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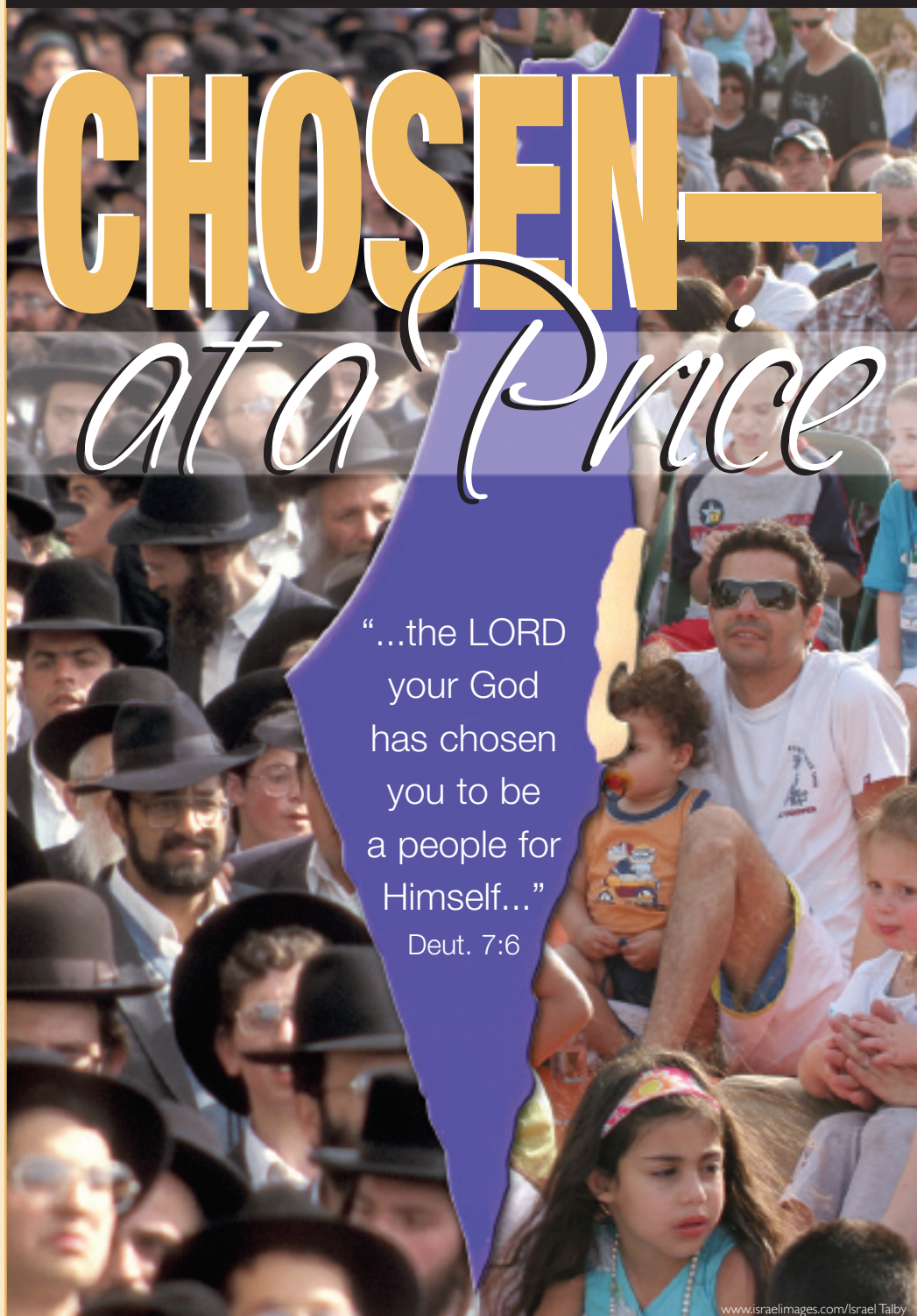
Bridges for Peace Israel Teaching Letter

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CHOSEN— *at a Price*

“...the LORD
your God
has chosen
you to be
a people for
Himself...”
Deut. 7:6



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CHOSEN— at a Price

ON THE SLOPES OF TABLE MOUNTAIN in Cape Town, South Africa stands a magnificent building, the Mount Nelson Hotel, a testimony to South Africa's bygone era as a British colony. As a child, I remember my awe as I entered the expansive, gloomy foyer where people spoke in hushed voices and glided about noiselessly on thick pile carpets. The focal point in the foyer was a well-lit display cabinet, advertising South Africa's finest diamond jewelry. The combination of the gloom, the location of the cabinet, and its valuable contents captured almost everyone's attention. In a sense, it was the "Israel" of the hotel foyer!

