

# STANDING WITH ISRAEL WITHOUT FEAR

A BIBLICAL GUIDE FOR PASTORS  
AND CHRISTIAN LEADERS



### **“Mission, Purpose, and Educational Use”**

Blow the Shofar Ministry was born out of a deeply personal burden to confront the growing rise of anti-Semitism and the increasing misunderstanding surrounding Israel and the Jewish people.

This ministry exists to bring truth where there is confusion, prayer where there is silence, compassion where there is division, and unwavering support where it is desperately needed.

Our mission is to educate, equip, and inspire the Church through biblical understanding, historical awareness, and compassionate engagement, encouraging believers to stand boldly, faithfully, and lovingly with the Jewish community while actively confronting anti-Semitism in all its forms.

The educational materials, teachings, and written works produced by Blow the Shofar Ministry are provided for educational, research, and informational purposes, with the goal of promoting historical awareness, religious understanding, and the ongoing fight against anti-Semitism, hatred, prejudice, and intolerance.

Every effort has been made to acknowledge and respect original historical references, scriptures, quotations, and publicly available source materials where applicable.

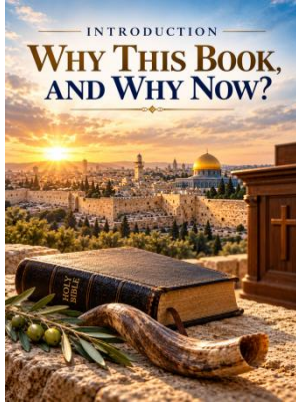
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These materials are intended to encourage education, dialogue, compassion, reconciliation, and a deeper understanding of the historical consequences of anti-Semitism and religious intolerance.

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## INDEX

|                     |                                                           |            |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Introduction</b> | <b>Standing with Israel without Fear</b>                  | <b>1</b>   |
| <b>Chapter 1</b>    | <b>Why Should Israel Matter to the Church ?</b>           | <b>8</b>   |
| <b>Chapter 2</b>    | <b>The Covenant God Has Not Forgotten</b>                 | <b>15</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 3</b>    | <b>Israel, the Jewish People, and the Modern State</b>    | <b>24</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 4</b>    | <b>Did the Church Replace Israel?</b>                     | <b>31</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 5</b>    | <b>Remember the Olive Tree</b>                            | <b>36</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 6</b>    | <b>Hath God Cast Away His People?</b>                     | <b>40</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 7</b>    | <b>Loving Israel Without Pretending Israel Is Perfect</b> | <b>45</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 8</b>    | <b>When Criticism of Israel Becomes Antisemitism</b>      | <b>53</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 9</b>    | <b>The Long Memory of the Jewish People</b>               | <b>59</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 10</b>   | <b>When the Church Was Silent</b>                         | <b>67</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 11</b>   | <b>Israel Is Not Just a Political Issue</b>               | <b>76</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 12</b>   | <b>Yeshua Was—and Is—Jewish</b>                           | <b>82</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 13</b>   | <b>What About the Palestinians?</b>                       | <b>88</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 14</b>   | <b>Standing With Israel in a Divided Church</b>           | <b>95</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 15</b>   | <b>What Should Pastors Teach Their Congregations?</b>     | <b>103</b> |
| <b>Chapter 16</b>   | <b>When the Shepherd Must Speak</b>                       | <b>110</b> |
| <b>Chapter 17</b>   | <b>Standing Without Fear</b>                              | <b>117</b> |
| <b>Chapter 18</b>   | <b>From the Pulpit to the Jewish Community</b>            | <b>123</b> |
|                     | <b>Beyond the Sermon</b>                                  | <b>123</b> |
|                     | <b>Jewish People Are Not a Theological Project</b>        | <b>123</b> |
|                     | <b>Start With the Jewish Community Nearby</b>             | <b>124</b> |
|                     | <b>Listen Before You Speak</b>                            | <b>124</b> |
|                     | <b>Friendship Without an Agenda</b>                       | <b>124</b> |
|                     | <b>Learning From the Synagogue</b>                        | <b>125</b> |
|                     | <b>When a Synagogue Is Threatened</b>                     | <b>125</b> |
|                     | <b>Meeting Holocaust Survivors</b>                        | <b>125</b> |
|                     | <b>Remembering Christians Who Stood With Jews</b>         | <b>126</b> |
|                     | <b>Build Relationships Before a Crisis</b>                | <b>126</b> |
|                     | <b>Relationships With Israelis</b>                        | <b>127</b> |
|                     | <b>Working With Those Who Confront Antisemitism</b>       | <b>127</b> |
|                     | <b>The Jewish Community Does Not Speak With One Voice</b> | <b>127</b> |
|                     | <b>Do Not Begin With Politics</b>                         | <b>128</b> |
|                     | <b>Share Faith Without Manipulation</b>                   | <b>128</b> |
|                     | <b>Let Jewish Friends Teach Us</b>                        | <b>128</b> |
|                     | <b>From Theology to Friendship</b>                        | <b>129</b> |
|                     | <b>When Friendship Becomes Witness</b>                    | <b>129</b> |
|                     | <b>A Relationship That Costs Something</b>                | <b>129</b> |
|                     | <b>From the Pulpit to the Street</b>                      | <b>129</b> |
|                     | <b>Refusing Yesterday's Silence</b>                       | <b>130</b> |
| <b>Conclusion</b>   | <b>We Cannot Remain Silent</b>                            | <b>131</b> |



## Introduction

There was a time when many pastors could avoid speaking about Israel. It seemed distant from the everyday concerns of the local church and was often treated as a subject belonging primarily to Bible prophecy conferences, theological debates, or discussions about events in the Middle East.

A pastor could preach through the Gospels, teach the letters of Paul, lead a congregation through the ordinary joys and struggles of Christian life, and rarely address the modern State of Israel or the Jewish people except when they appeared directly in the biblical text.

For many Christians, Israel remained somewhere in the background of their faith. They knew Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Peter, Paul, and Yeshua were Jewish, but the significance of that Jewish story for the Church today was not always explored.

That is becoming increasingly difficult. Israel has moved from the margins of Christian discussion into one of the most contentious conversations of our time.

Events in the Middle East now enter our homes almost instantly through television, social media, online news, and countless competing voices offering explanations of what is happening and why. Images of terrorism, war, hostages, military operations, destroyed buildings, grieving families, political demonstrations, and human suffering are placed before us, often without the historical or political context necessary to understand them.

Christians are then expected to form opinions quickly, and pastors may find themselves expected to provide answers to questions that involve thousands of years of biblical history, centuries of Christian theology, modern nationalism, international politics, terrorism, warfare, antisemitism, competing historical narratives, and deeply emotional claims from opposing sides.

One voice insists that Christians must stand unequivocally with Israel. Another argues that Christian support for Israel is politically motivated or theologically mistaken. Some Christians believe the modern restoration of Israel has profound prophetic significance, while others believe biblical promises concerning Israel have been fulfilled in Christ and the Church.

Some regard Zionism as the legitimate national aspiration of the Jewish people, while others use the word almost entirely as a term of condemnation. Still others believe that concern for Palestinian suffering requires opposition to Israel itself.

Into this environment steps the pastor, who is expected not only to understand these competing claims but somehow to address them without alienating people within the congregation.

The result is understandable. Many pastors conclude that the safest course is simply to say nothing. Silence can appear prudent. Why introduce a subject that may divide a congregation?

Why risk being labeled politically? Why speak when people on both sides may scrutinize every sentence? Why address an issue in which expressing compassion for one group can immediately be interpreted as hostility toward another? A pastor may reasonably wonder whether anything he says about Israel will be heard as a biblical statement or immediately interpreted as a political declaration.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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These are legitimate pastoral concerns. A pastor has a responsibility to protect the unity of the congregation and to avoid transforming the pulpit into a platform for partisan politics. The Church should never become merely an extension of a political party, government, ideology, nationalist movement, or activist organization.

The Gospel is greater than every political system. The authority of Scripture does not rise or fall with an election, and the mission of the Church cannot be reduced to defending the policies of any earthly government.

Yet there is another question Christian leaders must be willing to ask:

What happens when the desire to avoid controversy begins determining what the Church is willing to teach? There is an important difference between refusing to politicize the pulpit and refusing to address a biblical subject because that subject has become politically controversial.

Israel did not enter Christian conversation because of modern politics. Israel was already there. Long before there was a modern Israeli government, a Knesset, a prime minister, or an Israel Defense Forces, there was Abraham. There was Isaac. There was Jacob. There were twelve tribes. There was Jerusalem. There were the prophets. There were the covenants. And ultimately there was Yeshua.

Open the Bible and Israel appears throughout its story. The biblical narrative begins its particular covenantal focus with God's call to Abraham and the promise that through him the families of the earth would be blessed. That covenant continues through Isaac and Jacob, whose name becomes Israel. Jacob's descendants become a people, and that people become a nation. Through Israel come the patriarchs, the prophets, the covenants, the Scriptures, and ultimately the Messiah. The story of salvation presented in Scripture cannot be separated from God's dealings with Israel because God chose to reveal Himself and His redemptive purposes through that history.

Christians sometimes speak as though the Old Testament were merely a long introduction to Christianity, as though Israel's primary purpose was to prepare the stage for the arrival of Jesus and then quietly disappear once the Church emerged.

But that raises serious questions about the nature of God's promises. If God described certain commitments as everlasting, what does everlasting mean? If Paul wrote about Israel after the resurrection of Yeshua and the establishment of the Church, why did he continue to speak of Israel's calling, election, promises, and future? These questions cannot be answered simply by appealing to modern politics. They must be answered from Scripture.

Yeshua Himself cannot be removed from this Jewish story. He was born into a Jewish family, circumcised according to Jewish law, raised within the life of the Jewish people, worshipped in synagogues, celebrated the biblical feasts, taught from the Hebrew Scriptures, went to Jerusalem, and was crucified beneath a sign identifying Him as the King of the Jews. His apostles were Jewish. His earliest followers were Jewish. The first proclamation of the Gospel took place in Jerusalem. The Gospel went first into a Jewish world before spreading among the nations. The inclusion of Gentiles did not occur because the Gentiles replaced Israel, but because the God of Israel extended His saving grace to the nations through Israel's Messiah.

This is why Paul's olive-tree illustration in Romans 11 is so important. Paul describes natural branches and wild branches. Some natural branches were broken off because of unbelief, and wild olive branches were grafted in among those that remained. The Gentile believer therefore becomes a genuine participant

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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in the blessings associated with the root, but Paul does not tell the wild branch that it has become the natural branch. Instead, he warns it against arrogance. The Gentile believer is not to boast against the branches but to remember that the branch does not support the root; the root supports the branch.

That warning deserves to be heard again in every generation of the Church. Christianity did not begin in Rome, London, Geneva, Wittenberg, Toronto, Washington, or any other center of later Christian influence. It began within the story of Israel. The Church did not give the world the Jewish Messiah; the Jewish Messiah brought salvation to the nations. Gentile believers did not create the covenantal story into which they were welcomed. They entered a story that had already been unfolding for generations.

This does not mean that every Christian must accept one particular interpretation of biblical prophecy. Faithful Christians disagree about eschatology, the relationship between biblical Israel and the modern State of Israel, the fulfillment of prophetic passages, the nature of the land promises, and the precise relationship between Israel and the Church. Those disagreements are real and deserve careful study rather than caricature. A pastor who differs from another Christian regarding prophecy should not automatically be accused of hostility toward Israel, just as a Christian who believes God has continuing purposes for national Israel should not automatically be dismissed as politically motivated.

The purpose of this book is not to pretend those disagreements do not exist. It is to ask whether there is nevertheless a biblical foundation upon which Christian leaders can stand together.

Whatever conclusions we reach about prophecy, the Church cannot erase its Jewish roots. Whatever position we take regarding modern Israeli politics, we cannot ignore Paul's warning against arrogance toward the natural branches. Whatever eschatological system we adopt, we cannot make antisemitism compatible with Christian discipleship.

Neither does standing with Israel require Christians to defend everything Israel does. That distinction is essential to the argument of this book. The modern State of Israel is a nation governed by human beings. Its leaders make decisions that may be wise or foolish, just or unjust, successful or unsuccessful. Its governments may be criticized. Its policies may be questioned. Its military decisions may be debated. Israelis themselves vigorously disagree about their governments, courts, political parties, military policies, settlements, security policies, religious questions, and the direction of their country. There is nothing inherently anti-Israel about acknowledging this reality.

The Bible itself does not teach unquestioning political loyalty to Israel. In fact, some of the strongest criticism Israel ever received came from Israel's own prophets. Isaiah loved his people but rebuked their sin. Jeremiah wept for Jerusalem while warning of judgment. Amos condemned injustice. Nathan confronted King David. Elijah challenged Ahab. Their criticism did not prove that they hated Israel. Quite the opposite: their willingness to speak truth was part of their faithfulness to God and concern for His people.

Biblical love is therefore not blind allegiance. There must be room for Christians to say that they stand with Israel and the Jewish people while disagreeing with particular decisions of an Israeli government. Supporting Israel's right to exist does not require believing that every Israeli leader is correct. Rejecting antisemitism does not mean suspending moral judgment. A mature biblical position should be capable of distinguishing between covenantal conviction, concern for the Jewish people, support for Israel's existence, and approval of every decision made by a government.

There must also be room for Christians to say with equal sincerity that they care about Palestinians. Palestinian suffering should never be dismissed simply because Christians believe God has continuing

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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purposes for Israel. Palestinian men, women, and children are human beings created in the image of God. Their lives matter. Their suffering matters. Their fears matter. Their children matter. Christian compassion must never become selective, as though grief on one side of a border were more worthy of tears than grief on the other.

A Christian should be capable of mourning when an Israeli mother buries her child and when a Palestinian mother buries hers. We should be capable of condemning the murder of Jewish civilians while grieving the death of innocent Palestinian civilians. Compassion is not a betrayal of conviction. It is possible to maintain strong biblical convictions concerning Israel while refusing to become indifferent to the suffering of Palestinians.

But the reverse must also be said. Compassion for Palestinians should never require Christians to excuse terrorism, minimize the deliberate murder of civilians, ignore antisemitism, deny Jewish history, demonize Israel, or hold Jewish people throughout the world collectively responsible for the decisions of the Israeli government. Nor should legitimate concern for Palestinian rights become a doorway through which ancient hatred of Jews is allowed to re-enter public life wearing modern political language.

This is one reason the conversation has become so difficult. We are repeatedly pressured to choose between extremes. If we stand with Israel, someone may assume we support everything Israel does. If we criticize an Israeli policy, someone else may accuse us of abandoning Israel. If we express compassion for Palestinians, our commitment to the Jewish people may be questioned. If we condemn antisemitism, we may be accused of attempting to silence legitimate criticism of Israel. Nuance becomes suspicious, and careful distinctions are easily lost in an environment driven by slogans and outrage.

Pastors can quickly discover that whatever they say, someone will be dissatisfied. For a shepherd whose responsibility is to care for an entire congregation, that reality matters. Pastors are not commentators whose success is measured by attention or controversy. They are responsible for people. They know that careless words can wound, divide, or confuse. Caution therefore has a proper place in pastoral ministry.

Yet caution and fear are not the same thing. Wisdom asks, “How should I speak?” Fear asks, “How can I avoid speaking at all?” Discernment considers timing, language, context, and pastoral consequences. Fear allows possible criticism to become the deciding factor. When fear determines what may be preached, difficult biblical truths eventually disappear from the pulpit.

History gives Christians particular reason to think carefully about silence when the subject is the Jewish people. There have been periods when hostility toward Jews increased while many Christians convinced themselves that the controversy did not concern them. Antisemitic language became socially acceptable. Conspiracy theories spread. Jewish businesses, homes, cemeteries, and synagogues were attacked. Jewish people were blamed collectively for political, economic, or social problems. In some places Christians resisted these developments; in others they participated; and in still others they remained silent.

We cannot change those moments, but we can learn from them. Remembering Christian failures should not become an exercise in placing perpetual guilt upon today's Church. Nor should history be presented as though every Christian leader remained silent. There were Christians who spoke, Christians who resisted, Christians who protected Jewish neighbors, and Christians who risked reputations, careers, freedom, and even their lives because they believed silence was incompatible with obedience to God.

Their example raises an uncomfortable question for every generation: What would we have done? It is easy to answer when the danger belongs to history. We can look backward and imagine that we certainly would have recognized the hatred, rejected the propaganda, defended our Jewish neighbors, and spoken

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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from our pulpits. But history is always clearer in retrospect. Those living through it did not possess the advantage of knowing how the story would end. They faced social pressure, political intimidation, theological confusion, personal risk, and the temptation to believe that silence was prudence.

The more difficult question is not what we would have done then. It is what we will do now when prejudice appears in forms that are less obvious to us.

Antisemitism rarely introduces itself by announcing what it is. It adapts to the vocabulary of its generation. Ancient religious accusations can become modern conspiracy theories. Old stereotypes can acquire new political language. Collective blame can be disguised as social commentary. Hatred can hide behind respectable terminology. Legitimate criticism of a government can gradually become condemnation of an entire people, and people who would never openly express hostility toward Jews can sometimes repeat ideas rooted in centuries-old antisemitic stereotypes without recognizing their origins.

This is why Christian leaders need discernment. Not every criticism of Israel is antisemitic, and calling every criticism antisemitic weakens our ability to recognize genuine antisemitism. Israel, like every nation, can and should be subject to legitimate moral and political scrutiny. But criticism crosses a dangerous line when Jews everywhere are held responsible for the actions of Israel, when ancient conspiracies about Jewish power or control are revived, when Jewish history is denied, when attacks against Jewish civilians are justified because of political grievances, or when Jewish people are treated as uniquely undeserving of rights granted to others.

Pastors do not need to become experts in every detail of Middle Eastern politics. They do not need to deliver weekly commentary on the Israeli Knesset, military strategy, international diplomacy, coalition politics, court decisions, settlements, borders, or every headline coming from Jerusalem. They certainly do not need to turn Sunday worship into a political rally. A pastor's primary calling remains the faithful teaching of God's Word and the shepherding of God's people.

But pastors should understand the biblical foundations well enough to teach their congregations faithfully. They should understand God's covenant with Abraham and why the language of covenant matters. They should understand why Israel became a people and what Scripture means when it calls Israel chosen. They should understand the relationship between election and responsibility. They should understand the significance of the land without turning geography into an idol. They should understand exile and restoration. They should understand the Jewish identity of Yeshua and the apostles. They should understand Paul's argument in Romans 9, 10, and 11. They should understand the olive tree and Paul's warning against Gentile boasting. They should also know enough Christian history to recognize what can happen when theological contempt for Jews becomes cultural hostility toward Jews.

This book is therefore not primarily a book about politics. Political questions will inevitably arise because the modern State of Israel exists within a complicated political environment, but politics will not be our foundation. Our foundation must be Scripture. The central question is not which political party a Christian should support, which Israeli prime minister a Christian should prefer, or which political ideology provides the easiest answers. The central question is what the biblical story teaches us about Israel, the Jewish people, the nations, the Church, and the faithfulness of God.

This book is written particularly for pastors and Christian leaders who may feel caught between competing voices and who genuinely want to approach Israel faithfully. It is for leaders who want to stand against antisemitism without turning their churches into political organizations. It is for pastors who believe the Bible but remain uncertain about how the biblical promises concerning Israel should shape Christian thinking today. It is for Christian leaders who want to demonstrate genuine compassion toward

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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Palestinians without concluding that God's purposes for Israel have disappeared. It is also for those who may have avoided the subject because they feel inadequately prepared to address it.

No pastor should be ashamed to admit that the subject is complicated. Humility is preferable to pretending to possess answers we do not have. There are historical questions that require study, theological questions about which faithful Christians disagree, and political questions for which Scripture does not provide a simple policy prescription. Saying “I need to understand this better” is not weakness. In fact, it may be the beginning of responsible leadership.

But uncertainty about some questions should not produce uncertainty about everything. Christians can disagree about prophecy and still oppose antisemitism. We can disagree about borders and still recognize Jewish history. We can disagree about particular military actions while affirming Israel's right to exist. We can care deeply about Palestinians without denying the Jewish people's connection to the land. We can reject hatred toward Jews without embracing hatred toward Arabs or Muslims. These positions are not contradictions unless we allow political extremes to define the choices available to us.

The phrase “standing with Israel without fear” therefore requires careful definition. It does not mean standing without wisdom. It does not mean standing without compassion. It does not mean standing without questions. It does not mean defending everything Israel does or refusing to listen when Israel is legitimately criticized. It does not mean believing that Jewish lives matter more than Palestinian lives. And it certainly does not mean replacing the Gospel with political advocacy.

Standing without fear means something more disciplined. It means refusing to allow intimidation, political fashion, theological prejudice, social pressure, or fear of controversy to erase what Scripture teaches. It means being willing to say that antisemitism is wrong even when doing so is unpopular. It means acknowledging the Jewish roots of Christianity even when prevailing theological assumptions have obscured them. It means recognizing that Christians have been grafted into a story that began long before the Church existed. It means loving the Jewish people without hatred toward anyone else and extending compassion to Palestinians without abandoning biblical conviction.

Most importantly, it means trusting the character of God. The question of Israel ultimately leads beyond Israel. It leads to the faithfulness of God Himself. If God makes promises, does He keep them? If He establishes a covenant, can His people trust His word? If human failure automatically nullifies divine promises, what confidence can any of us have in grace? These questions matter not only for Israel but for every Christian who has ever trusted a promise of God.

This is why the subject cannot simply be placed in a box labeled “Middle East politics.” The biblical question of Israel reaches into our understanding of covenant, election, grace, faithfulness, prophecy, salvation, and the character of God. Paul's discussion of Israel in Romans 9–11 is not an interruption in his explanation of the Gospel. It belongs to his explanation of the Gospel because the faithfulness of God to His promises is inseparable from the good news Christians proclaim.

The pages that follow are therefore an invitation to examine the story again: from Abraham to Isaac and Jacob, from Jacob to Israel, from Israel to the prophets, from the prophets to Messiah, from Messiah to the nations, and from the olive tree of Romans 11 to the responsibilities facing Christian leaders today. Along the way, we will confront difficult theological questions, painful episodes of Christian history, modern political realities, antisemitism, Palestinian suffering, and the challenge pastors face when their congregations themselves are divided.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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The goal will not be to tell pastors what political opinions they must hold. The goal is to provide a biblical framework strong enough that political pressure does not become the foundation of Christian conviction.

