under foot of the Gentiles, the non-Jews, and comes back to Jewish sovereignty, then you will know that the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled; they are over. A new era in the program of God has commenced. That new era in the program of God is the last days, the last great stage of world history.

I do not subscribe to the view that understands the Greek here as “this generation shall not pass away till all these things be fulfilled” (Matthew 24:34; Luke 21:32). It was all very well in 1870 with Grattan Guinness, who was a godly and amazingly gifted man, to say that the generation that sees a Jewish nation rise back up in its own territory will be the generation that sees the Messiah return. It was all very well for people in 1917 when the Balfour Declaration was given to say the generation that sees the rising of a sovereign independent Jewish state will be the generation that sees Jesus return. It was all right in 1948 when that state came into being to say that this generation is the last generation because a biblical generation is forty years, give or take a few years.

But now we are in serious trouble for those who have subscribed to this view over the years because 1988 marks the end of the forty years. And if we allow two or three years either way, it means that by 1992-1993 the Messiah will return, which means we can date the coming of the Lord, which is exactly what Jesus said in the next breath we could not do. He said, “But of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only” (Matthew 24:36). It is always very difficult to speak on prophecy or Israel because people get so steamed up about these matters. I always have people coming up to me afterwards, saying, “Just you wait, just you wait! Jesus never said you would not know the year! He only said you would not know the day or the hour.” But Mark puts it very clearly. He says: “Since you do not know the time of the Son of Man’s coming” (Mark 13:33). No my dear friends, it is clear to me.

Years ago I asked a great classical Cambridge-trained Greek scholar if he would look into this for me. After reviewing it he just said, “This word in Greek is a generic term which has a whole family of meanings. It comes from a root of *begetting* and from this we get “a tribe” from the same forefathers, “a nation,” “a race” from the same ancestors, “a family” from the same parents, “kith and kin” from the same great grandparents and “a generation,” meaning that those born at the same point in time are one generation.” For some reason our translators translated it “generation” but they could have said, “This *race* shall not pass away; this *family* shall not pass away; this *tribe* shall not pass away; this *kith and kin* shall not pass away.” The New International Version and the New American Standard Bible has for the first time put an alternative in the margin which is “this race.”

In other words, we cannot say the Lord is coming back before the end of 1988 because that is exactly what we are told we could not say. What we know is this: we have passed irreversibly into the last era of world history. It may last forty years, it may last ten years, and it could end tonight. It might last a century, which I cannot believe in my own heart, and it might even last a couple of centuries, but the fact remains we have passed into the last era of world history. In that era Israel comes back to the central point of the world’s stage and she will remain there right through to the coming of the Lord. There will be war after war after war. There will be controversy and conflict and debate. There will be alienation and isolation of Israel. There will be antagonism and hatred on the part of nearly everybody; but she will remain at the center of the world stage according to God’s prophetic word until the Messiah comes! She will not be moved.

She will not be dispossessed, but everyone that comes against her will be dispossessed. *Every one of them, mark my words!* Whether it is a superpower, whether it is a great universal ideology, whether it is a nation, or whether it is only our neighbors, whoever finally comes against this recreated state in all its blindness and all its transgression and in all its weakness, will be broken because of it. This is what God's Word says.

The Fig Tree Has Put Forth It's Leaves

On May 14, 1948 the fig tree put forth its leaves and has been doing so ever since. Previously the fig tree had died from its roots. The Jewish Nation so completely disappeared from this territory that we have all this hullabaloo over whether the Jews have a right to be there. It totally disappeared but God said that in the last days, in the last generations, at the very end of the age she would be back in her territory. It would not be as a mummified tree, as an antique piece, as some fossilized fig tree, as a museum piece, but it would be a living, vibrant tree with sap rising within its trunk and into its branches with leaves and blossoms coming forth with the promise of fruit. This is where we are, and nobody has any excuse.