Israel was intended by God to be His showcase. Her strategic location at the meeting point of three continents meant that traders, travelers, and warriors en route to and from war took note of her. In a gloomy world where nations developed all sorts of practices to appease their different gods, Israel stood out as a nation to whom the one true God had revealed His will through the *Torah* [Gen.–Deut.]—their guide on how to live in right relationship with Him and each other. As the relationship between Israel and God evolved, others saw how their God blessed their obedience with rain for their crops and protection from invading armies. They also saw how famines and defeats followed Israel's disobedience.



Israel was intended by God to be His showcase.



Today we live in a global village where technology allows image and audio from any location on the face of this earth, even from the moon, to be transmitted within moments into our living rooms. The Internet and modern transportation allow us to buy products without knowing if the supplier is in our city or on the other side of the globe. We can travel the world and have uninterrupted contact with our business associates or friends. Amid all these options, there is one subject that is kept before the nations of the world, day in and day out—Israel! Why, we might ask, has God caused this to

be so? *"Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed'"* (Genesis 12:1–3).

Israel's history is one fraught with confrontation, condemnation, and a desperate bid to survive, both in Israel and in the Diaspora (the Jewish population outside Israel). Sociologists estimate that had the Jewish people not endured all the persecution, at times in the most drastic of

forms, the world Jewish population today could easily have topped 200 million. In fact, there are only 15–17 million Jewish people in the world today.

To a limited extent, the antagonism toward Israel finds its root in God's promise in Genesis 12 to bless the nation; but for the most part, it is vested in the role that this nation has been given:

- To make known God's salvation to mankind.
- To record and preserve the written Word of God.
- To reveal God's character through their relationship with Him.
- To provide the human channel for the Messiah.

Opposition to God's plan would manifest itself in opposition to His messenger nation Israel, and agreement with His plan would be visible in the cooperation that Israel would receive from others. Those that cooperated with God and blessed Israel would receive His blessing. Those that did the opposite would endure God's wrath.

As God moved to seal His covenantal relationship with Abram through the shedding of the blood of sacrifices, there was a sinister warning of the opposition that Israel would endure. *"He [Abram] said, 'O Lord GOD, how may I know that I will possess it.' So He said to him, 'Bring me a three year old heifer, and a three year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon.' Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds. The birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away"* (Genesis 15:8–11). The "birds of prey" were symbolic of spiritual opposition to God's salvation plan. Their failure to prevent the sealing of the covenant ushered in a history of repeated attempts to halt this covenant's effect through the only other possible means—the elimination of the descendants of Abraham.



Israel's history has been one where just surviving has absorbed inordinate effort and resources.

Israel's history, whether as a nation in the land set aside for them or as the Jewish people in the Diaspora, has been one where just surviving has absorbed inordinate effort and resources. The Israel Defense Forces, the fourth largest in the world, has repeatedly been called into action in Israel's

short modern history to defend her against physical threats. Another Jewish "army" is engaged in a massive effort to prevent Jewish people from becoming disconnected from their Jewishness and becoming assimilated into their societies in the Diaspora. The attempts to prevent Israel from fulfilling her calling as a nation have taken on two forms: the attempt to physically destroy her and the attempt to remove her uniqueness.

The Attempt to Physically DESTROY Israel...

Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad, elected in August 2005, has repeatedly promised to wipe Israel off the map, a threat made all the more sinister by the aggressive development of his country's military capacity to do just that. He has several predecessors in Israel's history.