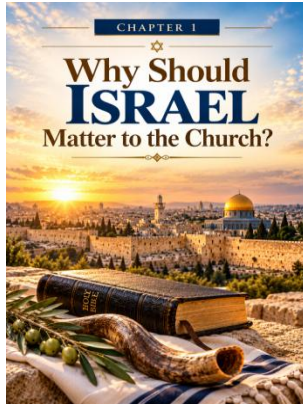
Pastors do not need to speak about Israel because Israel is politically fashionable. They should speak when Scripture requires them to speak. They do not need to defend Israel because Israel is perfect, because Israel is not perfect. They do not need to agree with every Israeli government, every Israeli leader, or every Israeli policy. They do not need to possess an answer to every question about the Middle East before they are permitted to say anything at all.

They need something more fundamental. They need to know what God has said, to teach it faithfully, to distinguish biblical conviction from political allegiance, to recognize hatred when it appears, to demonstrate compassion toward those who suffer, and to lead their congregations with courage and wisdom.

There will always be reasons to remain silent. There will always be someone who misunderstands. There will always be a political label waiting to be attached to anyone who enters this discussion. There will always be pressure to move toward one extreme or another. But Christian leadership has never been defined by finding the position least likely to attract criticism.

It is defined by faithfulness.

And once we have carefully examined what God has said, fear should never be the reason we refuse to say it.



### Chapter 1 — Why Should Israel Matter to the Church?

For a pastor serving a congregation in Canada, the United States, Europe, Australia, Africa, Asia, or anywhere else in the world, the question may initially seem remote from the ordinary responsibilities of ministry. Pastors preach the Gospel, teach Scripture, visit the sick, comfort grieving families, counsel marriages, disciple believers, lead worship, care for congregations, and proclaim salvation through Yeshua the Messiah.

With so many immediate responsibilities, why should Israel and the Jewish people occupy any significant place in Christian teaching?

The simplest answer is that Israel matters because Israel matters in the Bible. Israel is not a minor subject appearing occasionally at the edges of Scripture. Once God calls Abraham, Israel's story becomes one of the central threads running through the biblical narrative. Remove Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the twelve tribes, Moses, David, Jerusalem, the prophets, the covenants, and the Jewish Messiah from Scripture, and what remains is no longer the biblical story Christians claim as their own. Israel is woven into the history of redemption from Genesis through Revelation.

This does not mean that every sermon must be about Israel or that every pastor must become an expert on the modern Middle East. It means something more basic: Christians cannot fully understand their own faith without understanding the people, covenants, promises, Scriptures, and history through which God chose to reveal His redemptive purposes.

The story begins with Abraham. In Genesis 12, God calls Abram to leave his country, his kindred, and his father's house and go to a land that God would show him. God promises to make of him a great nation, to bless him, to make his name great, and to make him a blessing. Then comes one of the most consequential promises in all of Scripture: through Abraham, all the families of the earth would be blessed.

The significance of this promise reaches far beyond Abraham himself. God's purpose was never restricted to one man or even one nation. From the beginning, the calling of Abraham contained a purpose for the nations. God chose one through whom blessing would ultimately extend to many. The particular calling of Abraham and the universal purpose of God were not opposites. They belonged together.

This is important for Christian theology because Gentile believers are beneficiaries of that promise. The blessing that reaches the nations through Messiah does not appear suddenly in the New Testament without precedent. It is rooted in the promise God made to Abraham centuries earlier. When Paul explains the inclusion of the Gentiles, he reaches backward to Abraham. The Gospel going to the nations is therefore not the abandonment of the Abrahamic story. It is part of its unfolding.

The covenantal line then passes from Abraham to Isaac. This distinction matters because Abraham had other sons, yet Scripture specifically identifies Isaac as the son through whom the covenant would continue. God then confirms the covenant to Isaac and subsequently to Jacob. Jacob's name is changed to Israel, and his descendants become the children of Israel. What began as God's calling of one man becomes the story of a family, then a people, and eventually a nation.

This means that Israel has a specific biblical identity. Israel is not merely a theological symbol that can be detached from the people whose story Scripture records. The name begins with Jacob and becomes

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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associated with his descendants. The twelve sons of Jacob become the twelve tribes of Israel. Their story continues through Egypt, the Exodus, Sinai, the wilderness, the land, the monarchy, exile, and restoration.

At Sinai, Israel's calling becomes even more clearly defined. God declares that Israel is to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Election, however, should never be confused with superiority. God did not choose Israel because Israelites were inherently better than other peoples. Deuteronomy explicitly rejects such an idea. Israel's election was grounded in God's love and faithfulness to His covenant.

To be chosen in Scripture is also to be given responsibility. Israel was called to live in covenant relationship with God and to bear witness to His holiness among the nations. The Torah shaped Israel's worship, ethics, community life, festivals, justice, and relationship with God. Through Israel, the nations would learn that there is one God who is holy, righteous, merciful, and faithful.

This helps correct a misunderstanding that sometimes appears in Christian discussions of Israel. Biblical election is not divine favoritism in the simplistic sense of God loving one people and caring nothing for everyone else. God's choice of Israel serves a purpose extending beyond Israel. He chooses Abraham, yet promises blessing to all families of the earth. He forms Israel as a nation, yet repeatedly reveals His concern for the nations. The particular and the universal operate together throughout Scripture.

Then come the prophets. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Amos, Micah, Zechariah, and the other prophets speak to Israel and Judah about sin, judgment, repentance, restoration, righteousness, justice, and hope. They do not flatter Israel. In fact, some of the Bible's strongest condemnations of Israel come from Jewish prophets speaking to their own people.

Yet the prophets also reveal something essential about God's character. Israel's unfaithfulness does not make God unfaithful. Judgment is real, but judgment is not always the final word. Exile is announced, but restoration is also promised. Israel is disciplined, but God repeatedly speaks of gathering, restoring, renewing, and remembering His covenant.

This pattern becomes crucial when Christians ask whether Israel still matters. If Israel's failures automatically cancelled God's purposes, much of the prophetic language concerning restoration becomes difficult to explain. Again and again, the prophets connect Israel's future not primarily with Israel's worthiness but with God's faithfulness, God's name, God's covenant, and God's purposes.

Ezekiel provides a particularly striking example. When speaking of Israel's restoration, God makes clear that His action is not based upon Israel's deserving it. His own holy name is involved. That shifts the theological question. Israel's future cannot be considered only by asking whether Israel has been faithful. We must also ask whether God is faithful.

That question should matter deeply to every Christian.

If the faithfulness of God depends entirely upon the faithfulness of those to whom He makes promises, then none of us has much reason for confidence. Christian hope rests upon the opposite truth. God is faithful even when human beings fail. Grace does not deny accountability, but human failure does not transform God into an unfaithful covenant-maker.

The biblical story then moves toward its center: Yeshua.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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It is impossible to understand Yeshua correctly while removing Him from Israel's story. He does not enter history as an abstract religious figure without a people, history, or covenantal context. He is born Jewish. His mother is Jewish. His earthly family is Jewish. He is circumcised according to the Torah. He grows up within Jewish community life. He attends synagogue. He travels to Jerusalem. He celebrates the biblical feasts. He quotes the Hebrew Scriptures. His disciples call Him Rabbi. He speaks of Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah, Isaiah, and the prophets as part of the story into which He Himself has entered.

The Gospel writers deliberately locate Yeshua within that history. Matthew begins by identifying Him as the son of David and the son of Abraham. Those titles are not decorative introductions. They identify Him covenantally. Abraham points us toward the promises through which blessing would come to the nations. David points us toward the royal promise and the expectation of Messiah.

Even the title Messiah is inseparable from Israel. "Messiah" is not originally a Gentile religious category. It comes from Israel's Scriptures and Israel's hope. To proclaim Yeshua as Messiah while treating Israel as irrelevant is therefore a strange contradiction. The very language Christians use to describe Him comes from the biblical world of Israel.

The cross itself does not erase that identity. The inscription placed above Yeshua identifies Him as King of the Jews. The resurrection does not make Him less Jewish. The book of Revelation continues to use imagery rooted deeply in Israel's Scriptures, tribes, prophets, Jerusalem, and messianic expectation. The Jewish identity of Yeshua is not merely an interesting fact about His earthly childhood. It belongs to the biblical presentation of who He is.

The apostles likewise emerge from Israel. Peter is Jewish. John is Jewish. James is Jewish. Paul is Jewish. The earliest disciples are Jewish. The earliest believers in Yeshua are Jewish. The first great proclamation of the resurrected Messiah in Acts takes place in Jerusalem before a Jewish audience.

When thousands believe, the Church does not suddenly begin as a Gentile institution. Its earliest community is Jewish. Its Scriptures are the Scriptures of Israel. Its Messiah is Israel's Messiah. Its apostles are Jewish men proclaiming that the promises made in Israel's Scriptures have reached a decisive moment in Yeshua.

Only later does a question emerge that can seem almost surprising to modern Christians: Can Gentiles come in?

The earliest controversy was not whether Jewish believers could belong to a Gentile Church. The Church was not originally Gentile. The question was how Gentiles could enter a movement that had arisen within Israel.

Acts records the extraordinary importance of this development. Peter's encounter with Cornelius demonstrates that God is welcoming Gentiles. Paul becomes the great apostle to the nations. The Jerusalem council considers how Gentile believers should relate to the Torah and the Jewish community. The Gospel moves outward from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and eventually throughout the Roman world.

Gentile inclusion is one of the great wonders of the New Testament. Those who had been outside Israel's covenantal history were being brought near through Messiah. Paul describes this magnificently in Ephesians 2, reminding Gentile believers that they had once been strangers to the covenants of promise and without hope and without God in the world, but had now been brought near through Messiah.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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Notice the direction of Paul's argument. He does not tell Gentiles that Israel's history was irrelevant. He reminds them that they had once been outside that history. Their new position is remarkable precisely because they have been brought near to something from which they had previously been separated.

Paul develops the same idea through a different image in Romans 11. There he speaks of an olive tree. Some natural branches are broken off because of unbelief, and branches from a wild olive tree are grafted in among the remaining branches. Those wild branches share in the richness of the root.

For Gentile Christians, this should be a profoundly humbling picture. We were not the original tree. We were not the natural branches. We were grafted in.

Paul therefore warns Gentile believers not to boast against the branches. If they are tempted toward arrogance, they should remember that they do not support the root; the root supports them.

That warning is as relevant today as it was when Paul wrote it. Throughout Christian history, the relationship has too often been reversed in Christian thinking. Instead of remembering that Gentile believers were grafted into a story that preceded them, Christians sometimes began acting as though the Church had created the story and Israel had become an unfortunate preliminary chapter that could now be discarded.

Paul leaves little room for such arrogance. His olive-tree illustration calls Gentile Christians to humility. We participate in blessings we did not originate. We worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We read Israel's Scriptures. We sing Israel's Psalms. We learn from Israel's prophets. We proclaim Israel's Messiah. We speak of a new covenant whose very promise first appears in the prophet Jeremiah and is addressed to the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

This does not diminish the Church. It helps the Church understand itself.

A branch does not become less significant by acknowledging the root from which it receives nourishment. Quite the opposite. Understanding the root helps the branch understand where its life comes from.

This is why Israel should matter to a pastor far from Jerusalem. The issue is not geography. A congregation may be thousands of miles from Israel and still owe an enormous spiritual debt to the Jewish people. Every time Christians open the Psalms, they enter Israel's worship. Every time they read Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Ezekiel, they listen to Israel's prophets. Every time they read the Gospels, they enter the Jewish world of Yeshua and His disciples. Every time they read Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, or Philippians, they are reading letters written by a Jewish apostle explaining what Israel's Messiah means for the nations.

The question therefore changes. Instead of asking, "Why should Christians care about Israel?" perhaps we should ask, "How could Christians understand their own faith while ignoring Israel?"

This is especially important for pastors because congregations usually learn how to understand Scripture through those who teach them. If Israel appears only in Christmas stories, Old Testament children's lessons, prophecy charts, or political discussions, believers may never understand the continuity of the biblical narrative. They may unconsciously imagine that the Old Testament belongs to the Jews while the New Testament belongs to Christians, as though two separate religions and two separate Gods were involved.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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But there is one biblical story. The God worshipped by the Church is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Messiah proclaimed by the Church is the promised son of David. The Scriptures from which the apostles preached were Israel's Scriptures. The new covenant itself emerges from promises given through Israel's prophets.

This also changes the way Christians think about Jewish people today. Jewish people should not matter to Christians merely because Christians hope to convert them, nor should they matter only when events in Israel dominate the news. They should matter because Christianity has a relationship with Jewish history that cannot be erased.

That relationship should produce humility rather than superiority.

For centuries, however, Christian teaching sometimes moved in the opposite direction. Jews were portrayed not as the people through whom God gave the patriarchs, prophets, Scriptures, and Messiah, but primarily as those who rejected Jesus. The complexity of the New Testament was reduced to a simple accusation, and responsibility for the crucifixion was sometimes placed collectively upon generations of Jewish people who lived centuries later.

Such thinking ignored an obvious Christian confession: Yeshua went willingly to the cross for the sins of the world. If Christians believe He died for our sins, then the cross cannot become a weapon with which we condemn an entire ethnic people.

It is equally important to remember that the conflict recorded within the Gospels often represents an internal Jewish debate. Yeshua is Jewish. His disciples are Jewish. Many of His followers are Jewish. The religious leaders with whom He disputes are Jewish. Reading those passages as though “Jesus and the Christians” were confronting “the Jews” imposes a later historical division upon a first-century Jewish setting.

Pastors have an important role in helping congregations read these passages carefully. The way Scripture is taught can either reinforce ancient prejudices or correct them. Understanding the Jewish context of the New Testament does not weaken Christian faith. It makes our reading more historically and biblically accurate.

There is another reason Israel matters to the Church: God's relationship with Israel tells us something about God's character.

Christians frequently speak about the faithfulness of God. We sing about it. We preach about it. We depend upon it. We comfort the suffering with it. We assure believers that God keeps His promises.

Israel puts that confession to the test.

God made promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He established covenants. He spoke through prophets. Israel repeatedly failed, rebelled, wandered, and experienced judgment. Yet Scripture repeatedly returns to God's faithfulness.

Paul confronts precisely this issue in Romans. Israel's unbelief raises an enormous theological question: Has the Word of God failed? Has God rejected His people? Paul's response is emphatic. “God forbid.”

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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Why is Paul so concerned about the question? Because more is at stake than Israel alone. The faithfulness of God is at stake. If God's promises can simply disappear when His people fail, then every believer has reason to wonder about the security of God's promises.

Israel therefore becomes a testimony not merely to Jewish perseverance but to divine faithfulness.

For the pastor, this gives the subject profound pastoral significance. Teaching about Israel is not merely teaching about another people. It becomes an opportunity to teach about covenant, grace, judgment, restoration, election, mercy, humility, and the faithfulness of God.

It also gives the Church a framework for resisting antisemitism. Christians should oppose antisemitism because hatred of any people is incompatible with the command to love our neighbor. That alone is sufficient. But Christians have an additional reason for particular vigilance. Antisemitism targets the people from whom came the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, Scriptures, and Messiah.

Paul expresses this connection powerfully in Romans 9 when he speaks of his fellow Israelites, to whom belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises, and from whom, according to the flesh, Messiah came. Paul does not speak of these things with embarrassment. He speaks with profound sorrow over Israel's unbelief while simultaneously affirming Israel's extraordinary place within God's redemptive history.

The Church should be capable of doing the same. Christians can long for Jewish people to know Yeshua while refusing contempt toward them. We can proclaim our convictions while honoring Jewish people as human beings created in God's image and recognizing the extraordinary debt Christianity owes to Israel's history.

This is where pastors and Christian leaders have a unique responsibility. The attitudes of congregations are shaped not only by what pastors explicitly say but also by what they consistently omit. If Israel appears only when discussing war or prophecy, congregations may come to think of Israel primarily as a political problem or prophetic timetable. If Jewish people appear only in discussions of rejecting Yeshua, believers may develop a distorted picture of the people from whom their own faith emerged.

A healthier biblical approach begins much earlier. It begins with Abraham. It follows the covenant through Isaac and Jacob. It understands Israel's calling at Sinai. It listens to the prophets. It recognizes the hope of restoration. It encounters Yeshua within His Jewish world. It follows Jewish apostles carrying the Gospel from Jerusalem to the nations. It watches Gentiles being welcomed into blessings they did not create. And it listens carefully when Paul tells those Gentiles not to become arrogant.

Once that story is understood, Israel can no longer be treated as a peripheral Christian issue.

This does not require a pastor to place an Israeli flag in the sanctuary. It does not require a church to endorse a particular Israeli political party. It does not require Christians to agree about every prophecy concerning the land. It does not require the Church to ignore Palestinian suffering or defend actions that deserve legitimate criticism.

It requires something simpler and deeper: remembering the story into which we have been brought.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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The Church has not replaced the need for humility. The Church has not outgrown its biblical roots. Gentile believers have not become self-sustaining branches disconnected from the tree that supports them. We have been brought near by grace.

That truth should shape the way pastors teach, the way Christians read Scripture, and the way the Church relates to Jewish people.

Why, then, should Israel matter to the Church?

Because Abraham matters. Because the covenant matters. Because Isaac and Jacob matter. Because Moses and David matter. Because the prophets matter. Because Jerusalem matters within the biblical story. Because the apostles matter. Because Paul tells Gentile believers to remember the root.

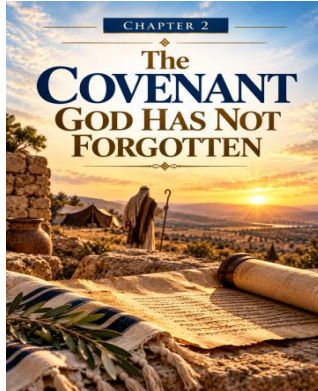
And above all, because Yeshua matters.

The Church cannot love the Scriptures while despising the people through whom those Scriptures came. It cannot proclaim the Jewish Messiah while treating His Jewish identity as irrelevant. It cannot celebrate being grafted into the olive tree while boasting against the natural branches. And it cannot proclaim that God is faithful while refusing to consider what His faithfulness means for the people to whom He made covenant promises.

Israel matters to the Church because Israel is woven into the story of God's redemptive work.

For pastors and Christian leaders, therefore, the first step is not deciding what position to take on every modern Israeli political question. The first step is much more fundamental. It is opening the Scriptures and allowing the Bible itself to establish the relationship between Israel, Messiah, the nations, and the Church.

Only then are we prepared to ask the question that naturally follows: What exactly did God promise, and does He still remember His covenant?



### Chapter 2 — The Covenant God Has Not Forgotten

If Israel matters to the Church because Israel is woven throughout the biblical story, then the next question is unavoidable:

What did God actually promise Israel?

This question takes us beyond modern politics, beyond debates about Zionism, and even beyond the establishment of the modern State of Israel.

Long before there was a Knesset, an Israeli government, or a modern political movement seeking a Jewish homeland, there was a covenant. To understand Israel biblically, we must therefore begin not with 1948, but with Abraham.

The story begins in Genesis 12 when God speaks to Abram and calls him to leave his country, his kindred, and his father's house and journey to a land that God would show him. God's command is accompanied by extraordinary promises. God declares that He will make Abram into a great nation, bless him, make his name great, and make him a blessing. God also promises that those who bless Abram will be blessed and that through him all the families of the earth will ultimately receive blessing.

These promises establish a pattern that continues throughout Scripture. There is a man, a people, a land, a blessing, and a purpose extending to the nations. God is not choosing Abraham so that His concern for the rest of humanity can be abandoned. He is choosing Abraham as part of the means through which His redemptive purposes will reach the world. God's particular calling of Abraham serves a universal purpose.

This distinction is essential. Christians sometimes speak as though God's choice of Israel and His love for the nations must compete with one another. Scripture presents no such competition. God chooses Abraham, and through Abraham He intends to bless the nations. He forms Israel, and through Israel come the Scriptures, the prophets, and ultimately Messiah. God's particular purposes for Israel become one of the instruments through which His universal purposes are accomplished.

Genesis 12 introduces the promises, but Genesis 15 develops them in a remarkable way. Abram has already obeyed God's call, but he has a problem. God has promised descendants, yet Abram remains childless. From a human perspective, the promise appears increasingly impossible. Abram therefore asks God how the promise can be fulfilled when he has no son.

God responds by taking Abram outside and directing his attention toward the heavens. Abram is told to look at the stars and count them, if he is able. His descendants, God says, will be like them. Then comes one of the foundational statements of biblical faith: Abram believes God, and his faith is counted to him for righteousness.

The significance of this moment extends far beyond the immediate story. Paul will later return to Abraham when explaining justification by faith. Yet Genesis 15 does not end with the promise of descendants. God also speaks concerning the land. Abram asks how he may know that he will possess it, and what follows is one of the most solemn covenant ceremonies recorded in Scripture.

Animals are brought, divided, and arranged. In the ancient world, covenant ceremonies of this kind carried profound meaning. The divided animals represented the seriousness of the covenant being

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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established. Yet something unusual happens in Genesis 15. Abram does not walk between the pieces as an equal covenant partner. Abram falls into a deep sleep.

Then, symbolically represented by a smoking furnace and a burning lamp, God passes between the pieces.

The importance of this scene is difficult to overstate. The covenant rests ultimately upon God's commitment. Abram is the recipient of the promise, but God assumes the covenantal obligation. The fulfillment of what has been promised depends fundamentally upon the faithfulness of the One who made the promise.

This does not mean Abraham or his descendants have no responsibilities. Scripture repeatedly calls Israel to obedience. Covenant disobedience has consequences. Israel can experience discipline, judgment, exile, and loss. The prophets make that abundantly clear. But discipline within a covenant is not necessarily the same thing as cancellation of the covenant itself.

That distinction becomes crucial for everything that follows.

In Genesis 15, God also tells Abram that his descendants will spend time as strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will experience oppression. God promises that He will judge the nation that oppresses them and afterward bring Abram's descendants out. The Exodus story, therefore, does not emerge unexpectedly centuries later. It is already anticipated within the Abrahamic covenant.