Christians are always telling me how they would love to have been present when the children of Israel went through the Red Sea as God carved a way through it and they went over on dry ground. People say to me, "If I had been there it would have helped my faith so much just to have seen it, just to have seen the Lord do it as Moses prayed over it. Then to be on the other side and see the whole thing close back on the crack divisions of Pharaoh's army would have helped my faith so much." But these same people, who went through the Red Sea on dry ground, within three days were moaning and groaning and murmuring and rebelling, and they wanted to stone Moses and Aaron. Why? Was it over some great theological issue? Was it over some great question about the Godhead? No!—over onions, garlic and the leeks of Egypt.

You and I have lived through a miracle that makes the Exodus pale into insignificance. That Exodus was from one place in Egypt to another place in the wilderness, two weeks' walking time from the Promised Land. It consisted of a million or more people. But in our day and generation God has drawn back Jews from every corner of the globe—from Afghanistan, Chile, the Argentine, New Zealand and Australia, South Africa, Siberia, Finland, Sweden, from the Far East, Far West, Far North, Far South, from eighty-seven different nations, from the ends of the earth. God has drawn them by some invisible almighty power back to the very territory from which this people were disbursed 1,900 years ago. That is a miracle! If the nations do not want to believe it, it is up to them, but the miracle is a miracle whether the nations believe it or not. It is as simple as that. This state of Israel, this Jewish nation, is God's time clock. Praise the Lord!

II. ISRAEL IS GOD'S SIGN TO THE NATIONS

The second thing is this: Israel is God's *physical sign* to the nations. It is a sign the nations can understand because it is a nation outwardly just like the rest. It has a government, a parliament, a president, and an army, air force, and navy. It has national institutions, universities, colleges and schools, a medical system and hospitals. It is a nation like any other nation, a state like any other state. But this nation is much more than a state and a nation. It is a sign—a divine sign, a physical sign that God has planted amongst the nations.

A "sign" is a word that the New Testament uses very advisedly. Miracles are miracles, wonders are wonders and powers are powers, but a sign can be any one of them; and it is more. When John used this word "Jesus did a sign," or "this sign He did," he meant it was more than just a miracle. It signified something; it expressed something. It was in itself like a parable. It was communication; it was a manifestation of some very important and powerful truth.

Please also note that a sign does not necessarily save, convert or convince. There are some Christians who believe that as long as you can do a few signs everybody will believe. But this is not true. Jesus went everywhere doing signs and what happened? People who were antagonistic became more antagonistic. People who were jealous became more jealous. People who were filled with animosity became even more filled with animosity. And people who had hatred in them were so controlled by it that it rose to such an extent they wanted to kill Him. You would have thought they would have all been saved. There are others who say that these healings were a coincidence. That woman who was bent over and had that problem for years was on her way to recovery anyway. It was a psychological, psychosomatic issue, and of course Jesus came at one of her psychological moments and she was delivered.

But how do you explain Lazarus being raised from the dead after being in the tomb for four days? His beloved sister, being a Jewess, was very straight about the matter. She said, “Lord, he stinks.” That is how the Authorized Version puts it. There is no question about Lazarus being dead. It was not that he merely had a swoon; he had been in the tomb with a great stone rolled over it for four days.

I always find what happened later with Lazarus quite amusing. Everyone thinks John the apostle was a man without humor, that he was very serious and solemn. But I always find the way he writes this story as one of the most humorous things in the whole gospel. He records that the executive committee of the Sanhedrin met together, not to discuss what they should do about Lazarus, because he was obviously alive. They had an executive committee session to decide how they could get him back into the grave! (John 11:47, 53; 12:10-11). There was no question of a miracle! No question of the sign! Their thought was: “How can we get him back as fast as possible into the grave?!” I find that one of the most amusing things in the whole of the New Testament. This reveals what I am trying to point out, that these men saw an undoubted miracle and it did not do a thing to them! It only entrenched them in their disbelief. Whenever God works a miracle, it either leads you to God or brings out the animosity you have toward God. It either brings you to a deeper dependence upon Him or it takes you deeper into disbelief and cynicism. You can never remain the same in the presence of a divine sign. You cannot be neutral.