...by Pharaoh

As Israel grew in number and prospered in the region of Goshen in Egypt, Pharaoh established the means to control and oppress them; to be a "god" over them. Through plagues that extracted an increasingly harsh penalty on the Egyptians, God freed His people and set them on their way to the Land promised to them. In a final attempt to destroy them, Pharaoh set out with his army to overtake



the Israelites. If he was unable to control them, he would annihilate them. Thankfully, God rescued the nation set apart for His purposes.

...by Haman

In the book of Esther (c. 462 BC), we read that Haman had risen to a place of great authority in the Persian kingdom of King Ahasuerus, a king who ruled over a vast region stretching from Ethiopia to India. Israel and almost all the Jewish people who were scattered through the first and second dispersions lived within this region. Haman loved the acclaim he received in the kingdom. There was, however, one man who refused to bow down and worship him: Mordechai, a Jew who also had a position in the household of the king. In fact, Haman was so incensed with Mordechai, that he devised a plan to destroy not only Mordechai, but all the Jewish people who lived throughout King Ahasuerus's kingdom. Thankfully, through the wisdom of Mordechai and the bravery of Queen Esther, Haman's plot to physically destroy Israel was averted.

Joy at Israel's miraculous survival from the hands of the evil Haman finds expression each year in the celebration of *Purim*. Children dress up as little Mordechais, Esthers, and Hamans, and there is great pandemonium in the synagogues as the book of Esther is read (accompanied by boos each time Haman's name is mentioned).

...by Hitler

Hitler's dream of rebuilding a pure Aryan nation employed various strategies to strip Jewish and other categories of their German citizenship and make Germany so unpleasant for them that they

"Final" attempts to eradicate the "Jewish problem"



would go elsewhere. The formidable German propaganda machine relentlessly demonized the Jewish people, saying, "The Jews are our misfortune." A battery of laws were enacted to limit every aspect of normal life and to isolate the Jewish people from the rest of society. Jewish people were not permitted to work as professionals; Jewish people were not allowed to be employed in the civil service; and Jewish children were banned from public schools. The list was endless, causing misery for Jewish people; and many, if they could find a country that would accept them, left Germany.

When Hitler's army started its conquest of other countries, some with large Jewish populations, the "Final Solution" to the "Jewish problem" was devised: the systematic slaughter of all the Jewish people in Europe. Hitler's evil plan ended the lives of six million Jewish people. Only the defeat of the German army by the Allied forces prevented the total annihilation of all of Europe's Jewry and those in the Middle East that were targets of future German expansion.

...by Hizbullah

It is little wonder that as Hizbullah forces unleashed their barrage of missiles on Israel this summer against a backdrop of repeated threats by Iranian President



Ahmadinejad "to wipe Israel off the map" that the psalm being offered as a prayer by many Christian and Jewish lips was Psalm 83: "O God, do not remain quiet; do not be silent and, O God, do not be still. For behold, Your enemies make an uproar, and those who hate You have exalted themselves. They make shrewd plans against Your people, and conspire together against Your treasured ones. They have said, 'Come, and let us wipe them out as a

nation, that the name of Israel be remembered no more” (vs.1–4).

The Attempt to REMOVE Israel’s Uniqueness...

God wants His nation Israel to stand out among the nations, to be different. In Ezekiel 11:12, God speaks His judgment over the nation of Israel, because they have become just like their neighbors: *“Thus you will know that I am the LORD; for you have not walked in My statutes nor have you executed my ordinances, but have acted according to the ordinances of the nations around you.”* The reason for their judgment? They had become indistinguishable from the nations that surrounded them. The story of *Hanukkah* is a good illustration of how Israel’s uniqueness continued to be challenged.

...by the Greeks

Following the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC, his empire dissolved into three major power blocks. The “Promised Land” fell under the rule of Antiochus IV. He saw himself as a reincarnation of the Greek god Zeus and gave himself the title Epiphanes or “the god revealed.” He set about Hellenizing the region under his control. This he did by establishing gymnasiums where the study of Greek literature and philosophy were complemented by wrestling and gymnastics, in themselves a form of religious worship.

The true followers of Israel’s God were incensed by what they saw around them and resisted being drawn into Hellenistic practices. Antiochus was, however, determined and placed a ban on



Antiochus IV couldn’t tolerate the Jewish people being different and following the ways of their God.