God then defines the land involved in the promise. Whatever theological questions Christians may later raise about the application of these promises, the original promise itself is concrete. It concerns Abraham's physical descendants and a geographical land. We should allow the text to say what it says before deciding how later revelation relates to it.

Genesis 17 develops the covenant still further. God again appears to Abraham and describes His covenant in extraordinary language. He promises to establish His covenant between Himself and Abraham and Abraham's descendants after him throughout their generations. Most significantly, God calls it an **everlasting covenant**.

The word “everlasting” cannot simply be ignored because it creates difficulties for a particular theological system. When Scripture uses covenant language this strong, Christians should at least hesitate before declaring that the covenant has ceased to have meaning for the people to whom it was originally given.

God also repeats the promise of the land and associates it with Abraham's descendants. Again, the biblical account does not present the land as an incidental detail. It appears repeatedly within the covenantal promises. Descendants, covenant, land, blessing, and God's relationship with Abraham's family are woven together.

Yet a question immediately arises. Which descendants of Abraham?

Abraham has more than one son. Ishmael is his son, and Scripture does not deny this. In fact, God promises to bless Ishmael and make him fruitful. God's covenantal choice of one line does not require hatred or contempt toward another. This principle deserves emphasis because biblical election has too often been misunderstood as though God's choosing one person requires Him to despise everyone else.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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Nevertheless, Scripture identifies a particular covenantal line. God tells Abraham that the covenant will be established through Isaac. Isaac is not chosen because Ishmael has no value. Ishmael is blessed, but the covenantal line through which the biblical story will proceed is identified with Isaac.

The same pattern continues in the next generation. Isaac has two sons, Esau and Jacob. Once again, the covenantal line does not proceed through every biological descendant equally. It passes through Jacob.

Jacob's importance is especially significant because God changes his name to Israel.

Israel, therefore, begins in Scripture not as an abstract theological concept, a church, a modern political ideology, or even initially as a nation. Israel is first the name given to a particular man: Jacob. His descendants become known as the children of Israel. His twelve sons become the fathers of the twelve tribes. A family becomes a people, and eventually that people becomes a nation.

God confirms to Jacob the promises previously given to Abraham and Isaac. This repetition is important. Scripture does not leave us to guess whether the covenantal promises ended with Abraham. They are deliberately reaffirmed from one generation to the next. Abraham receives the promise. Isaac receives its confirmation. Jacob receives it again. The biblical narrative establishes continuity.

This is why Scripture repeatedly refers to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The phrase is more than a convenient way of identifying God. It recalls a covenantal history. When God speaks to Moses from the burning bush, He identifies Himself in relationship to these patriarchs. Generations have passed, circumstances have changed, and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are long dead, but God has not forgotten what He promised.

The Exodus provides one of the clearest demonstrations of this truth. The children of Israel are suffering under Egyptian bondage. Their circumstances could easily suggest that God's promises have failed. They are not living as a free nation in the land promised to their fathers. They are slaves under a foreign power.

Yet Exodus tells us that God hears their groaning and remembers His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The word “remembers” does not suggest that God had temporarily forgotten something and suddenly recalled it. Biblical language of God remembering His covenant describes His acting faithfully in accordance with what He has promised. Israel's deliverance from Egypt is therefore not merely a humanitarian rescue from slavery. It is a covenantal act.

God acts because He remembers.

This theme becomes one of the great foundations of Israel's biblical history. Human circumstances change. Generations come and go. Kings rise and fall. Israel obeys and disobeys. The nation experiences victory, defeat, prosperity, judgment, exile, and restoration. But behind the changing circumstances stands the covenant-making God.

This brings us to one of the most important questions in Christian theology concerning Israel: What happens when Israel is unfaithful?

The Bible does not conceal Israel's failures. In fact, Scripture is remarkably candid about them. Israel complains in the wilderness. The people construct the golden calf. They repeatedly turn toward idolatry.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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Judges records cycles of rebellion and judgment. Kings become corrupt. Injustice spreads. Prophets are rejected. Eventually the northern kingdom is conquered by Assyria and the southern kingdom is carried into Babylonian exile.

If God's covenant depended upon Israel maintaining an unbroken record of obedience, the story should have ended many times.

But it does not.

Again and again, judgment is followed by the language of remembrance, mercy, restoration, and covenant faithfulness.

This does not make sin insignificant. Israel's disobedience has real consequences. The covenant never becomes an excuse for rebellion. The Torah itself warns of judgment. The prophets announce severe consequences for idolatry, injustice, corruption, and covenant unfaithfulness. Jerusalem can be destroyed. The Temple can fall. The people can be scattered.

Yet the prophets repeatedly distinguish between divine discipline and divine abandonment.

This distinction becomes extraordinarily important when Christians later ask whether Israel's rejection of Yeshua means that God has rejected Israel.

If disobedience automatically nullifies God's covenant, then Israel's story would have ended long before the first century. The golden calf could have ended it. The wilderness rebellions could have ended it. The period of the judges could have ended it. The idolatry of Israel's kings could have ended it. The Assyrian conquest could have ended it. The Babylonian exile could have ended it.

Yet after each failure, God's covenantal purposes continue.

Why?

Because the covenant reveals something not only about Israel but about God.

God is faithful.

This is the theological center of the issue. Too often the Christian discussion concerning Israel begins with Israel's behavior. Has Israel obeyed? Has Israel believed? Has Israel deserved the promises? Has modern Israel acted righteously?

Those are legitimate moral questions, but they are not the first covenantal question.

The first question is: What has God promised?

The second is: Is God faithful to what He has promised?

Once the issue is framed this way, the discussion changes considerably. Israel's continuing significance does not depend upon believing that Jewish people are morally superior to other people. Scripture never makes that claim. It does not depend upon believing that Israel has never sinned. Scripture records Israel's

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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sin repeatedly. It does not depend upon defending every action of the modern State of Israel. Biblical covenant theology cannot be reduced to modern political endorsement.

The issue concerns the character of God.

This is why the subject should matter profoundly to Christians who may have little interest in Middle Eastern politics. Every Christian depends upon the faithfulness of God.

We trust God's promises when we pray. We trust His promises when we face suffering. We trust His promises when we confess our sins. We trust His promises when we approach death. We trust His promises when we proclaim eternal life. The Christian life rests upon the conviction that God can be trusted to do what He has said.

If we construct a theology in which God's clearly stated promises can simply be reassigned, cancelled, or forgotten because the recipients failed, we create a theological problem much larger than Israel.

We must therefore distinguish between conditional and unconditional elements within biblical covenants. Scripture certainly contains conditions. Israel's enjoyment of blessing in the land is repeatedly connected with obedience. Disobedience brings consequences. But the underlying covenantal commitments to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are repeatedly grounded in God's oath and God's faithfulness.

The land provides an important example. Israel can be removed from the land because of disobedience. This happens historically. The Assyrians conquer the northern kingdom. Babylon conquers Judah. Jerusalem is destroyed, and many are carried into exile.

If exile meant the cancellation of the covenant, the story should end there.

Instead, the prophets begin speaking about return.

Jeremiah speaks of restoration. Ezekiel speaks of gathering. Isaiah speaks repeatedly of comfort, return, and renewal. The same prophets who announce judgment also proclaim hope.

This is not because they have suddenly decided that Israel's sin was unimportant. The prophets who proclaim restoration are often the very prophets who most forcefully condemn Israel's sin.

Restoration rests upon something deeper than Israel's performance.

It rests upon God's character.

Ezekiel makes this particularly clear. When speaking of restoration, God indicates that He is acting for the sake of His holy name. Israel has profaned that name among the nations, yet God will act in such a way that His holiness will be demonstrated.

This is an extraordinary theological principle. God's faithfulness to Israel becomes connected with the reputation of God Himself.

The nations are watching.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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If God makes promises and then simply abandons them, what does that communicate about the God who made them? The prophets therefore repeatedly connect Israel's restoration with God's name, God's mercy, God's covenant, and God's faithfulness.

Jeremiah provides another powerful example. In Jeremiah 31, after promising a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, the prophet uses the fixed order of creation as an illustration of Israel's continuing identity before God. The imagery of sun, moon, and stars communicates stability. God's purposes are not presented as temporary or casual.

Christians rightly treasure Jeremiah 31 because it contains the promise of the new covenant. Yeshua invokes covenant language at the Last Supper, and the New Testament applies the new covenant to the saving work of Messiah.

But Christians should notice to whom Jeremiah originally says the new covenant will be made: the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

Gentile believers participate in the blessings of that covenant through Messiah, but the promise itself arises within God's covenantal dealings with Israel. Once again, the Church receives spiritual riches that emerge from promises first spoken within Israel's story.

Paul later confronts the same theological problem in Romans 9–11. By the first century, a significant portion of Israel has not accepted Yeshua as Messiah. For Paul, this creates an agonizing personal and theological question. He expresses deep sorrow for his Jewish brothers and sisters.

But then comes the theological problem: Has the Word of God failed?

Paul refuses that conclusion.

Later, in Romans 11, he asks the question even more directly: “Hath God cast away his people?”

His answer is immediate and emphatic: “God forbid.”

That answer should be allowed to carry its full weight.

Paul does not deny Israel's unbelief. He does not pretend that faith in Messiah is unnecessary. He does not minimize the seriousness of rejecting the Gospel. Yet he simultaneously refuses to conclude that Israel's unbelief means God has permanently rejected His people.

Paul can hold both truths together.

Israel can be in unbelief, and God can remain faithful.

Israel can stumble, and God's purposes can continue.

Some natural branches can be broken off, and they can still be grafted in again.

This is precisely where the Church must resist simplistic theology. We often prefer easy categories. Accepted or rejected. Chosen or abandoned. Israel or Church. Judgment or mercy. Paul refuses to reduce God's purposes to such simplistic alternatives.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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Instead, Romans 11 introduces mystery.

There is judgment, but there is also mercy. There is unbelief, but there is also hope. There are broken branches, but there is also the possibility of grafting them in again. There is Gentile inclusion, but there is also a warning against Gentile arrogance.

And underlying everything is the faithfulness of God.

Paul eventually makes an extraordinary statement concerning Israel: “For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.”

God does not casually discard His calling.

That statement should cause every pastor to stop and think carefully before declaring that Israel's role in God's purposes has simply ended.

This does not resolve every theological question. Christians still debate how particular promises should be understood, how the land promises relate to the modern State of Israel, how prophecy should be interpreted, and how Israel and the Church relate within God's redemptive purposes. Those discussions deserve careful treatment.

But whatever conclusions we eventually reach, they must be consistent with the character of the covenant-making God revealed in Scripture.

We cannot build a theology of Israel that makes God appear less faithful than the Bible declares Him to be.

This has profound implications beyond Israel.

Consider what the Gospel itself asks Christians to believe. We believe that sinners can be forgiven. We believe that God keeps His promises even when we fail. We believe that salvation rests ultimately upon His grace rather than our perfect performance. We believe that He who began a good work is faithful. We believe that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Messiah.

In other words, Christians live every day by trusting the same divine characteristic that stands behind God's covenantal dealings with Israel: His faithfulness.

Israel's story therefore becomes a testimony.

It is a testimony that human failure does not surprise God.

It is a testimony that discipline does not necessarily mean abandonment.

It is a testimony that judgment and mercy can exist within the same covenantal relationship.

It is a testimony that God's purposes may continue through generations even when those generations cannot see how the promises will be fulfilled.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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Abraham did not live to see the twelve tribes of Israel. Isaac did not see the Exodus. Jacob did not see the conquest of the land. Moses did not see the Davidic kingdom. David did not see the coming of Yeshua.

Yet each generation lived within promises whose fulfillment extended beyond its own lifetime.

That should teach us humility.

We often judge God's faithfulness according to the length of our own lives. If we do not see a promise fulfilled within a few years or decades, we may conclude that it has failed. But the biblical covenant unfolds across centuries.

God is not limited by our timetable.

Abraham could look at his circumstances and see an old man without the promised heir. Israel in Egypt could look around and see slavery. Jewish exiles in Babylon could look toward Jerusalem and see destruction. At each point, circumstances could appear to contradict the promise.

Yet circumstances were never the final authority.

God's word was.

This is the foundation upon which a biblical understanding of Israel must be built. Before discussing modern politics, prophecy, borders, governments, or conflicts, Christians must first settle the theological question of God's character.

Is He faithful?

If the answer is yes, then His covenants must be taken seriously.

This does not mean every promise should be interpreted simplistically. Scripture must interpret Scripture. The coming of Messiah profoundly affects how Christians understand the biblical story. The New Testament reveals dimensions of God's purposes that earlier generations could not fully see. Gentiles are brought near. The Gospel goes to the nations. Jew and Gentile are reconciled through Messiah.

But fulfillment should not automatically be confused with cancellation.

The inclusion of Gentiles does not require the exclusion of Jews.

The existence of the Church does not require the nonexistence of God's purposes for Israel.

The blessing of the nations does not contradict the promises made to Abraham. It was part of those promises from the beginning.

The story began with a man standing beneath the stars and hearing an impossible promise.

Abraham believed God.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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Centuries passed. His descendants became slaves, were delivered, entered the land, established a kingdom, divided into kingdoms, fell into idolatry, experienced conquest, went into exile, returned, rebuilt Jerusalem, and waited for Messiah.

Through all those generations, one truth remained constant.

God had not forgotten.

That truth should shape the way the Church thinks about Israel today. The question is not whether Israel has always been faithful. It has not. Scripture says so openly. The question is not whether the Jewish people have always obeyed God. They have not, just as the Church has not. The question is not whether the modern State of Israel is beyond criticism. No earthly nation is.

The deeper question is whether human failure can make God unfaithful.

The biblical story repeatedly answers no.

The covenant God made with Abraham, confirmed to Isaac, and reaffirmed to Jacob reveals something fundamental about the One Christians worship. He remembers what He has promised. He acts according to His word. He disciplines without forgetting. He judges without surrendering His character. His purposes may unfold across generations, but time does not erase His promises.

For the Church, therefore, Israel is not merely a theological problem to be solved. Israel is also a testimony to be considered.

The God of Abraham is faithful.

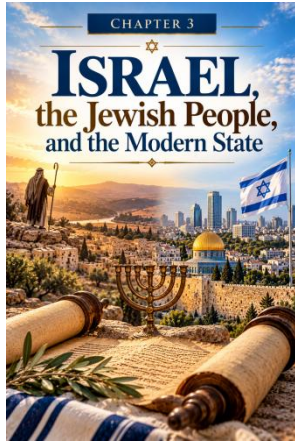
The God of Isaac is faithful.

The God of Jacob is faithful.

And if He remains faithful to promises made thousands of years ago, then every Christian who has placed his or her hope in the promises of that same God has reason to trust Him.

That is why the covenant matters.

And that is why we should be very careful before declaring that God has forgotten what He Himself promised.



### Chapter 3 — Israel, the Jewish People, and the Modern State

One of the greatest difficulties in Christian conversations about Israel is that the word “Israel” can mean several different things. A pastor may use the word while referring to Jacob in Genesis, while another Christian may hear it and think of the twelve tribes. Someone else may think of the kingdom ruled by David and Solomon, the Jewish people scattered throughout the world, or the modern State of Israel established in 1948. All of these meanings are connected, but they are not identical. Unless we distinguish them carefully, biblical interpretation, theology, history, and modern politics can easily become confused.

This distinction is particularly important for pastors and Christian leaders. When Scripture speaks of Israel, we cannot automatically assume that every reference applies directly and without qualification to the modern State of Israel. At the same time, we should not make the opposite mistake of treating the modern Jewish state as though it has no historical relationship whatsoever to the people whose story fills the pages of Scripture. Responsible Christian thinking requires us to recognize both continuity and distinction.

We must begin where the Bible begins. Israel is first the name of a person. Jacob, the son of Isaac and grandson of Abraham, receives the name Israel. Genesis 32 records the remarkable account of Jacob wrestling through the night and receiving a new name, and Genesis 35 again records God identifying Jacob as Israel. From that point forward, the name takes on a significance extending beyond Jacob himself because his descendants become known as the children of Israel.

Jacob has twelve sons, and those sons become associated with the twelve tribes of Israel. Israel therefore moves from being the name of one man to describing a family and eventually a people. When Jacob's descendants go down into Egypt, they are still a relatively small extended family. By the time God delivers them generations later, they have become a numerous people with a distinct identity.

The Exodus becomes one of the defining events in Israel's history. God delivers the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt, brings them through the sea, leads them to Sinai, and establishes them as a covenant people. They receive the Torah and are called to live in relationship with the God who delivered them. Eventually they enter the land, establish themselves there, and develop into a kingdom. Under Saul, David, and Solomon, Israel becomes a united monarchy, and Jerusalem assumes an increasingly central place in the national and spiritual life of the people. Under Solomon, the Temple becomes the focal point of national worship.

After Solomon, however, the political history becomes more complicated. The kingdom divides. The northern kingdom retains the name Israel, while the southern kingdom becomes known as Judah. This alone should caution Christians against assuming that the word “Israel” always carries precisely the same meaning everywhere in Scripture. Context matters. Sometimes Israel refers to Jacob, sometimes to all his descendants, sometimes to the covenant people collectively, and sometimes specifically to the northern kingdom.

The northern kingdom eventually falls to Assyria, while Judah continues for another period before falling to Babylon. Jerusalem is conquered, the Temple is destroyed, and many of the people are taken into exile. Yet the destruction of the kingdom does not mean the disappearance of the people. A political state can be

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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destroyed without the people themselves ceasing to exist. Israel's monarchy ended, Jerusalem fell, the Temple was destroyed, and the people experienced exile, but Jewish identity survived and the covenantal story continued.

After the Babylonian exile, a portion of the Jewish people returned to the land. Jerusalem was rebuilt, and the Temple was restored. Jewish life again developed in the land, although under successive foreign powers. Persia gave way to Greek domination, and eventually Rome controlled the region. By the first century, Jewish people were living both within the land and throughout a widespread diaspora. This becomes obvious when reading the book of Acts. As Paul travels through the Roman world, he repeatedly encounters Jewish communities and synagogues in cities far from Jerusalem.

Jewish identity therefore cannot be defined solely by residence within the land. Jewish people lived outside the land long before the Roman destruction of Jerusalem, and that reality became even more significant after the destruction of the Second Temple in AD 70 and subsequent upheavals under Roman rule. Jewish political sovereignty was lost, but Jewish people did not cease being Jewish. They continued to preserve religious traditions, communal identity, historical memory, Scripture, and a continuing attachment to Jerusalem and the land of their ancestors.

This is one of the remarkable features of Jewish history. Empires that once dominated the ancient world disappeared or were transformed beyond recognition, yet Jewish communities survived through centuries of dispersion, persecution, migration, expulsion, and cultural change. They survived without a king, without the Temple, and without political sovereignty. They lived scattered among the nations, yet Jerusalem remained embedded in Jewish religious memory, prayer, Scripture, and identity.

For Christians seeking to understand the modern State of Israel, this history matters because modern Israel did not emerge in a historical vacuum. The Jewish connection to the land did not suddenly begin in the nineteenth or twentieth century. Whatever conclusions Christians reach concerning modern political Zionism, the historical and religious Jewish connection with the land reaches back thousands of years.

At the same time, it would be historically inaccurate to imagine that the land stood empty while Jewish people lived throughout the diaspora. Different populations, empires, communities, languages, and religions inhabited and governed the territory across the centuries. Jewish communities continued to exist in the land in varying numbers, while Arab communities also developed deep roots there. By the time modern Jewish and Arab national movements emerged, the land was home to people whose histories, identities, and aspirations would increasingly come into conflict.

Recognizing this complexity is important because simplified history often produces simplified theology. One narrative may present modern Israel as though Jewish people suddenly appeared in a land to which they had no previous connection. Another may speak as though no other population had meaningful roots there. Neither approach adequately reflects the complexity of the history. Pastors do not need to become professional historians to recognize this. They simply need to resist slogans that erase inconvenient parts of the story.

The emergence of modern Zionism must also be understood within the wider experience of Jewish life in Europe and elsewhere. During the nineteenth century, nationalist movements were reshaping much of Europe. At the same time, Jewish communities continued to face discrimination and antisemitism. Some Jewish thinkers increasingly concluded that assimilation alone could not guarantee Jewish safety and that the Jewish people needed a national home where they could exercise political self-determination.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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Modern Zionism contained different streams. Some were primarily secular and political, while others were religious. Some emphasized refuge from persecution, while others emphasized the historical connection between the Jewish people and their ancestral homeland. Jewish people themselves disagreed about Zionism, and those disagreements have never completely disappeared. It is therefore misleading to speak about Zionism as though it has always represented one uniform political or religious ideology.

This distinction is important for Christians because Zionism should not simply be treated as another word for biblical covenant theology. The two concepts can intersect, but they are not identical. Biblical covenant theology begins with God's promises recorded in Scripture. Modern political Zionism developed as a modern Jewish national movement. A Christian may see theological or prophetic significance in the establishment of modern Israel while still recognizing that the political movement through which Jewish sovereignty was restored belongs to modern history.

The Holocaust then transformed the Jewish situation with almost unimaginable force. Six million Jews were murdered by Nazi Germany and its collaborators. Jewish communities that had existed for centuries were devastated or destroyed. The Holocaust did not create the Jewish historical connection to the land, nor did it create Zionism, which had already existed as an organized political movement for decades. It did, however, give extraordinary urgency to the questions of Jewish safety, refuge, and statehood.

For Christians, the Holocaust should also provoke serious reflection about the history of antisemitism in societies shaped by Christianity. Nazi racial antisemitism cannot simply be equated with Christian theology, and there were Christians who courageously resisted Nazism and rescued Jewish people. Nevertheless, centuries of anti-Jewish teaching, stereotypes, discrimination, and hostility within Christian societies contributed to cultural environments in which contempt for Jews had become deeply rooted. That history should make Christian leaders particularly cautious about language that demonizes Jewish people collectively.

In 1948, the modern State of Israel declared independence. For the first time in many centuries, Jewish political sovereignty was restored in the ancestral homeland of the Jewish people. For many Jews, particularly in the aftermath of the Holocaust and generations of persecution, the establishment of Israel represented refuge, survival, self-determination, and the restoration of national life. For many Christians, however, it also raised theological questions. They looked at biblical passages concerning return, restoration, and the land and asked whether the establishment of modern Israel might have prophetic significance. Some concluded emphatically that it did. Others were more cautious, while still others rejected the idea that the modern state should be directly identified with biblical prophecy.