Now let us come back to what I have said: Israel is God’s sign to the nations. What is Israel a sign of? What does she signify? She is a sign to the character of God, to the love of God, and the unending, undying fathomless love of God for the Jewish people. He has never forsaken them. Judged them? Yes. Exiled them? Yes. He has allowed suffering upon suffering to come upon them but He has never forsaken them. The very judgment and exile is the evidence of His undying love for this people.

Israel is a sign to the faithfulness of God.

Israel is also a sign to the faithfulness of God. If He can dispense with Israel, what guarantee have you got, child of God, that God will not dispense with you? If He can break the unconditional, everlasting covenant He made with Israel, will He not also break the covenant He has made with you by grace through the faith He has given you? No, Israel is a sign to the character of God who is Himself undying love and faithfulness.

Israel is a sign of God’s Word

Israel is also a sign of God’s Word—its authority, its infallibility, and its relevance. Zechariah is much more relevant than tomorrow morning’s *Jerusalem Post*. What Zechariah,

Isaiah, Jeremiah and the other prophets have to say about our situations here are infinitely more relevant than the news media. We are witnesses to the authority of God's Word in an unbelieving, cynical, space-age world. We are in a world that believes in materialistic humanism, and that the gods of the people are but the projection of their human minds. We are witnesses to the fact that God's Word is absolutely authoritative. The things He said through Moses some 3,000 years ago and to the prophets 2,500 years ago have actually come to pass in our own day and generation. We have seen a people disbursed to the ends of the earth according to the Word given through Moses, and brought back again according to God's Word to Jeremiah and Isaiah and so many of the others. The things spoken through these prophets years ago are actually being fulfilled literally before our very eyes.

Israel is a Sign of Election, Predestination and Foreordination

Israel is a sign that *election* (which is not a very popular twentieth-century word) is election. Let me put it another way. *Predestination* is predestination. Let me put it another way if you do not like the word "predestination." *Foreordination* is foreordination. What does it say in this Book? It says this: "As touching the gospel, they [the Jewish people] are enemies for your sake: but as touching the election, [the predestinating council and will of God], they are beloved of God for the fathers' sake. For the gifts and the calling of God are not repented of [irrevocable]" (Romans 11:28-29). I have never been able to understand how anyone could believe in anything other than the predestinating power and council of God when they look at what God is doing with the Jewish people. Much more than that, there have been 4,000 years of history, two exiles and much else that has happened, and today there is hardly a household on the face of the earth that has not heard of Israel yet forty years ago she did not exist! Election is election.

Israel is the Sign that God has a Purpose

Israel is also the sign that God has a purpose for the nations and He is going to fulfill it. There is going to come a day when this nation becomes the head of the nations. It seems a long way off just at present, but it is going to happen. This Israel is a sign that God has a purpose for the earth—a renewed earth, a renewed ecology, a renewed world, a renewed universe, and in the end a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness (see 2 Peter 3:13). This Israel is the sign. Every time I see the damage that we are doing to our environment—the trees singed and dying, birds being infertile and more species becoming extinct—I think of this little nation and this little land as a sign that God will renew it all.

III. ISRAEL IS GOD'S STUMBLING BLOCK TO ALL UNBELIEF AND EVIL

Israel is God's stumbling block to all unbelief and evil. The promise to Abraham and to his seed was this: "I will bless those that bless thee and I will curse those that curse thee" (Genesis 12:3). It was an unconditional covenant that God made with Abraham. From the day that God made that covenant with Abraham—which was not just for Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, or Joseph, but for the seed of Abraham—that whilst there is a physical seed of Abraham on the face of the earth, anyone who curses that seed will be cursed and anyone who blesses that seed will be blessed. Some people find that very hard to understand but the promise is reconfirmed in Isaiah: "For that nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted" (Isaiah 60:12). It is true. Where is the Ottoman Empire? It has totally disappeared. What has happened to the British Empire? It has disappeared. There are many more ideologies or superpowers in this world that are playing about with the destiny of Israel. *They do not understand that Israel is God's stumbling block!*