Shabbat (Sabbath) observance, circumcision, *kosher* eating, and ritual sacrifice; took over the Temple; and rededicated it to the worship of Zeus.

The Jewish people were faced with a crisis of catastrophic proportions. One family, the Maccabees, under the leadership of a priest called Mattithias, stood up to the might of Antiochus’s army. In the



The story of *Hanukkah* is a good illustration of how Israel’s uniqueness continued to be challenged.

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battles to follow, the Israelites routed them, recaptured the Temple, and reestablished an environment where *Torah* study and practice could continue and the Temple return to its central role in Jewish society. Although many of the customs associated with *Hanukkah* (Feast of Dedication or Festival of Lights) relate to the rededication of the Temple and the legend that a single day’s oil for the Temple Menorah burned for eight days, the outcome of this confrontation is important for us as Christians. Had the Maccabee family not stood up to the might of Antiochus, the nation of Israel and the Temple—two key aspects of Yeshua’s (Jesus’s) coming some 167 years later—may not have been in place.

Antiochus IV could tolerate the Jewish people in his kingdom. He, however, couldn’t tolerate their being different and following the ways of their God. His objective was to make them like the rest, to remove their uniqueness.

...by modern-day critics

In modern times, there are also attempts to make Israel just like any other country. Israel is frequently accused of being a racist state, likening her to South Africa during its Apartheid era. However, this accusation against Israel isn't about racial composition, as Israel's Arab population (20%) enjoys the same benefits as all other sectors of society. Because the Jewish people have returned to Israel—literally, from the four corners of the earth—Israeli society is color-blind and celebrates its diversity. The true motive behind this accusation is to dilute Israel's character as the only Jewish state in the world.

Yet while some would try to remove Israel's uniqueness, the media and many governments of the world treat her unfairly by a different standard. The recent war in Lebanon is an example. When Hizbullah fighters crossed Israel's sovereign border—killing eight and kidnapping two—and unleashed a barrage of missiles targeting Israeli population centers, the media and world governments, with few exceptions, were silent. They, however, erupted with harsh criticism when Israeli retaliation started, citing excessive use of force and the bombing of civilian population centers. Even the media and world governments know to apply a higher standard for the nation chosen by God to serve His purposes.

...by Replacement theologians

Sadly, the greatest attempt to rob Israel of her uniqueness has been at the hand of the Church. Despite Paul's warning (Romans



Photo by Will King



11:18) to the Church against arrogance and his crystal-clear description of the Church as grafted-in branches drawing their nourishing sap from the root, much of the Church—for the largest part of its history—has viewed itself as having “replaced” Israel.

Replacement theologians contend that Israel's failure to accept Yeshua as their Messiah rendered them outside the further plans of God, with the Church replacing her as the new Israel. Justin Martyr (c. AD 160) stated, “The Scriptures are not yours, but ours.” Eusebius, writing in the fourth century, contended that while the promises contained in the Hebrew Scriptures now belonged to the Church, the curses stayed with Israel. Later Church fathers heaped scorn on the Jewish people, calling them “a perverse people accursed by God forever” (Hilary of Poitiers, AD 291–371) and “serpents, wearing the image of Judas, their psalms and prayers are the braying of donkeys” (St. Jerome, AD 347–407). The replacement of the Jewish people in God's plans and their demonization created the medium for evil to take its course against the Jewish people.

For almost 2,000 years, the cross—for Christians a symbol of reconciliation—became to Jewish people an object of misery. Was God finished with His people Israel? Had their unique calling come to an end? Daily the sun, the moon, the star, and the waves answer our question: *“Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the LORD of hosts is His name: ‘If this fixed order departs from before Me,’ declares the LORD, ‘then the offspring of Israel also will cease from being a nation before Me forever’”* (Jeremiah 31:35–36).



The Meeting Place of God's WORD and His CHARACTER

Thankfully, the God of Israel is a practical God. His intention is that His presence in the lives of His people will make a real difference. God demonstrates this repeatedly throughout the pages of our Bibles. David trusted God, and his stone physically brought down Goliath. Gideon followed God's instruction, and they defeated the Midianites. God promised to care for the Israelites, and they received their portion of manna every day. God's integrity is vested in the fact that He does what He says. *"God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?"* (Numbers 23:19).