That debate continues, and it is not necessary to resolve every aspect of it in order to make an important distinction. Biblical Israel, the Jewish people, and the modern State of Israel are related, but they are not interchangeable. Biblical Israel begins with Jacob and his descendants. The Jewish people emerge historically from that biblical people, particularly through the history associated with Judah and the survival of Jewish identity through exile and diaspora. The modern State of Israel is a contemporary sovereign state established within the ancestral homeland of the Jewish people. These realities belong to one long historical story, but they should not be collapsed into a single category.

The distinction matters enormously because the modern State of Israel has political institutions that biblical Israel did not have. Modern Israel has elections, political parties, courts, a parliament, military institutions, administrative agencies, and governmental policies. These institutions belong to a contemporary state and should not automatically be treated as though every decision they make carries divine authority.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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To believe that God has continuing covenantal purposes involving Israel does not mean believing that every action taken by an Israeli government represents the will of God. Scripture itself gives us no reason to think that way. The kings of ancient Israel were not beyond moral judgment simply because they ruled God's covenant people. Saul was rebuked. David was confronted. Solomon's compromises were recorded. Ahab was condemned. The prophets repeatedly challenged kings, priests, and national leaders when they acted unjustly or turned away from God.

If the political leaders of biblical Israel could be criticized, there is no biblical reason to place modern Israeli leaders beyond criticism. A Christian can therefore believe that the Jewish people have a legitimate historical connection to the land while simultaneously disagreeing with a particular Israeli government policy. Those positions are not contradictory. Biblical support for Israel does not require belief in political infallibility.

This is especially important for pastors because Christians can sometimes be pushed toward one of two extremes. Some fear that any criticism of Israel constitutes opposition to God's purposes, while others assume that Christian support for Israel means unquestioning approval of everything an Israeli government does. Neither conclusion is necessary. A government can be criticized without denying a nation's right to exist, and a policy can be questioned without hating the people governed by that state. Christians routinely make this distinction regarding their own countries, and they should be capable of making the same distinction when discussing Israel.

Another distinction is equally important. Criticism of the Israeli government must not become a disguise for hostility toward Jewish people. Jewish people living in Canada, the United States, Britain, France, Australia, or elsewhere are not collectively responsible for decisions made by an Israeli government. A synagogue in Toronto is not an Israeli government office. A Jewish student at a university is not a representative of the Israeli cabinet. A Jewish family should not be required to answer for every military operation, settlement decision, court ruling, or statement made by an Israeli politician.

When Jewish communities outside Israel are threatened or attacked because of actions attributed to Israel, a line has clearly been crossed. Political disagreement with a foreign government does not justify hostility toward people who share an ethnic, religious, cultural, or historical connection with that country. Pastors and Christian leaders should understand this distinction because legitimate criticism can become something very different when collective blame enters the conversation.

Christians should therefore be able to discuss Israeli policies without reviving stereotypes about Jewish power, money, loyalty, manipulation, or control. We should be able to disagree with an Israeli leader without demonizing Jewish people. We should be able to debate Zionism without treating Jews collectively as enemies. At the same time, Christians should be careful not to use accusations of antisemitism to prevent every criticism of Israel. If every criticism is automatically described as antisemitic, the term loses clarity and genuine antisemitism becomes more difficult to identify. Discernment requires Christians to recognize both truths: Israel can legitimately be criticized, and antisemitism must be confronted.

The Jewish people also should not be reduced to the State of Israel. Millions of Jewish people live outside Israel. Jewish identity encompasses religion, ancestry, history, culture, community, and peoplehood in ways that cannot be reduced to citizenship in one modern state. Not every Jewish person is Israeli, and not every Israeli is Jewish. Jewish people also hold a wide range of opinions about Israel, Zionism, religion, politics, and the Israeli government. Careless language can therefore turn a diverse people into a political stereotype.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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There is another danger Christians should avoid, and that is treating Jewish people merely as characters in Christian prophecy. Sometimes Christian interest in Israel becomes almost entirely prophetic. People watch events in Jerusalem because they are attempting to determine where the world stands on an end-times timetable. Every conflict becomes a possible fulfillment, every political development becomes a prophetic sign, and every headline is placed beside a biblical verse.

Prophecy matters, and Scripture certainly speaks about the future, but Jewish people are not prophetic props. They are people with families, communities, hopes, fears, beliefs, disagreements, occupations, joys, and sorrows. Israeli society itself is extraordinarily diverse, including religious Jews, secular Jews, traditional Jews, Arabs, Muslims, Christians, Druze, and others. Even within Jewish Israeli society there are profound disagreements concerning religion, politics, security, courts, settlements, military service, and the future of the country. If Christians see Israel only through prophecy, we risk becoming fascinated with events while failing to love people.

The same danger exists when Israel is viewed only through politics. If every conversation begins and ends with governments, wars, borders, settlements, diplomacy, and military operations, we can forget that behind political arguments are human beings. This includes Palestinians. Any responsible discussion of the modern State of Israel must acknowledge that another people also regards this land as home. Palestinians have histories, families, communities, memories, aspirations, fears, and suffering that cannot simply be erased because Christians believe the Jewish people have a biblical and historical connection to the land.

Recognizing Palestinian humanity does not require denying Jewish history, and recognizing Jewish history does not require denying Palestinian humanity. Christians should reject any framework that demands hatred of one people as proof of love for another. Biblical conviction and human compassion should not be placed in opposition to one another. If all human beings are created in the image of God, then Christian concern cannot stop at an ethnic, religious, or national boundary.

This is particularly important for the central argument of this book. Standing with Israel without fear does not mean pretending Israel is perfect. It does not mean ignoring Palestinian suffering. It does not mean defending every military action or governmental decision. It means approaching Israel through a biblical framework while maintaining the moral discernment Scripture itself requires.

The modern State of Israel is neither the kingdom of God nor a nation beyond moral evaluation. It is a real country inhabited by real people, governed by real political institutions, facing real security threats, making real political decisions, and existing within an extraordinarily complicated historical conflict. Like every other nation, it can act wisely or unwisely, justly or unjustly. Christian theology should never require us to deny that reality.

At the same time, modern Israel cannot simply be treated as an accidental state with no meaningful connection to biblical or Jewish history. The Jewish people who established and populated modern Israel did not invent their connection with Jerusalem in the twentieth century. Jerusalem had occupied a central place in Jewish Scripture, prayer, memory, and identity for centuries. Hebrew, revived as a modern spoken language, has ancient biblical roots. Jewish festivals celebrated in modern Israel reach back into the biblical story. The names Jerusalem, Zion, Israel, Judah, and Judea did not originate in modern political movements. They belong to an ancient history.

This is why simplistic descriptions fail. Israel is simultaneously ancient and modern, biblical and political, religious and secular. It carries the weight of ancient covenantal history while functioning as a

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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contemporary nation-state. The challenge for Christian leaders is to speak about each dimension without confusing one with another.

Pastors therefore need a vocabulary capable of making careful distinctions. When we mean the Israel of the Bible, we should make that clear. When we mean the Jewish people, we should say so. When we mean the modern State of Israel, we should identify it. When we are referring specifically to an Israeli government, political party, leader, military action, or policy, we should use language precise enough to make that distinction clear. Such precision may seem unnecessary until we recognize how easily broad language can turn criticism of a government into condemnation of a people.

This precision also protects the Church from two theological errors. The first is assuming that everything belonging to biblical Israel can automatically and uncritically be transferred to the modern State of Israel. The second is assuming that the modern Jewish state has no meaningful connection whatsoever with the biblical and historical Jewish people. Both positions simplify a much more complicated relationship.

Between those extremes lies a more careful approach. Christians can acknowledge the extraordinary continuity of Jewish identity without pretending that history is simple. We can recognize the ancient Jewish connection to the land while acknowledging that Palestinians also have deep connections to it. We can believe that God has not forgotten His covenant while recognizing that the precise relationship between biblical promises and contemporary political events requires careful interpretation. We can support Israel's existence without treating its government as infallible, care about Palestinians without denying Jewish self-determination, condemn terrorism without becoming indifferent to civilian suffering, oppose antisemitism without declaring every criticism of Israel antisemitic, and study prophecy without turning Jewish people into pieces on an end-times chessboard.

Such an approach is not a retreat from conviction. It is an attempt to make Christian conviction more biblical, precise, responsible, and compassionate. Truth should not require exaggeration, and biblical faithfulness should not require Christians to ignore complexity.

For pastors, this is particularly important because congregations often learn how to discuss difficult subjects by listening to their leaders. If pastors use careless language, congregations may inherit careless thinking. If pastors reduce Israel entirely to politics, congregations may do the same. If pastors present every political disagreement as a test of biblical faithfulness, Christians may begin confusing loyalty to God with loyalty to a government. If pastors treat Israel only as a prophetic sign, believers may learn to watch Jewish people rather than love them.

A more responsible approach teaches Christians that supporting Israel does not mean approving everything Israel does, that caring for Palestinians does not require hostility toward Jews, that antisemitism is not legitimate political criticism, and that legitimate political criticism is not automatically antisemitism. It teaches them that Jewish identity is larger than Israeli politics and that the modern State of Israel must be considered within a history extending far beyond 1948.

Once these distinctions are understood, we are prepared to approach an even more difficult theological question. If biblical Israel has a continuing identity, if the Jewish people remain historically connected with the people of Scripture, and if God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has not simply been forgotten, what happened when the Church emerged? Did the arrival of Yeshua and the inclusion of the Gentiles bring Israel's distinct covenantal identity to an end? Did the Church inherit Israel's promises in such a way that Israel itself ceased to have a continuing place in God's purposes? Or did Gentile believers enter a story that God had already begun with Israel?

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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These questions are not merely academic. The answers Christians have given have shaped theology, preaching, Christian attitudes toward Jewish people, and at times the course of Christian history itself. Before we can understand what it means for the Church to stand with Israel today, we must therefore confront one of the most consequential questions in Christian theology concerning the Jewish people: Did the Church replace Israel?



### Chapter 4 — Did the Church Replace Israel?

Few questions concerning Israel and the Church have produced more theological disagreement than this one: Did the Church replace Israel? For centuries, many Christians have been taught, either explicitly or implicitly, that because much of Israel did not recognize Yeshua as Messiah, God transferred Israel's covenant position and promises to the Church. According to this understanding, the Church became the new or spiritual Israel, and the promises originally given to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants are now fulfilled primarily or exclusively in the Church.

This view is commonly called replacement theology, although those who hold variations of it may prefer terms such as supersessionism or fulfillment theology. Not every Christian who holds such a position believes that God has completely abandoned the Jewish people, and it would be unfair to treat every form of this theology as identical. Nevertheless, the central question remains. Has the coming of Messiah and the formation of the Church changed the identity of the people to whom God made His covenant promises? More specifically, does the New Testament teach that the Church has taken Israel's place in God's purposes?

To answer that question, we must begin with something established in the preceding chapters. Israel did not create the covenant. God did. Abraham did not approach God and negotiate a national future for his descendants. God called Abraham and made promises to him. Those promises were reaffirmed to Isaac and then to Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel. The covenant therefore rests ultimately upon the character and faithfulness of the One who made it.

This distinction is crucial. If Israel's covenant depended entirely upon Israel's faithfulness, the biblical record would give us many reasons to conclude that the covenant should have ended. Israel repeatedly disobeyed God. The nation fell into idolatry. The prophets warned of judgment. The northern kingdom was conquered by Assyria, and Judah was later carried into Babylonian captivity. Jerusalem was destroyed, and the people experienced exile. Yet judgment did not mean that God ceased to recognize Israel as Israel.

The prophets repeatedly spoke of both judgment and restoration. Israel could be disciplined without being discarded. The covenant people could experience exile without losing their identity. God's faithfulness remained the foundation of hope even when Israel was unfaithful.

The New Testament introduces an extraordinary development in God's redemptive plan. Through Yeshua the Messiah, salvation goes forth to the nations on an unprecedented scale. Gentiles who once stood outside the covenant community are brought near. Paul describes this beautifully in Ephesians when he speaks of Gentiles who had once been "strangers from the covenants of promise" but who had been brought near through Messiah.

This is one of the great truths of the Gospel. Gentile believers have been welcomed into the blessings flowing from God's redemptive purposes. They are no longer strangers and outsiders. They belong to the household of God.

But inclusion is not necessarily replacement.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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That distinction lies at the heart of the issue.

If a person who was once outside is brought near, it does not automatically follow that those who were already identified in the covenant story have been permanently removed. The New Testament must therefore be allowed to answer the question directly rather than having a theological conclusion imposed upon it.

One passage frequently discussed in this debate is Matthew 21:43. After telling the parable of the wicked tenants, Yeshua says, “The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.” Some have understood this statement to mean that the kingdom was taken permanently from Israel and transferred to the Church.

Yet the context requires careful attention. Yeshua was speaking directly to the chief priests and Pharisees. Matthew tells us that they understood that He was speaking about them. The immediate judgment therefore falls upon unfaithful leadership. The passage certainly contains a serious warning, but to move from that warning to the conclusion that every covenant promise concerning Israel has been transferred permanently to another people requires more than the passage itself explicitly states.

Another important passage is Galatians 6:16, where Paul refers to “the Israel of God.” Some interpreters understand this expression as a designation for the entire Church and therefore conclude that the Church is now Israel. Others understand Paul to be referring specifically to Jewish believers in Yeshua. The phrase has generated considerable theological discussion, but an entire doctrine concerning the permanent replacement of Israel should not rest upon one disputed expression, particularly when Paul discusses Israel far more extensively elsewhere.

First Peter 2:9 is also frequently cited. Peter tells believers, “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people.” The language clearly echoes Exodus 19, where Israel is described as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. This demonstrates that believers in Messiah participate in a calling deeply rooted in Israel’s Scriptures.

But sharing Israel’s spiritual blessings and calling does not necessarily mean assuming Israel’s identity or cancelling Israel’s covenant future. The New Testament frequently takes truths revealed through Israel and demonstrates their wider significance in Messiah. The crucial question is whether this expansion of blessing means the original recipients have ceased to have a place in God’s purposes.

For the clearest answer, we must turn to the apostle Paul.

Paul understood the problem personally. He was Jewish. He believed that Yeshua was the Messiah, yet he also saw that many of his fellow Jews did not believe. If Jewish unbelief meant that God had rejected Israel and replaced the nation with the Church, Paul had the perfect opportunity to say so.

Instead, he asks precisely the question that replacement theology forces us to confront.

“Hath God cast away his people?”

His answer could hardly be stronger:

“God forbid.”

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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Paul immediately identifies himself as evidence: “For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.” He then states, “God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew.”

Notice what Paul does not say. He does not answer the question by saying, “Israel is now the Church.” Nor does he say, “The Jewish people were once God’s people, but that covenant has ended.” Instead, he continues to speak of Israel as a recognizable people while explaining the mystery of Israel’s present unbelief and future hope.

Romans 11 becomes particularly important because Paul develops the illustration of the olive tree. Some natural branches are broken off because of unbelief. Wild olive branches—Gentile believers—are grafted in and become partakers of the root and richness of the olive tree.

Paul’s warning to those grafted-in branches is striking: “Boast not against the branches.”

If the Church had simply replaced Israel, this warning would be difficult to explain. Paul does not tell Gentile believers that the tree now belongs to them. He reminds them that they do not support the root; the root supports them.

The wild branches have received something extraordinary, but their inclusion provides no grounds for arrogance toward the natural branches.

Paul then goes further. The natural branches that were broken off can be grafted in again. Their present condition is therefore not necessarily their permanent condition. Paul writes that God is able to graft them in again and argues that their restoration is entirely consistent with their original relationship to the tree.

The illustration presents both continuity and distinction. Gentile believers truly participate in the blessings associated with Israel’s covenant story. They are not second-class members of God’s household. They have been genuinely grafted into the tree. Yet the natural branches remain natural branches, and Paul anticipates the possibility of their restoration.

Romans 11:25 then introduces what Paul calls a “mystery”: “blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.”

Every part of that statement matters.

The blindness is “in part.” It is not total.

And the word “until” indicates that the present situation should not automatically be regarded as the final chapter of Israel’s story.

Paul then makes the remarkable declaration, “And so all Israel shall be saved.”

Christians disagree over precisely how and when this statement will be fulfilled, but it is difficult to reconcile Paul’s argument with the claim that Israel has simply disappeared from God’s purposes. Paul continues by saying concerning Israel, “As touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers’ sakes.”

Then comes one of the most important statements in the entire discussion:

“For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.”

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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God does not casually revoke what He has promised.

This brings the discussion back to Abraham.

If God's covenant promises were based ultimately upon human perfection, none of us would have confidence in them. Israel failed. The Church has also failed. Christian history contains extraordinary examples of faithfulness, sacrifice, courage, compassion, and holiness, but it also contains division, corruption, violence, persecution, theological error, and moral failure.

The security of God's promises therefore cannot rest upon the flawless performance of those who receive them. It rests upon the faithfulness of God.

This does not mean that Jewish ancestry automatically provides salvation. The New Testament never teaches that. Paul grieved deeply over Jewish unbelief and proclaimed the necessity of faith. The Gospel is for Jew and Gentile alike. Salvation is found in Messiah, not ethnicity.

But salvation and covenant identity should not simply be collapsed into the same question.

The New Testament can proclaim salvation through Yeshua while still affirming that God has continuing purposes for Israel. Indeed, this appears to be exactly what Paul does. He mourns Israel's unbelief while simultaneously insisting that God has not rejected His people.

The Church therefore should understand itself not as the conqueror of Israel's position but as the beneficiary of God's mercy. Gentile believers have been brought into a story they did not begin. The Scriptures they read came through Israel. The prophets were Israelites. The apostles were Jewish. Yeshua Himself was born into the people of Israel. The Gospel went first to the Jewish people and then outward to the nations.

Paul summarizes the privilege of Israel in Romans 9 when he speaks of the Israelites, "to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises."

Most importantly, he adds, "of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came."

The Messiah did not appear disconnected from Israel's history. He came within it.

This should produce humility in the Church.

The Church has received immeasurable blessings through Israel's Messiah. Gentile Christians have been brought near to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They have become fellow citizens in God's household and participants in promises that once seemed far removed from them.

The proper response to such grace is gratitude, not replacement; humility, not boasting.

Perhaps the better question, therefore, is not simply, "Did the Church replace Israel?" but, "Does the New Testament ever clearly say that God permanently rejected Israel and transferred every covenant promise to the Church?"

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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When the relevant passages are considered together, the case for such a permanent rejection becomes difficult to sustain. The New Testament unquestionably teaches that the people of God have been dramatically enlarged through the Gospel. Jew and Gentile are reconciled through Messiah. Gentiles are brought near. Believers from every nation become part of God's household.

But enlargement is not the same thing as replacement.

Inclusion is not erasure.

The salvation of the nations does not require the cancellation of God's promises to Israel.

This distinction matters far beyond theological terminology. What Christians believe about Israel has consequences for how they understand God Himself. If God made promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants, then the question becomes one of divine faithfulness. Can God be trusted to keep what He has promised even when those who received His promises have failed?

The biblical story repeatedly answers yes.

That does not give Israel immunity from judgment. Scripture records Israel's failures with remarkable honesty. God disciplines His people. The prophets condemned sin relentlessly. But divine discipline and divine rejection are not identical.

The Church should therefore be extremely cautious before declaring cancelled what God calls everlasting or claiming ownership of promises God explicitly gave to another people.

Paul's warning still speaks with extraordinary force: "Boast not against the branches."

Those words should shape Christian theology as well as Christian attitudes toward Jewish people.

The Church has not been called to stand over Israel in triumph. It has been called to stand before God in gratitude. Gentile believers are recipients of mercy, grafted into a story whose roots reach back through the patriarchs and the promises of God.

The question of Israel therefore ultimately becomes a question about the character of God.

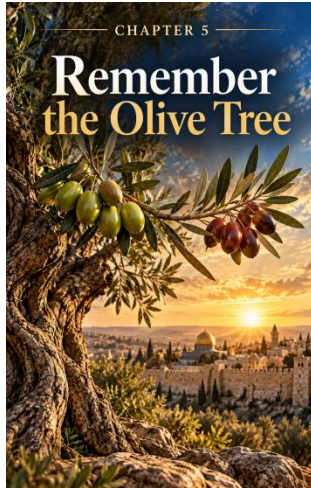
If God remains faithful when human beings are unfaithful, then Israel's failures do not demonstrate the failure of His covenant. If His gifts and calling are irrevocable, Israel cannot simply be written out of the biblical story. And if Paul could look upon an unbelieving Israel and still declare that "God hath not cast away his people," the Church should be very careful before saying that He has.

The New Testament does not present the Church as evidence that God abandoned Israel. It presents the Church as evidence that Israel's God has extended His mercy to the nations.

The Gentile believer has not replaced the natural branches.

By the grace of God, the wild branch has been grafted in.

And that truth should produce not pride, but profound humility, gratitude, and reverence for the faithfulness of the God who keeps His promises.



### Chapter 5 — Remember the Olive Tree

When Christians consider the relationship between the Church and Israel, few passages are more important than Paul's illustration of the olive tree in Romans 11. It is one of the clearest pictures in the New Testament of how Jewish and Gentile believers relate to the purposes of God. Paul does not describe one tree being cut down and another planted in its place. Instead, he describes one olive tree, natural branches, broken branches, wild branches grafted in, and the possibility that broken natural branches can be grafted back into their own tree. This distinction is crucial because Paul's illustration presents a picture not of replacement, but of continuity, inclusion, warning, and restoration.

Paul begins by saying, "For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches" (Romans 11:16). He then develops the picture by explaining that if some of the branches were broken off, and a branch from a wild olive tree was grafted in among them, that wild branch now shares in the root and richness of the cultivated olive tree. Notice carefully that Paul says that some of the branches were broken off. He does not say that the tree itself was destroyed, that every natural branch was removed, or that God uprooted the original tree and planted an entirely new one called the Church. Instead, Gentile believers are pictured as branches from a wild olive tree that have been grafted into an already existing cultivated tree. They now participate in its life and richness, but they did not create the tree, and the tree did not begin with them.