A Cup of Reeling

It is a very interesting phrase that the prophet Zechariah uses when he says: "I will make Jerusalem a cup of reeling unto all the peoples round about, and I will make Jerusalem a burdensome stone to all the nations; all that burden themselves with it shall be sore wounded" (see Zechariah 12:2-3). I wish with all my heart that Great Britain understood that. I wish with all my heart that Germany understood it, that France understood it, and that the United States and the State Department understood it. It is not that we expect them to agree with everything that Israel does or always to speak well of Israel at all times, never seeing her faults, never complaining about any of her actions, but they do not understand that this Jerusalem is a cup of reeling. It sounds so beautiful but it is a goblet of wine into which has been secretly introduced a poison.

The way you used to get rid of unwanted emperors, sultans, kings, dukes and lords, was to put something into the wine. Most of them were shrewd enough to taste their food and they would say, "There is something wrong with this food." But in a sultan's or an emperor's home, there were all kinds of wines that were given to them by subjects and though the wine might have tasted a little strange, it could just have been the kind of wine it was. So wine was the favorite means of bumping off unwanted sultans or emperors and therefore all these men had cupbearers. Jews were often put into that position because nobody else wanted the job. You could not get a life insurance if you were a cup bearer. It has been estimated that most of them did not last more than eighteen months. They had to drink something of every cup the emperor or sultan ever drank.

Now here the prophet uses this amazing picture of attempts at assassination or attempts at waylaying and removing people. He says, "Jerusalem is a goblet of wine," attractive to anybody. They might think by taking it they can drink it. But God Himself has introduced a poison into it and it does not matter whether it is a superpower or an empire or a great ideology or a great faith or religion, if it meddles with the divine destiny of Jerusalem and Israel it will find it has poisoned itself. It may continue on but it will be insensible. In other words, its faculties will not function, and that is exactly what has happened.

A Burdensome Stone

What does this word "a burdensome stone" mean? It sounds so beautiful in the old English Version. But a burdensome stone is so heavy that when you pick it up, it ruptures you. Anyone who has had a rupture knows you can never lift anything after that. So here is this stone Israel. It does not look so heavy. And here comes the United States who thinks it will take this stone from here and put it there. Here comes the Kremlin, the British Empire, Jordan, Syria, Khomeini with the Islamic Revolution and they all say, "I will take the stone from here and put it there." But if they try to mess around with the divine position of that rock, all of them will find that it ruptures them and they will never lift another thing. It is a stumbling block.

Some may think I am trying to be political, but I am not. I am going to the root of this matter and keeping to the point that Israel is God's stumbling block to the nations. God has constituted something in Israel that draws out the venom and hatred within unbelieving nations and governments, even in spite of the fact that Israel itself is very largely agnostic. Yet somehow her very constitution draws out not just anger, but *venomous hatred*. It seems to reveal terrible blindness in governments, leaders and nations that are otherwise quite clever and shrewd. It seems somehow or other to expose hypocrisy.

I follow news very carefully, and I have never seen anything like the last year or two. The whole world, including the United States by and large, is talking about Mr. Gorbachev as though he is God's gift to the world—this man of peace with his beautiful fashionable wife. It does not matter that he has been an executive in the KGB for fourteen years! That apparently does not sink into anybody. This Soviet Union has killed 2,400,000 Afghans and yet the whole world is acclaiming the great Russian departure from Afghanistan as if they are doing Afghanistan and all of us a great favor. Do you realize that ten percent of the Afghan nation has been killed in the last ten years? Where have there been the great demonstrations? Where have there been the resolutions in the United Nations? Where have we all been? Why does the United Nations not send some people there? No, we never hear anything of the kind. It is hypocrisy!