The condition of the Land, the return of the people, and their spiritual condition are all important for the nation of Israel. In Ezekiel 36, God deals with each of these aspects in detail, but in the process He highlights the real reason why these

The Lord our Sovereign
The Lord Most High
The Everlasting God
The Eternal Creator
The Lord our Provider
The Lord our Banner
The Lord our Healer
The Lord our Peace
The Lord our Righteousness
The Lord our Sanctifier
The Lord of Hosts
The Lord our Shepherd
The Lord our Maker
The Lord our God

things have to come to pass. It is for the sake of God's name, His integrity, that these events need to happen and indeed will happen. The Land in a state of disrepair, and the people dispersed both physically and spiritually, caused God's name to be profaned among the nations. As the process is reversed, God's name is restored; and as His name is restored, so is His power and authority.

Why Is This IMPORTANT to Us?

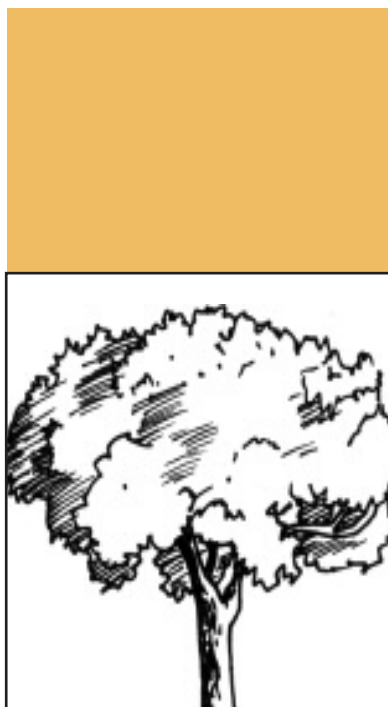
Israel's history books are filled with challenges and suffering; some brought on through their own disobedience, but mostly because they were chosen to be God's channel, that in them, *"all the families of the earth shall be blessed"* (Genesis 12:3b).

In His grace and through the sacrifice of His son, God has added those outside of Israel to His "chosen" people. The Apostle Paul explains the depth of this grace in the books of Ephesians and Romans:

"Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in this world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ...So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household" (Ephesians 2:12–13, 19).

"But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you" (Romans 11:17–18).

As Christians, we are not only grafted into the *benefits* of being made a part of God's household, we are also grafted into the *responsibilities* and *consequences*. Like the Jewish people, we, as Christians, have the ability to honor or profane God's name. Christian behavior during the dark days, when antagonism toward the Jewish people was common, profaned God's name, leaving much of the Church in a sort of spiritual Diaspora, removed from God's blessing associated with Israel and disconnected from the "root" described by Paul. Thankfully, Israel's physical return from the Diaspora has been matched by a similar process in the Church: the blessing of Israel and the rediscovering of its roots.



How do we RECONNECT to the Jewish people—OUR ROOTS?

In 1996, Nobel Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu addressed a meeting in a Palestinian Authority town. Behind him a banner in Arabic stated, "First we will kill the Saturday people, and then we'll kill the Sunday people." This threat to destroy first the Jewish people and then the Christians is no idle threat. Operation World estimates that there are 66 countries with instructive restrictions on Christians and over 400 million Christians living under governments that persecute them. Reliable sources estimate that over 160,000 Christians die annually for their faith.

Israel is the frontline, but there are many battles ahead for both Christians and Jews. Our prayers, encouragement, and practical support for those who suffer are the supply line that will enable all of us to endure to the end.

By Chris Eden,
National Director,
South Africa



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All Scriptures are taken from the
New American Standard Bible.

Many pastors, Bible teachers, and lay people have written and asked if they can use these notes for preaching and teaching. The answer is a resounding "yes"! It is our hope that the information contained herein will be disseminated over and over again, whether through the spoken word or by photocopying and redistributing these teachings. "For out of Zion shall go forth the law, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:3).