This is why Paul immediately warns Gentile believers, "Boast not against the branches." Those words deserve to be remembered by every generation of the Church. Paul understood that Gentile believers might eventually become proud of their position. As the Gospel spread throughout the Gentile world and increasing numbers of Gentiles entered the community of believers, it would have been easy for them to look at Jewish unbelief and conclude that they had replaced Israel. Paul anticipates precisely that attitude and warns against it. He then explains why such boasting is completely inappropriate: "But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee."

That statement should reverse any sense of Christian superiority toward the Jewish people. Christianity did not emerge from a vacuum. Gentile believers did not create the biblical story into which they entered. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob stood at the beginning of the covenant story. Moses was an Israelite. The prophets came from Israel. The Scriptures were entrusted to the Jewish people. Yeshua was born into a Jewish family, lived among the Jewish people, taught from the Jewish Scriptures, observed the biblical feasts, and was recognized as the Messiah by Jewish disciples. The apostles who first carried the Gospel into the world were Jewish. The Church therefore does not support the root; the root supports the Church.

This truth should create profound humility among Gentile Christians. The Gospel has given Gentile believers an extraordinary privilege. Paul tells them that although they were wild olive branches, they have been grafted into the cultivated tree. They now share in its richness. They have been brought near to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yet grace never provides grounds for arrogance. The more clearly we understand what we have received, the less reason we have to boast about receiving it.

Paul anticipates the objection that might arise when Gentile believers consider the branches that were broken off. He writes, "Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in." At first glance, that reasoning can sound remarkably similar to replacement theology: Israel rejected Messiah, Israel was removed, and the Church took Israel's place. Paul acknowledges that branches were indeed broken off because of unbelief, but he immediately warns Gentile believers against drawing a

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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conclusion of superiority from that fact. “Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear.”

Paul does not tell the Gentile believer that he was grafted in because he was better than the natural branches. He does not say that God rejected Israel because He preferred the Gentiles. Instead, he reminds the Gentile believer that he stands by faith. His position is therefore a position of grace, not superiority. Paul makes the warning even stronger when he says, “For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.” Whatever interpretation we bring to Romans 11 must take that warning seriously. The olive tree cannot legitimately become an illustration of Gentile superiority when Paul uses it specifically to warn against Gentile superiority.

Imagine for a moment the picture Paul is painting. Before us stands an ancient cultivated olive tree. Its roots reach deeply into the soil, and its trunk bears the marks of age. Some natural branches remain attached to the tree while others have been broken away. Then branches from a wild olive tree are carefully grafted into the cultivated tree. Those grafted branches genuinely belong there. They receive nourishment from the same root, share the life of the same tree, and produce fruit because they have been joined to something that existed before them. Yet the grafted branch should never look upon the natural branches and declare that the tree now belongs exclusively to it. The grafted branch did not replace the root. It is sustained by the root.

There is another important truth in Paul’s illustration that must not be overlooked. The natural branches that were broken off are not beyond restoration. Paul writes, “And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again.” The word “again” is extremely important. Paul does not describe the natural branches as belonging to a tree that no longer exists. Neither does he suggest that Jewish people who come to faith must become part of an entirely unrelated tree. They can be grafted in again.

Paul presses the point even further when he says, “For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?” The phrase “their own olive tree” deserves careful consideration. Even while discussing Jewish unbelief, Paul continues to recognize a particular relationship between Israel and the cultivated olive tree. The wild branch has been graciously grafted in, while the natural branch can be restored. Neither truth cancels the other.

This helps us understand something fundamental about the relationship between Israel and the Church. God’s purpose is not built upon replacement but upon redemption. Gentiles do not need Israel to disappear in order to receive the blessings of God. God is not limited in His mercy. He can remain faithful to His promises concerning Israel while extending salvation to the nations. In fact, the calling of Abraham anticipated precisely such a blessing when God declared that through Abraham all the families of the earth would be blessed. The salvation of Gentiles therefore does not demonstrate the failure of God’s purposes for Israel. It demonstrates the expanding reach of those purposes.

The olive tree also corrects another possible misunderstanding. Being grafted into the tree does not mean that Gentile believers become ethnically Jewish. Paul continues to distinguish between natural and wild branches even after the wild branches have been grafted in. The wild branch does not become a natural branch, yet it truly belongs to the tree. This is a remarkable picture of unity without the erasure of distinction. Jew and Gentile can share in the blessings of God without pretending that their historical identities are identical. Gentile believers do not need to become Jewish in order to belong to Messiah, and Jewish identity does not have to disappear when a Jewish person believes in Yeshua. The tree has room for both.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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This picture also helps us understand Paul's teaching elsewhere. In Ephesians 2, Gentiles are described as those who had once been "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise." Through Messiah they have been "made nigh." The movement is from being far away to being brought near. It is not the destruction of what existed before. The nations are welcomed into the blessings flowing from God's redemptive purposes.

This should transform the way Gentile Christians read the Bible. When a Gentile believer opens the Scriptures, he is reading a story into which he has been graciously invited. He reads about Abraham and discovers that through Abraham blessing would come to the nations. He reads Moses and the prophets and encounters the God whose redemptive purposes were revealed through Israel. He reads the Gospels and encounters Israel's Messiah. He reads Acts and watches the Gospel move from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and eventually toward the ends of the earth. The story expands without requiring the destruction of its beginning.

Remembering the olive tree therefore protects the Church from spiritual arrogance. Christian history demonstrates why Paul's warning was necessary. At various times, Christians forgot the root that supported them. Jewish people were treated not as members of the people through whom God had given the Scriptures and brought Messiah into the world, but as a rejected people supposedly abandoned by God. Paul's words, "Boast not against the branches," should have challenged such thinking. Unfortunately, they were too often ignored.

When Christians began viewing the Jewish people primarily as evidence of divine rejection, theological contempt could become social contempt. Social contempt could then lead to discrimination, exclusion, humiliation, persecution, and sometimes violence. The olive tree should have reminded the Church that there was no biblical justification for such arrogance. The natural branches were never intended to become objects of Christian boasting. Paul's warning was written specifically against that temptation.

At the same time, emphasizing God's continuing purposes for Israel must never lead Christians to suggest that Jewish people have no need of Messiah. Paul certainly did not believe that. His anguish over his fellow Israelites in Romans 9 is unmistakable. He desired their salvation so intensely that his words remain among the most emotional passages in his writings. Paul could affirm Israel's continuing significance while also proclaiming salvation through Messiah. Christians should be able to hold those truths together as well.

Christian love for the Jewish people should therefore never become theological arrogance in either direction. We should neither declare that God has rejected Israel and replaced Israel with the Church, nor suggest that the Gospel somehow has nothing to say to the Jewish people. Instead, we should follow Paul's example. We should recognize the tragedy of unbelief, proclaim Messiah, affirm the faithfulness of God, and refuse to boast over the natural branches.

Paul's olive tree gives us a picture capable of holding all these truths together. There is one cultivated tree and one root sustaining it. There are natural branches, some of which have been broken off because of unbelief. There are wild branches that have been graciously grafted in. There is also the possibility of the natural branches being grafted back into their own olive tree. The picture is therefore not one of replacement. It is a picture of covenantal continuity, divine faithfulness, mercy, warning, and hope.

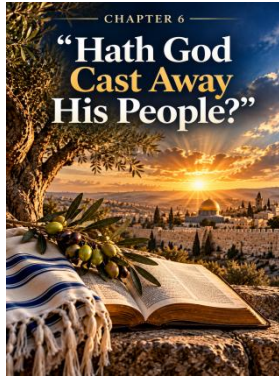
For Gentile Christians, perhaps the most important lesson is simply to remember how we entered the tree. We were grafted in. We did not earn our place, plant the tree, or create the root. We were brought near by grace. If we were brought near by grace, there can never be grounds for boasting against the people from whose covenantal history those blessings came.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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The Church must remember the olive tree because the olive tree reminds the Church of the character of God. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is the God who keeps covenant. He is the God who judges unbelief but also offers restoration. He is the God who brought salvation to the nations without forgetting the people through whom that salvation came. He is the God whose mercy leaves no room for spiritual pride.

When the Church looks at Israel and the Jewish people, therefore, it should hear again the warning of the apostle Paul: “Boast not against the branches.” When the Church is tempted to believe that the natural branches have no future, it should remember Paul’s equally important declaration that “God is able to graft them in again.” We must remember the root, remember the natural branches, remember the wild branches, and remember who supports whom. Above all, we must remember the olive tree.



### Chapter 6 — “Hath God Cast Away His People?”

There are moments in Scripture when a question is so direct that it leaves little room for misunderstanding. Romans 11 begins with such a question. After discussing Israel’s privileges, Israel’s unbelief, and the righteousness that comes through faith, the apostle Paul asks the question that Christians have continued to debate for centuries: “Hath God cast away his people?” Paul does not avoid the question, qualify it, or leave his readers wondering what he believes. His answer is immediate and emphatic: “God forbid.”

Those two words should stand at the beginning of every Christian discussion concerning whether God has finished with Israel. Paul understood the seriousness of the question because he understood what was at stake. If Israel’s unbelief meant that God had permanently rejected His people, then the promises made throughout the Hebrew Scriptures would have to be reconsidered. The covenants, the promises to the patriarchs, the prophetic expectations of restoration, and God’s repeated declarations of faithfulness would all be affected. Paul therefore addresses the question directly. Has God cast away His people? His answer is no.

Paul immediately presents himself as evidence. He writes, “For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.” Paul was a follower of Yeshua, an apostle of the Gospel, and the great missionary to the Gentiles, yet he did not stop identifying himself as an Israelite. Faith in Messiah did not cause Paul to believe that Israel had ceased to exist or that Jewish identity had become meaningless. He could proclaim the Gospel to the nations while still declaring that he himself was an Israelite, descended from Abraham and belonging to the tribe of Benjamin.

Paul then states the matter even more plainly: “God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew.” This statement is especially significant because Paul does not merely speak about individual Jewish believers. He continues to wrestle with the larger question of Israel. He recognizes Israel’s unbelief, but he refuses to interpret that unbelief as proof that God has permanently abandoned the people He foreknew.

To explain this, Paul reaches back into Israel’s history and reminds his readers of the days of Elijah. Elijah believed that Israel had turned so completely away from God that he was virtually alone. He complained that the people had forsaken God’s covenant, torn down His altars, and killed His prophets. Yet God revealed something Elijah could not see. There were still seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Israel’s widespread unfaithfulness had not eliminated the faithful remnant.

Paul applies that historical lesson to his own generation. “Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.” Israel’s unbelief was real, but it was not total. Jewish believers in Yeshua, including Paul himself, demonstrated that God had not abandoned Israel. The existence of a remnant was evidence of divine faithfulness.

The concept of the remnant runs throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. Israel repeatedly experienced periods of spiritual rebellion, judgment, exile, and national catastrophe, yet God preserved a people for Himself. The prophets often ministered during times when faithfulness seemed almost extinguished. Nevertheless, God’s purposes continued. Judgment never meant that God had lost control of His covenant purposes.

This is important because Scripture never hides Israel’s failures. The Bible is remarkably honest about them. Israel complained in the wilderness, worshiped idols, rejected prophetic warnings, and repeatedly

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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turned away from God. Kings failed. Priests failed. The nation divided. Jerusalem fell. The Temple was destroyed, and the people went into exile. Yet throughout these events, God continued to speak of Israel as His people and continued to promise restoration.

Israel's failure therefore cannot by itself prove that God's covenant purposes have failed.

Paul then asks another important question in Romans 11: "Have they stumbled that they should fall?" Once again, his response is emphatic: "God forbid." Israel stumbled, but Paul refuses to describe that stumbling as an irreversible fall. Something much larger is taking place within the purposes of God.

Paul explains that through Israel's stumbling, salvation has come to the Gentiles. The Gospel, which began within Israel, moved outward to the nations. What might have appeared to be the end of Israel's story became part of the means through which the message of Israel's Messiah reached the world. Gentiles who had once been strangers to the covenants of promise were brought near.

But Paul does not stop there.

He asks his readers to consider what Israel's restoration might mean. "Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?"

That question points forward rather than backward. Paul is not merely explaining what happened to Israel. He is anticipating something yet to come. If Israel's stumbling resulted in blessing reaching the nations, Paul asks his readers to imagine what Israel's fullness might mean.

This is one of the reasons Romans 11 cannot easily be interpreted as teaching the permanent rejection of Israel. Paul's argument continually moves from Israel's present condition toward the possibility of restoration. He sees unbelief, but he also sees hope. He sees broken branches, but he also sees the possibility of grafting them in again. He sees a partial hardening, but he also speaks of a future in which that condition does not have the final word.

Paul then turns directly to Gentile believers: "For I speak to you Gentiles." Those words are essential for understanding what follows. Paul wants Gentile Christians to understand their position correctly. Their inclusion in God's purposes must never become a reason for pride toward Israel.

This is where the olive tree illustration examined in the previous chapter becomes so important. Some natural branches were broken off because of unbelief, and wild branches were grafted in. But Paul immediately warns the grafted-in Gentile branches not to boast against the natural branches. They do not support the root; the root supports them.

Paul then reveals what he calls a mystery. He does so because he does not want Gentile believers to become "wise in your own conceits." He writes that "blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in."

The wording deserves careful attention. Israel's blindness is described as being "in part." Paul does not say that every Jewish person is blind, nor does he describe Israel's condition as absolute. The existence of the remnant already demonstrates that. More importantly, Paul uses the word "until." Whatever conclusions Christians reach concerning the precise prophetic sequence Paul has in mind, his language does not sound like a declaration that Israel's present condition is permanent.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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Paul then makes one of the most discussed statements in the entire New Testament: “And so all Israel shall be saved.”

Christians have interpreted this statement in different ways. Some understand “all Israel” as referring to a future large-scale turning of the Jewish people to Messiah. Others interpret the expression differently within Paul’s broader theology of salvation. These differences should be acknowledged. Yet whatever position one takes concerning the precise meaning of the phrase, Paul’s argument throughout Romans 11 makes one fact extremely difficult to ignore: he has not written Israel out of God’s purposes.

Paul reinforces this by quoting the prophetic expectation of deliverance: “There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.” The language of Zion and Jacob deliberately connects Paul’s argument with the prophetic promises concerning Israel.

Then Paul makes a distinction that is essential for understanding his theology. Concerning the Gospel, Israel may presently stand in a position of opposition because of unbelief, but concerning election, Paul says, “they are beloved for the fathers’ sakes.”

The fathers are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Paul reaches back again to the patriarchal promises. Israel’s continuing significance is connected not to Israel’s perfect obedience but to God’s covenant faithfulness. The promises did not begin with Israel’s merit. They began with God’s choice and God’s word.

Paul then gives the theological foundation beneath the entire argument: “For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.”

God does not behave as though His promises were temporary experiments. His faithfulness is not dependent upon changing circumstances. Human beings may fail, but God remains faithful to His character.

This does not mean that unbelief is unimportant. Paul never says that. Romans 9–11 contains some of his strongest expressions of grief over Israel’s unbelief. At the beginning of Romans 9, he speaks of “great heaviness and continual sorrow” in his heart for his fellow Israelites. At the beginning of Romans 10, he declares, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.”

Paul therefore holds two truths together. Israel remains beloved because of God’s election and the promises made to the fathers, yet Israel still needs salvation. Covenant faithfulness does not eliminate the necessity of faith. Neither does unbelief eliminate the faithfulness of God.

Christians sometimes struggle to hold these truths together. We may feel that we must choose between affirming God’s continuing purposes for Israel and proclaiming salvation through Messiah. Paul makes no such choice. He does both. He proclaims Yeshua, grieves over Jewish unbelief, evangelizes Jews and Gentiles, affirms Israel’s election, and insists that God has not cast away His people.

Perhaps this is where the Church should follow Paul more closely.

We do not honor the Jewish people by pretending that Paul had no concern for their salvation. Neither do we honor the Gospel by declaring that God has abandoned the people to whom He made covenant promises. Paul refuses both extremes.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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The issue ultimately reaches beyond Israel. It touches the very character of God. If God's promises can simply disappear when those who receive them fail, then every believer has reason to ask what that means for the promises upon which his own faith rests. Israel's story repeatedly demonstrates that the faithfulness of God is greater than human failure.

Consider the history recorded in Scripture. Israel rebelled in the wilderness, yet God did not forget His covenant. Israel fell into idolatry, yet God continued sending prophets. The northern kingdom was conquered, yet the prophetic hope continued. Judah went into Babylonian exile, yet God brought the people back. Jerusalem was destroyed, yet the identity of Israel survived. Again and again, judgment was severe, but judgment was not the same as abandonment.

This is why Jeremiah could record God's remarkable promise concerning Israel. After speaking of the fixed order of the sun, moon, and stars, the Lord declares that only if those ordinances depart from before Him will the seed of Israel cease from being a nation before Him. The permanence of Israel is connected symbolically with the stability of creation itself.

The same principle appears in Paul's argument centuries later. Israel's present unbelief does not demonstrate that God's promises have failed. Instead, Paul sees a mystery unfolding in which Gentile salvation and Israel's future remain connected within the redemptive purposes of God.

This should profoundly affect the attitude of the Church. Christians should never look at Jewish unbelief and conclude that they are witnessing evidence that God has discarded Israel. Paul explicitly warns against that conclusion. Gentile believers are recipients of mercy, not replacements entitled to boast over those who stumbled.

The proper Christian attitude is therefore one of humility, gratitude, prayer, and hope. We should be grateful that the Gospel has come to the nations. We should be humble because we have been grafted into blessings we did not originate. We should pray for the salvation of Israel as Paul did. And we should hope because the God who made the promises remains faithful.

The question with which Romans 11 begins therefore remains one of the most important questions the Church can ask: "Hath God cast away his people?" If we allow Paul to answer his own question, we should not hesitate to repeat his response.

"God forbid."

God has disciplined Israel, but discipline is not abandonment. Israel has experienced unbelief, but unbelief has not destroyed God's faithfulness. Some natural branches have been broken off, but God is able to graft them in again. A partial blindness has occurred, but Paul does not describe it as permanent. Israel remains beloved for the sake of the fathers, because the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.

The Church therefore has no biblical basis for celebrating Israel's stumbling. We should instead marvel at the mercy of God. The same chapter that warns Israel concerning unbelief warns Gentile believers concerning pride. No one stands before God on the basis of ethnic superiority, religious heritage, or human achievement. We stand by faith and by the mercy of God.

Romans 11 begins with a question, but it does not leave us without an answer. Has God cast away His people? Paul answers no. Has Israel stumbled? Yes. Is that stumbling final? Paul answers no. Can the natural branches be restored? Yes, because "God is able to graft them in again." Does Israel remain

## Standing with Israel without Fear

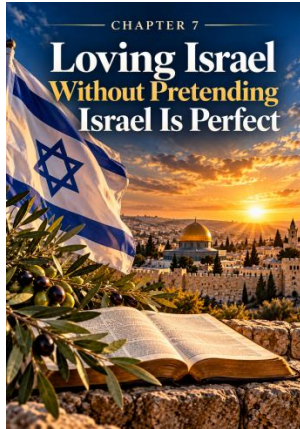
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significant within the purposes of God? Paul says that concerning election they remain beloved for the sake of the fathers.

The final word, therefore, does not belong to Israel's failure. It belongs to God's faithfulness. The story is not finished because God has not finished writing it. The God who called Abraham, confirmed His covenant with Isaac, gave the name Israel to Jacob, preserved a remnant through generations of rebellion and exile, and brought salvation to the nations through Israel's Messiah remains the same God.

And so the Church should never answer differently from the apostle Paul when confronted with the question, "Hath God cast away His people?"

His answer should remain ours: "God forbid."



### Chapter 7 — Loving Israel Without Pretending Israel Is Perfect

One of the greatest misunderstandings surrounding Christian support for Israel is the assumption that loving Israel means defending everything Israel does. It does not. Christians should be able to love Israel, stand against antisemitism, recognize the continuing significance of the Jewish people, affirm the faithfulness of God to His covenant promises, and pray for the peace of Jerusalem without pretending that every Israeli government, politician, military commander, court, political party, or policy is automatically right.

Israel is not perfect, Israel never was perfect, and most importantly, the Bible never asks us to pretend otherwise. In fact, anyone who believes that biblical support for Israel requires defending everything Israel does has overlooked one of the most obvious characteristics of Scripture: the Bible is remarkably honest about Israel's failures. Moses rebuked Israel, Samuel confronted Israel's leaders, Nathan confronted David, Elijah confronted Ahab, Isaiah condemned the sins of Judah, Jeremiah warned Jerusalem, Ezekiel exposed corruption among Israel's leaders, Amos condemned injustice, and Micah spoke against exploitation and dishonesty. Yeshua Himself rebuked religious leaders in His generation, and Paul expressed profound sorrow over the unbelief of many of his fellow Israelites. Scripture does not conceal Israel's failures in order to protect Israel's reputation.

Consider the golden calf. Israel had experienced deliverance from Egypt and had witnessed extraordinary demonstrations of the power of God, yet while Moses was on Mount Sinai the people made an idol and worshiped it. Scripture does not hide the incident because Israel was chosen. Israel's election did not transform idolatry into righteousness. God judged the sin, but the story of Israel did not end at the foot of Mount Sinai. Israel sinned, Israel was disciplined, and God remained faithful to His covenant purposes. The same principle can be seen in the life of David. Scripture describes David as a man after God's own heart, yet it also records his terrible sin involving Bathsheba and Uriah. David's position as Israel's king did not place him beyond moral accountability. Nathan confronted him directly with the words, "Thou art the man." Nathan did not become an enemy of Israel by confronting Israel's king. He served God by speaking truth to power. David's sin was real and the consequences were severe, but God's covenant purposes did not disappear because David failed.

The prophets provide the same lesson. Isaiah loved Jerusalem, yet he condemned corruption within it. Jeremiah wept for his people, yet he warned that Jerusalem would face judgment. Amos spoke some of the strongest words of condemnation found anywhere in Scripture, particularly concerning injustice and the exploitation of the vulnerable. These men did not hate Israel. Their willingness to speak truth was evidence that they cared deeply about Israel's relationship with God. This establishes an important biblical principle: love and criticism are not opposites. Sometimes genuine love requires criticism. A parent who loves a child does not demonstrate love by pretending destructive behavior is good. A pastor who loves his congregation does not serve them by refusing to confront wrongdoing. A friend who truly cares about another person does not remain silent simply because the truth may be uncomfortable. In the same way, Christians do not demonstrate love for Israel by pretending that Israel is incapable of error.