In Israel there is no such thing as 2,400,000 dead, yet the whole world goes up in arms when it does anything to defend itself. Just recently the Iraqis used a chemical weapon upon the Kurdish people in the north of its own country, and killed 5,000 men, women and children. The pictures are there to prove it, but there has not been a single resolution in the United Nations. When the Arab League met, it did not even discuss what one Islamic nation was doing to another Islamic nation. Since then it has again used chemical weapons, but we never hear about it. It is strange. If Israel were to use gas in any single way the whole world would do a war dance. We would never hear the end of it; they would go round us in circles as if they were going round the walls of Jericho. It is incredible.

More recently the Shiites entered the same camps in which some 500 people were massacred in Shatila and Sabra and killed over 1,500 Palestinians, and there was not a squeak in the whole world. It is amazing. It is as if somehow or other Israel draws out this hypocrisy. The British delegate to the United Nations let off steam about the death of Abu Jihad. He said apparently that Israel was to blame and then went on to say that it is quite wrong even if a man has been a terrorist not to execute him after the due processes of law. Yet the same country gunned down three unarmed IRA people in Gibraltar. What is wrong with this kind of hypocrisy? I cannot understand it.

The Secretary of State for the British Foreign Office came to Israel on an official visit, and then proceeds to have a look at Gaza. Now we are all horrified about the conditions in those UN-sponsored camps, as would be anyone with any humanity. Then in front of television he tells off a colonel who had been delegated to look after his safety who had arrested a fourteen year old with a rock. Anyone with sense knows that a fourteen year old with a rock can smash your skull in. But he dressed him down and then indignantly exclaimed: "How any country that calls itself humane can allow such camps while just beyond them were beautiful homes for Israelis!" Yet for twenty years this same nation has voted in the United Nations for a resolution requesting Israel to return the 66,000 Palestinians she has rehoused in homes back to those camps. I do not understand it. It means that Israel is a stumbling block. It draws out this kind of venom.

It is now happening within the Church. I find it quite interesting that some of my friends who are otherwise so gracious, so level headed, so objective, and so impartial, when it comes to this matter of Israel, seem to lose their cool and become angry!

Israel is the Judgment to the Nations

This matter of a stumbling block means that Israel is going to be the judgment of the nations. That is why the prophet Joel spoke of the valley of Jehoshaphat and said that God would use this land as the judgment of nations. Nations are going to be judged according to the way that they have looked at this nation, not because she is anything, but because it is the Word of God

that is being fulfilled. It is the purpose of God that is being fulfilled. It is the program of God that is underway.

IV. ISRAEL IS GOD'S GUARANTEE THAT THE EARTH IS HIS AND THE FULLNESS THEREOF

Finally, Israel is God's guarantee that: "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; The world, and they that dwell therein" (Psalm 24:1). Israel, if I may put it this way, is the introduction of the Messianic Age. I do not mean by that that Israel at present is like a Messianic kingdom. Those of us who live here know very well that it is nothing of the kind; but we do know that God has started the process that will end in the coming of the King. And when the King comes, the Kingdom is coming with Him and then it will all be very different. Now when I think of this, I understand that Israel is the guarantee of those marvelous words:

But in the latter days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow unto it. And many nations shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem; and he will judge between many peoples, and will decide concerning strong nations afar off: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig-tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. For all the peoples walk every one in the name of his god; and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever. (Micah 4:1-5)

Now my dear friends, Israel is the guarantee that that is going to happen. It is this Jerusalem that is being talked about. It is going to become that place in the whole earth. I can give yet another Scripture which is absolutely marvelous:

And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.

And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.

They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of [the glory] of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:6-9)

Israel is the guarantee that this will come. But there are some Christians who have a completely ethereal idea of the coming of the Lord. It seems that somehow or other we are all going to become disemboweled, disembodied spirits floating around somewhere in heavenly places. But it says there will be a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1). But before that new heaven and new earth come there will be a reign on this earth, as I understand it. I find it so amazing that this little land is God's deposit on the whole earth and its fullness. This nation is God's guarantee that the whole world and all those that dwell within it are His. If that is the case, then I begin to understand the battle. There are powers of darkness who understand only too well that this people is blind, that there is a veil on the mind, and the transgression and sin that is amongst us. Those powers of darkness know all the weaknesses and failings of Israel far more than the media of the world do. But those powers of darkness know that this people, this nation and this land is the guarantee of a Messianic Kingdom. They are the surest guarantee that the Messiah is coming and coming soon.