This principle becomes particularly important when we move from biblical Israel to the modern State of Israel. We must distinguish carefully between the two. The modern State of Israel is a sovereign political state governed by human institutions and human beings. It has elected officials, political parties, courts, military forces, government agencies, opposition parties, journalists, activists, religious communities,

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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secular communities, and citizens who hold widely differing opinions. Like every other nation, Israel contains political disagreement and human imperfection. Its governments can make wise decisions and unwise decisions. Its leaders can act courageously and can make mistakes. Its institutions can succeed and fail. Its soldiers can act honorably, while individual soldiers can also act wrongly. Nothing in Scripture requires Christians to declare every decision made by a modern Israeli government to be the will of God, and nothing in Scripture requires us to place a divine stamp of approval upon every political or military decision made in Jerusalem.

A Christian may therefore support the existence and security of Israel while disagreeing with an Israeli prime minister. A Christian may recognize the Jewish people's historic connection to the land while questioning a particular government policy. A Christian may condemn terrorism against Israelis while questioning whether a particular military response was wise or justified. A Christian may oppose antisemitism while disagreeing with legislation passed by Israel's parliament. There is no contradiction in doing so. Imagine, for example, that an Israeli government adopts a controversial policy concerning settlements, judicial authority, military strategy, taxation, religious regulation, or another domestic matter. One Christian may believe the policy is wise, another may believe it is unwise, and a third may believe there is insufficient information to reach a conclusion. Those differences do not by themselves determine whether someone loves or hates Israel. Political disagreement is not automatically antisemitism.

We understand this principle easily when discussing other countries. If the Canadian government adopts a policy with which we disagree, we do not normally conclude that Canada should cease to exist. If an American president makes a decision we believe is wrong, we do not automatically conclude that the American people have forfeited their right to national existence. If a British government acts unwisely, we do not hold every British citizen personally responsible for the government's actions. We distinguish between a country, its government, a particular administration, a particular policy, and individual citizens. Israel deserves the same distinction. Criticizing the actions of a government is fundamentally different from condemning an entire people or questioning their right to live safely as a nation.

This is where criticism can cross an important line. There is a significant difference between saying, "I believe this Israeli government policy is wrong," and declaring that Israel is uniquely evil and therefore should not exist. There is a difference between criticizing a military operation and blaming Jewish people throughout the world for that operation. There is a difference between disagreeing with an Israeli politician and directing hostility toward a Jewish student, Jewish business, synagogue, or Jewish family thousands of miles away. Christians must learn to recognize that difference because the movement from political criticism to collective blame can happen very quickly.

Suppose a Jewish university student in Canada is confronted and told to answer for decisions made by the Israeli government. What authority does that student have over Israel's cabinet? None. Suppose a synagogue in Europe is vandalized because someone is angry about events in the Middle East. What responsibility does that congregation bear for decisions made by Israeli political leaders? None. Suppose a Jewish business owner in the United States is targeted because protesters object to an Israeli military policy. That business owner may have no connection whatsoever with the Israeli government. Treating these people as responsible merely because they are Jewish is collective guilt, and collective guilt is dangerous. Jewish people should not be treated as representatives of the Israeli government merely because they are Jewish, just as Palestinians should not automatically be treated as terrorists because they are Palestinian, Muslims should not automatically be held responsible for the actions of Islamist extremists, and Christians should not be assumed to support every act committed throughout history in the name of Christianity.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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Jewish history gives Christians particular reason to be cautious about collective blame. For centuries, Jewish communities were sometimes blamed collectively for the death of Yeshua. The accusation was extended across generations, as though Jewish people living hundreds or even thousands of years later were personally responsible for events that occurred in first-century Jerusalem. Such reasoning ignores both historical complexity and the theological meaning of the crucifixion. Yeshua willingly gave His life, and the Gospel does not give Christians permission to transfer guilt across generations and ethnicities. The Church should have learned from that history that collective accusations can become spiritually and socially poisonous.

At the same time, criticism of Israel should not automatically be labeled antisemitic. Israelis themselves criticize their governments. Jewish people throughout the world hold widely different political opinions. Political parties within Israel disagree with one another, citizens protest government policies, journalists investigate political leaders, and members of the Knesset debate legislation. Disagreement is part of political life. If an Israeli citizen can criticize an Israeli government policy without ceasing to be Israeli, then a Christian can question an Israeli policy without automatically becoming antisemitic. However, the opposite principle is equally important: political criticism should not become a convenient disguise for hostility toward Jews.

How can we recognize the difference? Context, language, consistency, and conduct matter. Saying, “I disagree with this particular government decision because of these specific facts,” is fundamentally different from making sweeping claims about Jews as a people. Criticizing a prime minister is different from repeating ancient stereotypes about Jewish money, Jewish power, Jewish conspiracy, or Jewish control. Protesting a government policy is different from threatening a synagogue. Questioning the conduct of a military operation is different from harassing Jewish students. The question therefore should not simply be whether Israel is being criticized. We should ask what exactly is being criticized, what evidence supports the criticism, whether Jews collectively are being blamed, and whether the same moral standards would be applied if another country were involved.

Consistency is crucial because Israel should neither be exempt from moral scrutiny nor subjected automatically to standards that are not applied elsewhere. Christians should seek one moral standard rather than one standard for countries they favor and another for countries they oppose. If deliberately attacking civilians is wrong, it is wrong regardless of who does it. If terrorism is wrong, it remains wrong regardless of the political cause invoked to justify it. If racism is wrong, racism against Jews is wrong, racism against Arabs is wrong, and racism against every other people is wrong. If religious hatred is wrong, it remains wrong whether its target is Jewish, Christian, Muslim, or anyone else. If human dignity matters, Israeli dignity matters and Palestinian dignity matters. Truth cannot change according to which flag is involved.

This is where Christian thinking should rise above political tribalism. Political movements often pressure people to choose a side and then defend everything associated with that side. Once that choice is made, evidence can become secondary. Wrongdoing by one’s preferred side is minimized while wrongdoing by the opposing side is magnified. Christians should resist that temptation because our first allegiance is not to a political party, a government, a flag, or an ideological movement. Our first allegiance is to God and to truth. Christians who love Israel should therefore be willing to acknowledge wrongdoing when credible evidence supports that conclusion, just as they should be willing to challenge accusations that are false, exaggerated, or unsupported. We should not begin with the assumption that Israel must always be right, nor should we begin with the assumption that Israel must always be wrong. We should examine the facts as carefully as possible and apply consistent moral principles.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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There will be times when Christians conclude that Israel acted properly, times when they conclude that an Israeli decision was wrong, and times when sincere Christians examining the same facts reach different judgments. There will also be occasions when the most responsible answer is simply that we do not yet know enough to reach a conclusion. There is wisdom in saying, “I do not know.” Those words may be far more truthful than confidently repeating an accusation because it appeared on social media. Modern communication makes this particularly important because during war and political crisis claims travel around the world almost instantly. A photograph may be shared without context. A video may show something terrible without showing what happened before or afterward. Casualty figures may be reported before they can be independently verified. Governments have national interests, activists have causes, and social media rewards emotional certainty. Christians should not become distributors of unverified information simply because a claim supports what they already believe. The biblical prohibition against false witness does not disappear during political conflict. Truth matters even when truth is inconvenient.

There is another principle that must be stated with equal strength: loving Israel does not require hating Palestinians. There should be nothing controversial about this for Christians. Palestinians are human beings created in the image of God. They are not theological obstacles, statistics, or merely part of a political problem. They are men, women, children, families, communities, Christians, Muslims, professionals, laborers, students, parents, and grandparents. A theology of Israel that causes Christians to become indifferent to Palestinian suffering has lost something essential. At the same time, compassion for Palestinians must never become an excuse for indifference toward Jewish suffering.

Consider two mothers. One is an Israeli mother sheltering with her children while rockets are being fired toward her community. The other is a Palestinian mother desperately trying to protect her children during fighting in Gaza. Christians should not have to decide which mother is worthy of compassion before acknowledging the fear and suffering of both. An Israeli child murdered because he or she is Israeli is precious in the sight of God, and a Palestinian child killed in war is precious in the sight of God. A Jewish family mourning a loved one deserves compassion, and a Palestinian family mourning a loved one deserves compassion. Compassion is not betrayal, nor is human dignity a competition. We do not dishonor Israel by recognizing Palestinian suffering, and we do not dishonor Palestinians by recognizing Israeli suffering.

This does not mean that every action in a conflict is morally equivalent. Compassion for human beings does not require moral confusion about actions. Christians can and should distinguish between combatants and civilians, deliberate attacks and accidental harm, terrorism and legitimate defense, justice and vengeance. But making moral distinctions should never require us to stop seeing human beings as human beings. Yeshua did not teach us to love only those whose politics agree with ours, and the command to love our neighbor does not contain an ethnic exception.

Pastors carry a particular responsibility in this area. When pastors speak about Israel, congregations should not be taught that biblical faithfulness requires unquestioning political support for every Israeli decision. Neither should they be encouraged to see Israel merely through the lens of contemporary political accusations while ignoring the biblical and historical significance of the Jewish people. Pastors should teach believers how to hold several truths together at the same time: God’s covenant faithfulness matters, Israel is not perfect, criticism is not automatically antisemitism, antisemitism can sometimes hide behind political language, Palestinians are created in the image of God, Jewish people should not be collectively blamed for Israeli government decisions, and Palestinian civilians should not be collectively blamed for the actions of terrorists. Christians should be taught to examine evidence, refuse stereotypes, pray before speaking, and value truth more than winning an argument.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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The prophets provide a powerful model for such an approach. Amos did not look at injustice in Israel and conclude that he could not criticize it because Israel was God's chosen people. Isaiah did not excuse corruption because Jerusalem was the city of David. Jeremiah did not remain silent because warning Jerusalem might make him appear disloyal. They spoke because righteousness mattered. Yet none of those prophets concluded that Israel's sin meant God had forgotten His covenant. This is precisely the balance the Church needs. We must be able to say that Israel can be wrong without concluding that God is unfaithful.

This distinction becomes especially important when Christians discuss Israel's chosenness. Biblical election never meant moral superiority. God did not choose Israel because Israelites were inherently better human beings than Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, Romans, or anyone else. Deuteronomy explicitly rejects such pride. Israel's election arose from God's love, His purposes, and His faithfulness to the oath He had sworn. Israel was chosen for responsibility, not immunity. Amos makes this particularly clear when God declares, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." Israel's special relationship with God did not mean less accountability; it meant greater accountability. Christians therefore distort the biblical doctrine of election when they reason that Israel is chosen and therefore everything Israel does must be right.

Yet we must reject the opposite distortion just as strongly. Israel's wrongdoing does not automatically cancel Israel's calling. The biblical record makes that impossible to sustain. Israel worshiped the golden calf, rebelled in the wilderness, repeatedly turned toward idolatry during the period of the judges, experienced the sins of its kings, divided into two kingdoms, suffered the Assyrian conquest of the north, endured the Babylonian captivity, and witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem. Yet none of these events caused the prophets to announce that Abraham's descendants had ceased forever to be Israel. Judgment was real, sometimes severe, but judgment was not the same as permanent abandonment.

If Israel had to remain perfect for God to remain faithful, there would have been no Israel left long before the time of Yeshua. The remarkable thing about Israel's biblical history is therefore not Israel's perfection but God's faithfulness in the midst of Israel's imperfection. That realization should also cause Christians to examine ourselves before becoming arrogant, because Church history is hardly a record of uninterrupted righteousness. Christians have fought Christians, churches have divided, religious authorities have abused power, Scripture has been misused, political ambition has sometimes been clothed in religious language, and Jewish communities have at times suffered in societies that called themselves Christian. At moments when courage was desperately needed, many Christians remained silent. If human failure automatically cancels divine mercy, Christians should be very careful about pointing triumphantly toward Israel. Paul's warning in Romans 11 should echo through every Christian discussion of this subject: "Be not highminded, but fear."

There is also a danger in turning Israel itself into something approaching an idol. Christians can become so enthusiastic about Israel that biblical Israel, modern Israel, the Israeli government, the Jewish people, and the purposes of God become blurred together as though they were interchangeable. They are not. The Israeli government is not God. An Israeli prime minister is not automatically a biblical prophet because he leads Israel. Decisions of the Knesset are not additions to Scripture. An Israeli military operation is not automatically the fulfillment of prophecy simply because it occurs in the land of the Bible, and the Israeli flag, important as it may be as a national symbol, is not the Gospel. Christians should love Israel without worshipping Israel.

Refusing to idolize Israel actually allows Christians to love Israel more honestly. We no longer need to defend the indefensible, explain away every mistake, or transform politicians into biblical heroes. We can recognize human government for what it is: necessary, consequential, and fallible. Our faith is ultimately

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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not in the government of Israel but in the God of Israel. Governments change, prime ministers come and go, political parties rise and fall, military strategies change, and national policies change, but the faithfulness of God does not depend upon election results in Jerusalem. God's covenant faithfulness is rooted in His character.

Perhaps one of the most important lessons for the Church is therefore that we should not make Israel carry a burden Scripture never placed upon it. Israel does not have to be perfect for God to be faithful. Jewish people do not have to prove their worthiness before Christians are willing to oppose antisemitism. We should oppose antisemitism because antisemitism is wrong. We should oppose attacks on synagogues because people should be able to worship without fear. We should oppose harassment of Jewish students because students should not be targeted because of their Jewish identity. We should reject conspiracy theories about Jews because bearing false witness is wrong, and we should refuse collective blame because collective guilt violates basic moral responsibility. None of these convictions requires a perfect Israeli government.

In the same way, Christians do not need to deny Palestinian suffering in order to affirm these principles. A mature Christian theology should be capable of acknowledging the long history of Jewish persecution while also caring about Palestinian suffering. It should be capable of condemning terrorism against Israelis while caring about Palestinian civilians. It should be capable of defending Israel against false accusations while confronting wrongdoing when credible evidence warrants criticism. This is not compromise; it is moral consistency. Instead of immediately asking, "Which side are you on?" perhaps Christians should first ask, "What is true?" Instead of asking, "Whose suffering matters more?" we should ask how we can respond to suffering without abandoning moral clarity. Instead of asking how we can defend our side, we should ask what righteousness requires of us.

This approach also allows Christians to speak more credibly to Jewish people. A Jewish person should not have to wonder whether Christian friendship will disappear the moment Israel is accused of wrongdoing. At the same time, genuine friendship should never require dishonesty. Real friendship is not flattery. If I tell a friend that everything he does is right, I am not necessarily being a good friend, but if I abandon him the moment he makes a mistake, I am not being a good friend either. True friendship remains while telling the truth. Perhaps this is a useful model for Christian attitudes toward Israel: we will not abandon you because you are imperfect, and we will not pretend you are perfect because we support you. We will stand against hatred directed toward you, challenge lies told about you, listen to your fears, remember your history, recognize your humanity, and when we believe something is wrong, we will speak honestly without turning disagreement into contempt.

The same maturity should shape Christian concern for Palestinians. Palestinians should never be reduced to obstacles standing between Israel and prophecy. Their humanity, experiences, suffering, and hopes matter. Christian theology should never make believers less compassionate. The command to "pray for the peace of Jerusalem" should deepen our desire for peace rather than turn suffering into a theological abstraction. Peace for Jerusalem should make us long for Jewish families to live without fear, Arab families to live without fear, children to grow without fear, and people to worship without fear. Christians may disagree profoundly about how governments should pursue such peace, but we should never become comfortable with hatred simply because hatred comes from the side we happen to support.

The history of antisemitism gives the Church an additional reason for vigilance. Hatred rarely begins at its worst point. It can begin with stereotypes, accusations, ridicule, exclusion, conspiracy theories, economic hostility, religious contempt, and the repeated portrayal of Jews as a collective problem. When an entire people is repeatedly described as dangerous, dishonest, disloyal, manipulative, or responsible for society's troubles, actions that once seemed unthinkable can gradually become acceptable. Christian history

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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contains enough painful examples that the Church should recognize this pattern and challenge it before it becomes normalized.

At the same time, vigilance against antisemitism must not become an excuse for refusing to hear legitimate criticism. If every uncomfortable question concerning Israel is immediately labeled antisemitic, the term becomes less precise and actual antisemitism can become harder to identify. Discernment requires patience. We must ask what was actually said, what evidence supports the claim, whether Jews collectively are being blamed, whether stereotypes are being used, whether the criticism concerns a government policy or an ethnic people, and whether the same moral principle would be applied if another nation were involved. These questions may not resolve every disagreement, but they encourage careful thought rather than emotional reaction.

For pastors, teachers, and Christian leaders, this responsibility is particularly serious because people sitting in our churches are exposed to enormous amounts of political information. Some of it is accurate, some incomplete, and some deliberately manipulative. Some appeals to fear, some to anger, and some uses images of suffering to provoke immediate reactions before facts are established. The pulpit should not become another source of propaganda. It should be a place where believers learn wisdom, discernment, compassion, and truthfulness. Pastors do not need to provide instant opinions on every military operation, election, court decision, protest, or political controversy involving Israel. Sometimes responsible leadership means admitting that an issue is complicated and more information is needed. There is no shame in saying, “I need to understand this better before I speak.” The Church should be known for truthfulness, not merely for speed or certainty.

The Christian position toward Israel should therefore reject two opposite temptations. The first is blind defense: Israel is chosen, therefore everything Israel does must be defended. The second is blind condemnation: Israel has done something wrong, therefore Israel is uniquely evil, illegitimate, or unworthy of Christian concern. Neither position reflects the full biblical picture. Scripture gives us something stronger and more demanding. It gives us covenant without idolatry, accountability without abandonment, love without blindness, criticism without hatred, compassion without moral confusion, and truth without fear.

That is the position from which the Church should speak. We should love Israel enough to tell the truth. When Israel acts rightly, we should be willing to acknowledge it. When Israel acts wrongly, we should be willing to acknowledge that as well. When accusations against Israel are false, we should challenge them. When credible evidence supports legitimate criticism, we should not hide from it. When Jewish people are threatened because they are Jewish, Christians should stand beside them. When Palestinians suffer, Christians should not harden their hearts. When political disagreement turns into hatred of Jews, we should confront it, and when concern for Israel turns into contempt for Arabs, we should confront that too. When propaganda appears, we should refuse to spread it, and when we do not know the facts, we should have the humility to say so.

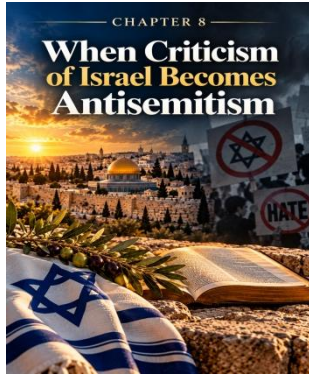
Above all, we must never confuse Israel’s imperfection with God’s unfaithfulness. That may be the central lesson of this chapter. The Bible never asks Christians to believe that Israel is perfect; it asks us to believe that God is faithful. Those are profoundly different claims. Israel has failed before, the Church has failed before, governments fail, leaders fail, religious institutions fail, nations fail, and human beings fail, but God remains faithful. That is why Christians can love Israel honestly. We do not have to manufacture perfection in order to defend God’s covenant faithfulness. We do not have to rewrite history, excuse wrongdoing, or surrender our conscience. The hero of Israel’s story has never ultimately been Israel. The hero is the God who keeps His word.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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Let the Church therefore reject the false choice between truth and love. Let us love Israel without idolizing Israel, criticize without demonizing, defend without becoming blind, and care about Palestinians without becoming hostile toward Jews. Let us oppose antisemitism without turning the term into a weapon against every disagreement, and let us refuse collective guilt, stereotypes, conspiracy theories, and hatred wherever they appear. Let us remember the prophets who loved Israel enough to confront Israel, remember Paul who grieved over Israel while insisting that God had not cast away His people, and remember the olive tree with its warning not to boast against the branches.

Israel does not have to be perfect for God to keep His promises. We can love Israel without pretending Israel is perfect because our faith has never rested upon Israel's perfection. It rests upon the faithfulness of God.



### Chapter 8 — When Criticism of Israel Becomes Antisemitism

One of the most difficult questions facing Christians who speak about Israel is determining where legitimate criticism ends and antisemitism begins. The distinction matters because two serious errors are possible. The first is to label every criticism of Israel antisemitic, thereby shutting down legitimate political and moral discussion. The second is to assume that criticism of Israel can never become antisemitic, thereby allowing ancient prejudices against Jews to reappear under the language of contemporary politics. Christians who care about truth should resist both extremes. Israel, like every other nation, can and should be held accountable for the decisions of its government, but Jewish people should never become targets of hatred because of what the State of Israel does.

Criticizing Israel is not inherently antisemitic. Israel is a modern state governed by human beings, and its policies, politicians, laws, military decisions, courts, and institutions may legitimately be examined and criticized. Israelis themselves do this constantly. Israeli political parties disagree with one another, citizens protest government policies, journalists investigate political leaders, and members of the Knesset debate legislation and national policy. There is nothing inherently antisemitic about saying that an Israeli government has made a mistake or that a particular policy is unjust, unwise, ineffective, or morally questionable. Christians should be able to examine Israel with the same seriousness with which they examine Canada, the United States, Britain, France, or any other nation.

The difficulty begins when criticism moves away from specific policies, leaders, decisions, or actions and begins employing ideas historically directed against Jews as a people. Antisemitism did not begin with the establishment of the modern State of Israel in 1948. For centuries Jews were accused of controlling governments, manipulating economies, controlling banks and newspapers, corrupting societies, conspiring secretly against nations, spreading disease, murdering Christian children, and bearing collective responsibility for the death of Yeshua. The accusations changed according to the culture and historical period, but the underlying pattern remained remarkably persistent. Jews were portrayed not simply as individuals capable of wrongdoing, as all human beings are, but as a sinister collective force supposedly operating behind the events of history.

When these same ideas are transferred to Israel, changing the vocabulary does not necessarily change the prejudice. There is an obvious difference between saying that an Israeli prime minister made a poor decision and claiming that Israel secretly controls governments throughout the world. There is a difference between questioning Israeli influence on a particular foreign-policy decision and declaring that Jews or “Zionists” secretly control politicians, banks, newspapers, universities, entertainment, or international institutions. At that point we are no longer merely discussing Israeli policy. We are entering territory occupied for centuries by antisemitic conspiracy theories. Sometimes the word “Zionist” can simply describe a political belief concerning Jewish national self-determination. At other times, however, it can be used as a substitute for “Jew” while the ancient accusation of secret Jewish power remains unchanged. Christians must learn to recognize the difference from context rather than assuming that a particular word automatically proves or disproves antisemitism.

Conspiracy theories have historically been among antisemitism’s most persistent weapons because they create a system in which almost everything can be interpreted as evidence. If a Jewish person occupies a position of influence, that may be presented as proof of the conspiracy. If evidence contradicts the

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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conspiracy, the contradiction itself may be described as evidence that the conspiracy has successfully concealed its activities. Such thinking is not careful investigation. It begins with a conclusion about Jews and then forces every fact into that conclusion. Christians committed to truth should reject this kind of reasoning regardless of whether it appears in religious, political, nationalist, or anti-Israel language.

Collective blame provides another important boundary between legitimate criticism and antisemitism. Governments make decisions through political institutions. Citizens may support those decisions, oppose them, know little about them, or possess no meaningful influence over them. Yet Jewish people throughout the world are sometimes expected to answer for decisions made by the Israeli government simply because they are Jewish. A Jewish student in Toronto, a Jewish shopkeeper in London, a Jewish family in New York, or a synagogue congregation in Paris may have no influence whatsoever over the Israeli cabinet, but anger toward Israel can nevertheless be redirected toward them. When this happens, the discussion has moved away from political accountability and toward collective guilt.

Imagine a Jewish university student in Canada being confronted and required to explain an Israeli military decision. That student may never have lived in Israel, may not be an Israeli citizen, may disagree with the Israeli government, and may have no more influence over Israel's policies than any other Canadian student. Yet simply because the student is Jewish, he or she may be expected to answer for the decisions of a government thousands of kilometres away. Imagine a synagogue being vandalized because someone is angry about an Israeli military operation. The synagogue did not formulate Israeli military policy. The congregation did not order the operation. The building was targeted for one reason: Jews worship there. At that point Israel may be the stated justification, but Jewish people have become the actual target.

A synagogue is not an Israeli embassy. A Jewish school is not an office of the Israeli government. A Jewish student is not a spokesperson for Israel's prime minister, and a Jewish business owner is not responsible for Israeli military policy. Jewish people outside Israel should not be required to pass a political test concerning Israel before they are accepted as neighbors, classmates, colleagues, or fellow citizens. Holding them collectively responsible for the actions of another government simply because they are Jewish is not legitimate criticism of Israel. It is collective blame, and collective blame has a long and dangerous history.

Christians should be especially sensitive to this because the Church has its own painful history of assigning collective guilt to Jews. For centuries some Christians accused Jewish people collectively of responsibility for the death of Yeshua, extending blame across generations as though Jews living hundreds or thousands of years later were personally responsible for events in first-century Jerusalem. Such reasoning ignored both historical complexity and the theological meaning of the crucifixion. Yeshua willingly gave His life, and the Gospel presents His death as connected to the sin and redemption of humanity, not as grounds for inherited ethnic guilt against the Jewish people. The Church should have learned from that history how dangerous it becomes when guilt is transferred from individuals to an entire people.

At the same time, criticism of Israel should not automatically be labeled antisemitic. Israelis themselves criticize their governments, and Jewish people throughout the world hold widely different political opinions. Israeli citizens protest government policies, journalists investigate their leaders, opposition politicians challenge governing coalitions, and voters remove governments from office. Political disagreement is a normal feature of democratic society. If an Israeli citizen can criticize an Israeli government policy without ceasing to be Israeli, then a Christian can question an Israeli policy without automatically becoming antisemitic. Calling every criticism antisemitic would not defend Israel effectively; it would weaken the meaning of antisemitism and make genuine cases more difficult to identify.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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The opposite principle is equally important. Political criticism should not become a convenient disguise for hostility toward Jews. Context, language, consistency, and conduct matter. Saying, “I disagree with this particular government decision because of these specific facts,” is fundamentally different from making sweeping claims about Jews as a people. Criticizing a prime minister is different from repeating ancient stereotypes about Jewish money, Jewish power, Jewish conspiracy, or Jewish control. Protesting a government policy is different from threatening a synagogue. Questioning the conduct of a military operation is different from harassing Jewish students. Christians should therefore ask not merely whether Israel is being criticized but what exactly is being criticized, what evidence supports the criticism, who is being held responsible, and whether the criticism has shifted from the conduct of a government to the character of a people.

Classic Jewish stereotypes are an especially important warning sign. Throughout history Jews have been portrayed as uniquely greedy, dishonest, manipulative, disloyal, bloodthirsty, or secretly powerful. These images did not disappear with the creation of Israel. They can reappear in modern political language. A person may begin by discussing Israeli policy and gradually move toward claims about Jewish influence over governments, financial institutions, media organizations, universities, or culture. The terminology may sound contemporary, but the underlying accusation can be centuries old. Christians who know the history of antisemitism should be able to recognize an old stereotype even when it is wearing new political clothing.

Demonization presents another danger. Legitimate political criticism normally addresses identifiable actions. A government passed a law, a politician made a statement, a military unit carried out an operation, or an institution adopted a policy. Such claims can be investigated and debated. Demonization speaks differently. It portrays an entire nation or people as inherently monstrous, uniquely evil, bloodthirsty, conspiratorial, or beyond ordinary human morality. Once people cease being viewed as human beings and become symbols of absolute evil, normal moral restraints begin to weaken. History gives us ample reason to fear language that strips an entire population of its humanity.

This principle must apply consistently. Christians who object to the demonization of Jews should never respond by demonizing Arabs or Muslims. Palestinians must not be collectively described as terrorists any more than Jews should be collectively described as responsible for Israeli government policy. Muslims should not be held collectively responsible for Islamist terrorism, just as Jewish people should not be held collectively responsible for actions taken by Israel. The command against false witness does not change according to ethnicity, nationality, or religion, and neither does the command to love our neighbor.

Holocaust comparisons require particular care. The Holocaust was the systematic attempt by Nazi Germany and its collaborators to annihilate European Jewry, resulting in the murder of six million Jews. That history should not become a casual rhetorical device whenever someone wants to express strong disapproval of an Israeli policy. Not every military action is Auschwitz, not every controversial law is a Nuremberg Law, and not every political leader with whom we strongly disagree is Hitler. Historical comparisons can sometimes be legitimate subjects of scholarship, but careless Nazi analogies often obscure more than they clarify. They can also carry a particularly cruel message when the descendants of a people targeted for extermination are casually equated with those who attempted to destroy them.

Holocaust denial and deliberate distortion go much further. Claims that the Holocaust never happened, that the number of Jewish victims was deliberately fabricated, or that Jews invented or exaggerated the Holocaust in order to gain political or financial advantage are not legitimate criticisms of Israel. They are attacks upon documented history and Jewish memory. The Holocaust occurred before the modern State of

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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Israel existed, and denying it cannot logically be defended as criticism of Israeli government policy. Christians should reject such claims without hesitation.

The question of Jewish self-determination requires more careful treatment because sincere people hold different political philosophies concerning nationalism, Zionism, Palestinian self-determination, borders, sovereignty, and possible political arrangements for the land. Disagreement with a particular form of Zionism should not automatically be described as hatred of Jews. Neither should advocacy for Palestinian national rights automatically be treated as antisemitic. People can debate one state, two states, borders, constitutional structures, security arrangements, settlements, citizenship, and national identity without necessarily hating anyone. The crucial moral question is whether Jews are being denied rights or safety simply because they are Jews.

If someone believes that Palestinians possess a legitimate right to collective identity and political self-determination, that position should be heard and discussed seriously. If someone believes that Jews also possess a legitimate right to collective identity, security, and self-determination, that position should likewise be heard seriously. Christians should seek principles that recognize the humanity, safety, and dignity of both peoples rather than constructing a moral framework in which one people's humanity depends upon denying the humanity of the other.

Double standards are also frequently discussed in relation to antisemitism, but this subject requires care. Paying unusual attention to Israel does not by itself prove antisemitism. Christians themselves may pay particular attention to Israel because of the land's biblical significance. Jewish and Palestinian families may pay greater attention because events directly affect relatives and communities. Journalists may concentrate on a conflict because it has international importance. Activists naturally focus on issues about which they care deeply. The amount of attention given to Israel therefore cannot by itself determine whether prejudice is present.

Nevertheless, moral consistency remains important. If an action is condemned when Israel takes it but excused when another nation takes an equivalent action, it is reasonable to ask why. If a person recognizes the right of many peoples to national identity but denies that possibility uniquely to Jews because they are Jews, the distinction deserves examination. If violence against civilians is condemned when one side commits it but celebrated when the other side commits it, a consistent moral standard is missing. A useful question for Christians is whether we would apply the same principle if another country or people were involved.

That question protects both sides of the discussion. Israel should not receive a moral exemption because it is Israel, but neither should Israel automatically be presumed guilty because it is Israel. If civilian life matters, Israeli and Palestinian civilian life matters. If terrorism is wrong, terrorism remains wrong regardless of the political cause invoked to justify it. If racism is wrong, racism against Jews and racism against Arabs are both wrong. If deliberately targeting civilians is immoral, the identity of the civilians does not change the principle. Christians should seek one moral standard rather than adjusting morality according to which flag is involved.

There is also an important difference between criticism that is harsh, criticism that is unfair, and criticism that is antisemitic. Not every false accusation against Israel necessarily originates in hatred of Jews. People can be mistaken, poorly informed, politically biased, emotionally reactive, or persuaded by unreliable information without being antisemitic. We should therefore be careful about assuming motives we cannot know. The accusation of antisemitism is serious and should not be used merely as a way to silence someone with whom we disagree. If the term is applied carelessly to every criticism, it eventually loses precision, and genuine antisemitism becomes more difficult to identify.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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That would be particularly tragic because genuine antisemitism is real. We need the moral vocabulary to distinguish between someone who says, “I oppose this Israeli government policy,” and someone who says, “Jews secretly control our government.” We need to distinguish between someone advocating Palestinian rights and someone attacking a synagogue. We need to distinguish between someone questioning the conduct of an Israeli military operation and someone blaming Jewish classmates for that operation. We need to distinguish between disagreement with Zionism and the revival of conspiracy theories about Jewish power. If we describe all of these things with the same language, we will understand none of them properly.

The same care is needed when evaluating slogans, symbols, demonstrations, and political rhetoric. Words can mean different things to different people, and context matters. A slogan that one person understands as a call for Palestinian freedom may be heard by another as a threat to Jewish security. A symbol may carry different historical meanings depending upon who uses it and where it appears. Christians should resist the temptation to make immediate judgments solely on the basis of a phrase without examining what the speaker actually means and what actions accompany the words. At the same time, speakers have a responsibility to understand that words carry histories and consequences. We should all be willing to ask whether our language communicates something beyond what we intended.

For Christians, however, the issue reaches deeper than political definitions. Scripture asks us to examine not only our words but our hearts. It is possible to use acceptable political language while harboring contempt. It is possible to defend Israel passionately for political reasons while caring very little about actual Jewish people. It is possible to advocate Palestinian rights out of genuine compassion, and it is also possible to use Palestinian suffering as permission to express hostility toward Jews. External political labels cannot tell us everything about the human heart. Scripture repeatedly warns against hatred, pride, false witness, partiality, and contempt, and those warnings should govern Christian speech about Israel just as they govern every other subject.

Paul’s warning in Romans 11 remains especially relevant: “Boast not against the branches.” Paul understood that Gentile believers might look at Jewish unbelief and develop spiritual arrogance. His answer was not merely a theological correction; it was a warning about attitude. Gentile believers were to remember that they had been grafted in by grace. The Church therefore has no basis for contempt toward Jewish people, whether that contempt is expressed through theology, racial stereotypes, political conspiracy theories, or hostility disguised as concern about Israel.

Christians do not stand with Jewish people because every Jewish person agrees with us, nor do we oppose antisemitism because every Israeli government decision is correct. We do not defend a synagogue because we approve of the policies of a foreign government. We defend Jewish people from antisemitism because no person should be hated simply for being Jewish. A Jewish neighbor should be able to walk down the street wearing a Star of David without fear. A Jewish student should be able to attend university without being treated as personally responsible for Israel. A Jewish family should be able to worship in a synagogue without fearing attack because someone thousands of miles away is angry about events in the Middle East. A Jewish business owner should not become a political target merely because he or she is Jewish.

None of this prevents Christians from caring deeply about Palestinians. None of it prevents criticism of Israeli policy, disagreement with Israeli politicians, or debate about Zionism. None of it requires Christians to surrender moral judgment. It simply requires us to recognize Jewish people as human beings rather than political symbols. In the same way, Palestinians must be recognized as human beings rather than political symbols. The humanity of one people does not require the denial of the humanity of another.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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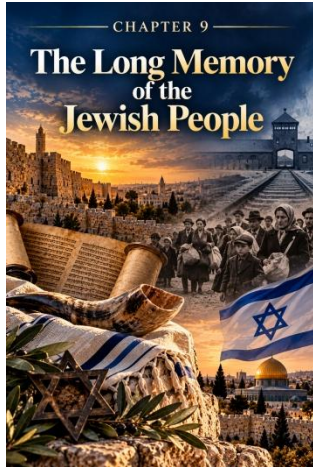
The Church should therefore occupy a position of moral clarity. We should defend the freedom to criticize governments, including the government of Israel. We should defend the dignity of Palestinians and Israelis alike. We should examine evidence, reject propaganda, and refuse to label every political disagreement antisemitic. At the same time, when criticism turns into collective blame, conspiracy theories about Jewish power, classic stereotypes, Holocaust denial or distortion, hostility toward Jewish people outside Israel, or the demonization of Jews as a people, Christians should recognize that something fundamental has changed. The discussion is no longer simply about what a government has done. The target has shifted from a government to a people.

The boundary will not always be perfectly clear. Responsible people may sometimes disagree about whether a particular statement or action has crossed it. That is why humility, context, evidence, and careful judgment matter. Difficulty, however, is not an excuse for silence. Christians should learn to distinguish criticism from contempt, political opposition from collective hatred, questioning government power from reviving conspiracy theories, and criticism of Israel from hostility toward Jews.

The Church has been silent in the face of antisemitism before, and history has shown the terrible consequences that can follow when hatred becomes normalized. That history should not cause Christians to silence every critic of Israel. It should make us more discerning. We should be able to defend the right to speak truth about Israel while also defending Jewish people when hatred hides behind political language. We should be capable of saying that Israel can be criticized, Israeli governments can be held accountable, Palestinian suffering matters, and antisemitism must still be confronted wherever it appears.

Our responsibility is not to protect Israel from criticism. Israel, like every nation, must be open to criticism and accountability. Our responsibility is to recognize when criticism ceases to focus on what Israel does and begins attacking Jews for who they are. When Jewish people are collectively blamed, when ancient conspiracy theories are revived, when classic stereotypes return, when synagogues become targets for anger against Israel, when Jewish students are required to answer for a foreign government, or when Jews are treated as uniquely undeserving of safety and dignity, Christians should have the courage to recognize what is happening.

We must defend the right to criticize Israel honestly, fairly, and responsibly. We must also defend Jewish people when legitimate political disagreement crosses the line into prejudice and hatred. The Church must be capable of doing both, because truth requires nothing less.



### Chapter 9 — The Long Memory of the Jewish People

If Christians genuinely desire a better relationship with the Jewish people, we must be willing to understand something about Jewish memory. We may approach a Jewish neighbor, rabbi, community leader, or synagogue with sincere friendship and wonder why our intentions are sometimes received cautiously. We may speak enthusiastically about our love for Israel and the Jewish people and be surprised when the response is polite but guarded. We may mention Yeshua believing that we are sharing good news and fail to understand why the conversation suddenly becomes uncomfortable. For many Christians these reactions can be confusing, but they become more understandable when we remember that Jewish people do not encounter

Christianity only through the Christian standing in front of them. Christianity may also be encountered through the memory of what happened during centuries when Jewish communities lived as minorities within predominantly Christian societies.

The Jewish people have a long memory, but this does not mean that every Jewish person thinks alike, interprets history in the same way, or personally feels suspicious of Christians. Jewish communities are extraordinarily diverse. Some Jews are religious and others secular, some traditional and others liberal, and their political and theological views can differ enormously. Nevertheless, Jewish historical memory contains experiences with Christianity that pastors should understand if they hope to build relationships based upon honesty and trust. Some of those memories are painful, and Christians should be able to hear them without immediately becoming defensive. Understanding what happened is not the same as accepting personal guilt for events we did not commit. It is simply an acknowledgment that history affects relationships long after the original participants are gone.

For long periods of Christian history, Jews lived as vulnerable minorities within societies that identified themselves as Christian. The relationship between Christianity and Judaism was frequently shaped by theological conflict. As the Church became increasingly Gentile and separated from its Jewish roots, Jews were sometimes portrayed not merely as people who rejected Christian claims concerning Yeshua but as people whom God Himself had rejected. The belief that the Church had replaced Israel could, in some settings, contribute to a darker conclusion: if God had rejected the Jews, then their continuing suffering could be interpreted as evidence of divine judgment. This was never the only Christian attitude toward Jews, and Christian history is far too complex to reduce to a single position. Nevertheless, anti-Jewish theology became influential in many places and periods, and Jewish people could be portrayed as spiritually blind, stubborn, cursed, or collectively responsible for the crucifixion.

There is a painful contradiction here that Christians should recognize. Christians worship a Jewish Messiah. His mother was Jewish. His apostles were Jewish. Paul was Jewish. The prophets were Jewish. The Scriptures Christians call the Old Testament were entrusted to Israel. The earliest community of believers in Yeshua emerged from within the Jewish world. Yet as the centuries passed, Christians could read the writings of Jewish prophets, preach from the Psalms of David, study the Torah of Moses, proclaim the Gospel of a Jewish Messiah, and still look upon Jewish people living in their own towns with suspicion or contempt. Pastors need to understand this contradiction because Jewish historical memory has not forgotten it.

One of the most damaging accusations was the charge that Jews collectively killed Christ. The crucifixion occurred within the complex political and religious circumstances of first-century Roman Judea. Roman

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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authority carried out the execution, certain Jewish leaders were involved in the events leading to it, and the New Testament places the death of Yeshua within the larger redemptive purposes of God. Christian theology teaches that Yeshua willingly gave His life for sinners. Yet over the centuries the accusation that “the Jews killed Christ” was sometimes extended far beyond the people involved in those historical events. Jewish people born hundreds of years later could be treated as though they personally shared responsibility for the crucifixion simply because they were Jewish. Once guilt is transferred across centuries from particular individuals to an entire ethnic people, it is no longer individual responsibility. It has become collective guilt, and collective guilt has repeatedly proved dangerous.

At various points in European history, Jews were subjected to restrictions concerning where they could live, what occupations they could enter, what property they could own, and how they could participate in society. In some places they were confined to designated areas or required to wear identifying clothing or symbols. Jewish communities were periodically expelled from places in which their families had lived for generations. England expelled its Jewish population in 1290, and the Jews of Spain were ordered to convert or leave in 1492. Other expulsions and restrictions occurred in different European territories. For Jewish families, these were not simply entries in a history book. They meant leaving homes, businesses, communities, possessions, and familiar surroundings because authorities had decided that Jews were no longer welcome.

There were also periods when Jews faced intense pressure or coercion to convert to Christianity. This history is especially painful because forced conversion contradicts the nature of genuine faith. A confession obtained through fear is not faith, and baptism performed under coercion cannot reveal the condition of the heart. Yet there were times when Jewish people accepted baptism under circumstances in which conversion could mean protection, social acceptance, or escape from persecution. This history matters when Christians speak with Jewish people today. A Christian may say, “I would like to tell you about Yeshua,” meaning nothing more than a sincere desire to share the One whom he loves. A Jewish listener who knows the history of forced conversion may hear echoes that the Christian speaker never intended. The Christian may be thinking about the Gospel, while the Jewish listener may remember ancestors who were told to convert or suffer the consequences.

Understanding this history does not mean Christians should stop speaking about their faith. Paul openly proclaimed Messiah and prayed for Israel’s salvation. It does mean that Christian witness should be characterized by humility, patience, respect, and the complete rejection of coercion. Christians should understand that trust cannot always be demanded immediately simply because our intentions are sincere. Trust is built through relationships, and where history has created suspicion, Christians should be willing to demonstrate friendship before expecting that suspicion to disappear.

The Crusades added another painful layer to Jewish memory. They are usually remembered primarily as military campaigns associated with control of the Holy Land, but Jewish communities in Europe also suffered violence during the crusading period. During the First Crusade in particular, Jewish communities in parts of the Rhineland were attacked by crusading groups. Jews who lived nowhere near the battlefield in Jerusalem became victims of people traveling under Christian symbols. Whatever the political and theological complexities surrounding the Crusades, the memory of Jews being attacked by people identifying themselves as Christians became part of Jewish historical consciousness.

The symbolism is particularly sobering. Christians see the cross as the place where Yeshua demonstrated sacrificial love and offered Himself for the sins of humanity. Yet Jews who encountered violent crusaders bearing crosses could associate that same symbol with fear. The Christian and the Jew could therefore look at the same symbol through very different historical memories. This does not change what the cross

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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means to Christianity, but it should help Christians understand why our symbols and language may sometimes carry associations for Jewish people that we ourselves do not immediately recognize.

Medieval Europe also witnessed grotesque false accusations against Jews. One of the most notorious was the blood libel, the accusation that Jews murdered Christian children and used their blood for religious purposes. Such accusations were entirely contrary to Jewish law, which prohibits the consumption of blood, yet facts did not prevent the stories from spreading. Rumor became accusation, accusation created fear, and fear sometimes produced violence. Jews were also accused of poisoning wells, particularly during periods of disease and social crisis. During the Black Death in the fourteenth century, Jewish communities in various places were falsely accused of causing the plague even though Jews themselves suffered from the disease.