When I look around at this world and see so much destruction, I wonder what kind of a world we are living in. I see the ecological damage, the destruction of natural resources, the destruction of the tropical rain forest and the resulting damage to the oxygen supply to the world progressively. I see the pollution of the seas and of the air, the extinction of species that have been with us from the beginning, the proliferation of nuclear, chemical, and bacteriological weapons, and most appalling of all, I see the dehumanizing of human beings so that lives conceived in the womb are annihilated as if vermin. We can kill one another in such a way that we can refer to murdered hostages as though glad that there was only one or two and that it was over so quickly. We say we must understand that the perpetrators have a grievance. What kind of morality is it? What kind of ethic? What kind of world are we living in? The more I see of it, the more I feel an inward pain, an inward sickness and an inward longing for the coming of the King. In the end there is no one else who can put right what we have done to this world. There is nobody who can renew the ecological balance, nobody who can somehow counter and nullify the destruction of our natural resources, and nobody who can stop the dehumanizing process but only Him.

This little Israel in all her sin and blindness is the guarantee that the King is coming. I remember the words of the Lord Jesus: "But when these things begin to come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads; because your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21:28). I think we are right there. I think it is time for us to lift up our heads, to rejoice because our redemption is coming.

A CHALLENGE

In conclusion, let me just challenge you. This reveals the significance of Israel as far as the nations are concerned. God is not finished with the nations. He has a purpose for the nations just as God is not finished with this old earth; He has a purpose for it. Israel is the key to that in many ways. It reveals, in my estimation, the vital importance of the natural branches being grafted back into their own olive tree. I am not surprised that the whole world is going up in smoke about Israel. I am not surprised at all the trouble we have within the land. I am not surprised about the threat of war from outside. I am not surprised about the alienation and isolation of Israel and I am not surprised at the huge onslaught on this whole matter within Evangelical and Charismatic circles. It seems to me that Satan is going to cause a whole smoke screen and much else if he can in any way stop the natural branches being grafted back into their own olive tree. That melting of the hardening in part which is befallen Israel, the taking away of the veil on the Jewish heart, the receiving of the Jewish people again by God is going to result in enormous and powerful forces being released.

So my dear friends, I believe the call is to you and to me as believers, to us as true disciples of the Lord Jesus, for one hundred percent commitment to the Lord. We need to be one hundred percent committed to the Lord, not to become an Israel crank or lunatic, but to be a living functioning member of the body of Christ, a witness to the Lord Jesus. We want you to add to your dimension of understanding the whole question of Israel and the Jewish people. For God's purpose for the church cannot be completed without Israel. His whole purpose for the bride, for the body of the Lord, cannot be completed without the natural branches being grafted back into their own olive tree. This is the call to us all. It is not to get involved in polemics nor to become disillusioned or confused by all the storm that is going on in Christian circles over this, but to get down to the work of intercession that God may fulfill this matter, if it please Him, in our day and generation. God bless you.

Prayer:

Loving Father, at the beginning of this seminar we asked You to honor us by being present. Lord, we would thank You for answered prayer. We would thank You for all that You have taught us. Father, we ask that You will help us to remember this, and as You send us back to our own battle stations in different parts of the world, we ask that what You have taught us may remain with us. And Lord, enable us to go and pass on the truth and the authority that You have manifested to us here.

We ask you to bless our families. Lord, you have given us a rich time and the enemy does not like that, and so we thank You that Your power and Your authority will protect all our families. Go with us, Lord. Thank You for the richness of Your love to us.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all ever more. Amen.