These examples reveal a pattern that would appear repeatedly in later history. When society experienced fear, economic hardship, disease, political instability, or social change, Jews could become convenient scapegoats. The specific accusation changed, but the structure remained remarkably similar. In one century Jews might be accused of poisoning wells; in another they might be accused of secretly controlling banks, governments, newspapers, revolutions, or international institutions. Antisemitism did not even require logical consistency. Jews could simultaneously be accused of being responsible for capitalism and communism, nationalism and internationalism, revolutionary movements and financial elites. The contradiction itself should tell us that these accusations were not the result of careful analysis. The Jew had become a convenient explanation for whatever society feared.

The Protestant Reformation did not automatically eliminate these attitudes. Martin Luther is rightly recognized as one of the most influential figures in Christian history, particularly because of his challenge to abuses within the medieval Church and his role in the Reformation. Yet late in his life Luther wrote viciously against Jews and advocated harsh measures against Jewish communities. Christians do not need to erase Luther from history in order to acknowledge this. Neither should we hide his anti-Jewish writings in order to protect his reputation. Mature Christian historical understanding allows us to recognize that a person may make significant contributions in one area while committing serious moral errors in another. Christian heroes were still human beings, and human beings can be profoundly wrong.

As Europe moved into the modern period, antisemitism increasingly acquired racial and nationalist forms in addition to older religious hostility. This development was particularly dangerous because Jewish identity was increasingly defined by ancestry rather than merely religion. Under older forms of religious prejudice, conversion theoretically offered a Jew a path into Christian society. Under racial antisemitism, even conversion could not remove Jewish ancestry. A Jewish person could become a Christian and still be classified as Jewish according to racial theories. Jewishness itself increasingly became the supposed problem.

In the Russian Empire and parts of Eastern Europe, Jewish communities endured waves of pogroms, particularly during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Homes and businesses could be destroyed, people assaulted or murdered, and entire communities terrorized. Many Jews fled. Some went westward into Europe, while large numbers emigrated to the United States, Canada, and other countries. Others became increasingly convinced that Jewish security could not permanently depend upon the willingness of other nations to protect Jewish minorities. This historical experience became one of the factors contributing to the development and appeal of modern Zionism.

Christians sometimes discuss Zionism almost entirely through the lenses of biblical prophecy or modern Middle Eastern politics. Those subjects are important, but Jewish historical experience must also be considered. For many Jews, the desire for a Jewish homeland was not merely an abstract political

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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philosophy. It was connected to a practical question that history had repeatedly forced upon Jewish communities: where can Jews live safely if the societies in which they reside turn against them? Whether one agrees with every expression of Zionist political thought is a separate question. To understand its appeal, however, one must understand the historical insecurity experienced by Jewish communities across many generations.

Then came the Holocaust. The Holocaust did not emerge from Christian theology alone, and it would be historically inaccurate to describe Nazism simply as an expression of Christianity. Nazi antisemitism incorporated racial ideology, extreme nationalism, pseudoscientific theories, conspiracy thinking, authoritarianism, and other influences. Christians themselves were among those persecuted by the Nazi regime, and some Christians resisted it courageously. Nevertheless, the Holocaust occurred on a European continent that had been shaped by centuries of Christian culture, and older anti-Jewish prejudices had helped create stereotypes that the Nazis could exploit, racialize, and radicalize.

The progression remains one of the most frightening lessons in modern history. Jewish people were progressively excluded from public life, stripped of rights, removed from occupations, and separated from their fellow citizens. Jewish businesses were targeted and synagogues attacked. Property was confiscated. Families were displaced. Jews were forced into ghettos, deported, subjected to mass shootings, and ultimately transported to killing centers created for systematic murder. By the end of the Holocaust, approximately six million Jews had been murdered.

Numbers on that scale can become almost impossible for the human mind to comprehend, so perhaps we should sometimes think in terms of individual lives. Think of a child taken from his parents, a mother separated from her children, an elderly man forced from the home where he had lived for decades, or a family ordered to pack what they could carry before being transported to an unknown destination. Think of a synagogue burning while neighbors watched, a train leaving a station filled with frightened families, a suitcase left on a railway platform, or a photograph preserved after almost everyone pictured in it had been murdered. Multiply such individual stories millions of times and we begin to understand why the Holocaust occupies such a profound place in Jewish memory.

The Holocaust is not remote ancient history. Families today still carry memories of parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents who experienced it. There are family trees with branches that suddenly disappear during the 1940s, photographs of relatives who never returned, names preserved because no grave exists, and European communities that once contained vibrant Jewish populations but today contain few or no Jews. When Jewish people hear antisemitic slogans in the present, therefore, they may hear them through a historical memory in which hostile words were sometimes followed by exclusion, violence, and death. This does not mean every hateful statement will lead to another Holocaust, but it does mean that Jewish concern about antisemitism did not arise in a historical vacuum.

This helps Christians understand why incidents that may appear minor to outsiders can create profound anxiety within Jewish communities. A swastika painted on a synagogue is not simply graffiti. A threat sent to a Jewish school is not merely another piece of offensive correspondence. A Jewish student being told to hide a Star of David can carry a historical meaning far beyond one unpleasant encounter. Jewish communities remember what happened when societies decided that visible Jewish identity was dangerous. Christians seeking genuine friendship with Jewish people should understand that memory rather than dismissing it as oversensitivity.

Yet Christian history should not be told only as a story of failure. That would be both historically incomplete and unfair to the many Christians whose faith led them in the opposite direction. Throughout periods of persecution there were Christians who rejected hatred, protected Jewish neighbors, challenged

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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antisemitism, hid Jewish families, provided false documents, smuggled people across borders, shared food, opened their homes, and risked their lives. Some paid for that courage with imprisonment or death. Their stories are important because they demonstrate that Christian faith itself did not require hatred of Jews. Christians faced moral choices, and while some participated in persecution and others remained silent, some chose courage.

Corrie ten Boom and her family in the Netherlands provide one of the best-known examples. Motivated by Christian conviction, the ten Boom family helped hide Jews and members of the Dutch resistance from Nazi authorities. Their home became part of an underground network that offered protection to people in danger. Eventually the family was arrested. Corrie survived imprisonment and later told the story of what had happened. Her family demonstrates something profoundly important for Christians: faith in Yeshua can lead not toward hostility against Jewish people but toward sacrificial solidarity with them.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer provides another important example, although his story should be remembered accurately rather than transformed into legend. Bonhoeffer was a German pastor and theologian who opposed the Nazi regime and became involved in resistance activities. He challenged the corruption of parts of the German Church under Nazi influence and was eventually imprisoned and executed. His life reminds Christians that there were believers who understood that loyalty to Messiah could require resistance to political evil even when such resistance carried enormous personal cost.

Another remarkable example can be found in the French village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon and the ministry associated with Pastor André Trocmé and others. Motivated in significant measure by Christian conviction, residents sheltered Jewish refugees and helped people escape danger. Homes, farms, and institutions became places of refuge. Those who helped did not first require the Jews they protected to accept Christianity. They recognized that human beings were in danger and needed help. Their faith expressed itself through courage and hospitality.

The rescue of Danish Jews in 1943 provides another powerful example of resistance to Nazi persecution. Thousands of Danish Jews were helped to escape to neutral Sweden through the actions of Danish citizens and resistance networks. Christians were among those who assisted. Such examples remind us that the story of Christian-Jewish relations cannot honestly be told as though Christians always stood on one side. Some persecuted, some collaborated, some looked away, and some resisted.

That distinction is crucial. When examining Christian history, our purpose should not be to place every Christian of previous centuries on trial or to condemn Christianity itself. Neither should we defend everything done by people who carried the Christian name. Our responsibility is to learn. We should ask what caused some Christians to participate in prejudice, what caused others to remain silent, and what enabled still others to recognize Jewish neighbors as people whom God commanded them to love. For pastors, perhaps one of the most important historical questions is what kind of Christian formation produces courage when society begins turning against a minority.

The Christians who helped Jewish people during periods of persecution did not necessarily possess perfect theology or complete political understanding. Often they understood something much more fundamental: these are human beings, they are our neighbors, and they are in danger. Sometimes faithfulness begins with that simple recognition. A person does not need to understand every political issue before protecting a threatened neighbor. One does not need to solve the Middle East before opposing the vandalism of a synagogue. One does not need to agree with every decision of the Israeli government before standing beside a Jewish family that has been threatened because it is Jewish.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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The long memory of the Jewish people therefore contains both wounds and friendships. Jews remember persecution that occurred within Christian societies, but Jewish history also contains memories of Christians who helped. There are stories of priests who provided shelter, pastors who challenged hatred, families who hid Jewish neighbors, diplomats motivated by conscience who issued life-saving documents, and ordinary believers who shared food, provided transportation, opened doors, or helped people escape. The Church should remember these people too, not as a way of cancelling the failures of others but as examples of what Christian courage can look like.

We should not study Christian antisemitism merely so that Christians will feel ashamed. Shame by itself accomplishes very little. We should study history so that we recognize patterns, understand Jewish concerns, correct false theology, and prepare ourselves to act differently when courage is required. History should produce responsibility rather than either defensiveness or despair. A pastor does not need to stand before his congregation and declare that Christianity is responsible for every act of antisemitism in history, because that would not be accurate. Neither should a pastor tell the story of Christian history as though hostility toward Jews were merely someone else's problem. There is a better approach: honesty without self-condemnation, repentance where repentance is warranted, gratitude for those who acted courageously, and determination not to repeat the failures of the past.

This approach can transform Christian relationships with Jewish communities. Imagine a pastor meeting a rabbi and beginning not with an argument but with listening. Imagine Christians visiting a synagogue because they want to know their neighbors. Imagine a church standing beside a Jewish community after an antisemitic attack without asking for recognition or anything in return. Imagine Christian leaders speaking publicly when a synagogue is threatened and saying simply that their Jewish neighbors should not have to face hatred alone. Trust is built through actions, and Jewish-Christian relationships cannot be repaired merely through theological declarations. Where history created wounds through actions, friendship must also be demonstrated through actions.

This does not require Christians to abandon their belief in Yeshua. Genuine friendship does not require either side to pretend that theological differences do not exist. Christians believe Yeshua is Messiah, while most Jewish people do not. That disagreement is real and significant, but disagreement does not require hostility, manipulation, or coercion. Christians can speak honestly about what we believe while respecting the freedom and dignity of the person standing before us. We can share our faith, listen to questions, explain why we believe, and allow another person the dignity to respond freely. The Gospel does not need intimidation, and truth does not require coercion.

Pastors especially need to understand these matters because they shape how congregations think about Jewish people. A careless sermon can reinforce stereotypes that listeners carry into the world, while a thoughtful sermon can dismantle them. A pastor who repeatedly speaks about “the Jews” as though all Jewish people throughout history constituted one hostile group may unintentionally strengthen prejudice. A pastor who carefully explains the Jewish context of Scripture can help Christians rediscover how deeply their faith is connected to the Jewish story. Yeshua was Jewish, His mother Miriam was Jewish, the apostles were Jewish, Paul was Jewish, the prophets were Jewish, and the earliest believers in Yeshua were Jewish. Christianity did not emerge in opposition to a foreign people called the Jews. It emerged from within the story of Israel.

Remembering this does not resolve every theological disagreement between Christians and Jews, but it should make Christian contempt for Jews impossible to justify. It should also make pastors more thoughtful about language. When preaching passages in which the Gospel of John refers to “the Jews,” for example, pastors should explain the historical and literary context rather than leaving congregations with the impression that every Jewish person everywhere is being described. When discussing the

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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crucifixion, pastors should explain the Roman political authority involved, the actions of particular Jewish leaders, the broader reality of human sin, and above all the Christian conviction that Yeshua willingly laid down His life. No Christian child should leave a church service believing that a Jewish classmate belongs to a people who should carry inherited guilt for the crucifixion.

The long memory of the Jewish people should also influence how Christians approach evangelism. Christians naturally desire to share what we believe is good news, but when speaking with Jewish people we should remember that words such as “conversion” may carry historical associations different from those they carry for us. For Christians, conversion may mean spiritual transformation and reconciliation with God. For Jewish communities shaped by memories of forced conversion, the same word may also evoke pressure, loss of identity, coercion, or persecution. This does not mean Christians should conceal our faith. It means our witness should look like Yeshua rather than like coercive power. We speak, listen, answer questions, share why we believe, love the person before us, and leave the response to God and the individual conscience.

Perhaps one of the greatest gifts the modern Church can offer the Jewish people is not another promise that Christians have changed, but evidence that we have learned. When antisemitism appears, Christians should speak. When Jewish institutions are threatened, Christians should stand beside their neighbors. When conspiracy theories circulate, Christians should challenge them. When someone blames every Jewish person for the actions of Israel, Christians should reject collective guilt. When Christian teaching distorts Jewish history, pastors should teach more carefully. When the Holocaust is denied or trivialized, Christians should defend historical truth. When Jewish neighbors tell us they are afraid, perhaps our first response should be to listen rather than immediately explaining why they should not be afraid. These are not primarily political acts. They are acts of neighborly responsibility.

The Jewish people have survived ancient conquest, exile, expulsions, forced conversions, pogroms, and the Holocaust. Across continents and centuries they carried Scripture, tradition, family memory, language, worship, and identity. Passover was celebrated in prosperity and persecution. The words “Hear, O Israel” were spoken in homes, synagogues, ghettos, hiding places, and places of death. Jerusalem remained present in Jewish prayer across generations of dispersion. Memory became one of the ways identity survived.

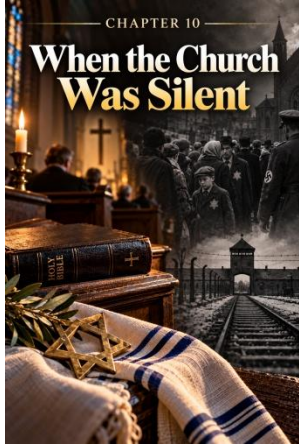
Christians therefore should not be surprised that Jewish people remember, nor should we ask them to forget simply because remembering makes us uncomfortable. Instead, we should listen. Listening does not require accepting every interpretation of history. It does not require Christians living today to accept personal guilt for events they did not commit. It does not require rejecting Christianity or concealing our convictions. It simply requires enough humility to acknowledge that our Jewish neighbors may carry historical memories that we do not carry and that those memories can shape how Christian words and actions are received.

If the Church wishes to speak meaningfully to the Jewish people, perhaps we must first demonstrate that we are willing to hear them. The long memory of the Jewish people is not merely a memory of persecution; it is also a memory of survival. Empires disappeared, kingdoms collapsed, borders changed, languages vanished, and rulers who once appeared invincible became names in history books, yet the Jewish people endured. For Christians who believe the biblical promises concerning Israel, that endurance should provoke reflection. The people through whom God gave the patriarchs, prophets, Scriptures, apostles, and Messiah remain among us despite centuries in which powerful forces attempted to assimilate, expel, convert, persecute, or destroy them.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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We should approach that history with humility. We should remember the Christians who failed and honor the Christians who stood. We should learn from both, and when Jewish people look at the Church today and wonder whether Christians will stand beside them when hatred rises again, our answer should not consist merely of words. Our actions should answer. The Church cannot change the centuries that have passed. We cannot undo an expulsion, erase a pogrom, reopen the door of a home from which a Jewish family was driven, or bring back a child murdered in the Holocaust. We cannot return to yesterday and give courage to those who remained silent, but we are responsible for what we do today. We cannot change yesterday's silence, but with God's help, we can refuse to be silent today.



### Chapter 10 — When the Church Was Silent

There are moments in history when the greatest moral failure is not found only in the voices shouting hatred, but also in the voices that should have answered and did not. Evil certainly bears responsibility for what it does, but history also forces us to examine those who recognized what was happening, understood that something was wrong, possessed a voice that others respected, and nevertheless chose silence. For the Church, this is an especially difficult question because pastors and Christian leaders are called to be shepherds. A shepherd is not merely responsible for feeding the flock when the pasture is peaceful. A shepherd is also responsible for recognizing danger, warning those entrusted to his care, and standing when others are threatened. The

question confronting the Church is therefore not simply what Christians believed about the Jewish people during periods of rising antisemitism. We must also ask what Christian leaders did when hatred became visible and speaking against it became uncomfortable.

Silence is rarely announced as a moral decision. Few pastors stand before their congregations and declare that they have decided to ignore injustice. Silence usually arrives through explanations that appear reasonable. The issue is too political. The congregation is divided. Some members may leave. Important donors may become upset. The pastor does not know enough about the subject. Speaking might create controversy. The church should concentrate on the Gospel. Someone else is better qualified to address it. Perhaps the situation will calm down on its own. Each explanation may contain an element of truth, and there are certainly occasions when wisdom requires patience rather than immediate public commentary. A pastor does not need to speak on every political controversy, social-media dispute, election, protest, or international crisis. Silence can sometimes be prudent. The danger begins when prudence becomes an excuse for avoiding moral responsibility.

There is a difference between refusing to comment on an issue because the facts are uncertain and refusing to speak because the truth is inconvenient. There is a difference between waiting until reliable information is available and waiting because we fear the reaction of the congregation. There is a difference between pastoral wisdom and pastoral self-protection. Christian leaders must be honest enough to recognize that distinction, particularly when hatred is directed against a recognizable group of people. When Jewish neighbors are threatened because they are Jewish, when synagogues require increased security, when Jewish students are intimidated, when conspiracy theories about Jews spread openly, or when language that once would have been recognized as antisemitic becomes socially acceptable, the Church cannot indefinitely hide behind the statement that the subject is controversial.

Hatred does not become morally ambiguous merely because confronting it is unpopular.

History teaches us that persecution rarely begins at its final stage. It develops gradually. Before people are physically attacked, they are often verbally degraded. Before rights are removed, arguments are made explaining why those rights should not apply. Before businesses are destroyed, people are taught to view their owners with suspicion. Before neighbors are abandoned, they are first separated in the public imagination from the rest of society. They become “those people.” Their motives are questioned, their loyalty doubted, their influence exaggerated, and their suffering minimized. Eventually behavior that once would have shocked the conscience begins to appear ordinary.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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This is precisely why silence matters so much in the early stages. When hatred first appears, the cost of opposing it may be relatively small. A pastor may need to correct a false statement, challenge a stereotype, preach against collective blame, defend a threatened neighbor, or tell a congregation that certain language is incompatible with Christian conduct. Later, if hatred becomes institutionalized or violent, resistance may require far greater courage. History repeatedly demonstrates that waiting for the danger to become unmistakable can mean waiting until the cost of resisting it has become enormous.

The shepherd therefore has a responsibility to recognize the wolf before the wolf is standing in the middle of the flock.

Scripture provides many examples of people who were called to speak when silence would have been easier. The prophets were rarely sent to deliver messages that everyone wanted to hear. Nathan confronted David, even though David was king. Elijah confronted Ahab. Isaiah spoke against corruption. Jeremiah warned Jerusalem despite ridicule, opposition, and imprisonment. Amos challenged injustice even when his message was unwelcome. Their authority did not come from public approval. They spoke because faithfulness to God required them to speak.

This does not mean pastors should imagine themselves prophets every time they express a political opinion. That can produce another form of irresponsibility. Personal preferences should not automatically be presented as divine revelation. Yet the prophetic tradition establishes a principle that the Church should never forget: there are circumstances in which truth becomes costly, and the cost of speaking does not remove the obligation to speak.

Yeshua Himself repeatedly demonstrated this courage. He confronted hypocrisy even when powerful people were offended. He defended those who were treated with contempt. He challenged religious leaders when their conduct contradicted the purposes of God. He did not measure truth by whether it would preserve His popularity. Christian leadership modeled after Yeshua therefore cannot be reduced to maintaining institutional stability. A pastor is not merely the manager of a religious organization. He is a shepherd entrusted with people and with truth.

This is where the temptation toward silence becomes particularly dangerous. Modern churches can easily begin thinking institutionally. Will attendance decline? Will giving decrease? Will this create arguments? Will people complain? Will the church appear political? Will someone criticize the pastor online? These concerns are not always trivial. Pastors genuinely carry responsibility for congregational unity, financial stewardship, and the spiritual health of their churches. But there comes a point when protecting the institution can conflict with protecting the integrity of its witness.

The Church does not need more leaders whose highest priority is avoiding controversy.

It needs shepherds who know when controversy cannot honorably be avoided.

Consider what silence communicates to the person being targeted. Imagine a Jewish family living near a church. Antisemitic graffiti appears in the community. Threats are made against a synagogue. Jewish students begin reporting harassment. The pastor knows what is happening but says nothing because he does not want the church to become involved in a controversial subject. What does the Jewish family hear? They do not hear the pastor's internal reasoning. They hear silence.

Now imagine members of that pastor's congregation witnessing the same events. Some may already understand that antisemitism is wrong, but others may be uncertain. Perhaps they have encountered conspiracy theories online. Perhaps they have heard claims about Jews controlling governments, media,

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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or finance. Perhaps they have begun confusing legitimate criticism of Israel with hostility toward Jewish people. They look toward their spiritual leader for moral guidance, but nothing is said. Again, silence communicates something, even if the pastor never intended to communicate it.

Silence can be interpreted as permission.

That does not mean the silent person agrees with hatred. Often he does not. He may privately reject it completely. But public hatred combined with private disagreement leaves the public hatred unchallenged. Those promoting prejudice continue speaking while those who know better remain quiet. Eventually the loudest voices begin defining what the community considers normal.

This is one of the great lessons history offers the Church. Hatred does not require everyone to become a hater. It requires enough people to participate, enough institutions to cooperate, and enough others to remain passive.

This is why the question of silence during the Nazi period remains so painful for Christians. The historical situation was complex, and it would be unfair to describe every Christian or every church in the same way. Some Christians supported the regime. Some compromised with it. Some resisted particular policies while accepting others. Some were confused or afraid. Some acted courageously. Others paid with imprisonment or death for their resistance. We should not flatten these differences into a simple accusation against Christianity.

Yet the question remains: when the treatment of Jews became increasingly visible, why did more Christian leaders not speak?

The question becomes even more troubling when we remember that the early stages of persecution did not begin with extermination camps. They began with words, exclusions, boycotts, propaganda, legal restrictions, professional dismissals, public humiliation, and the gradual separation of Jews from the rest of society. The final horror was preceded by many smaller decisions, each of which made the next one easier.

This is one reason Christians must be cautious when looking backward and imagining that we know exactly what we would have done. It is easy to condemn silence after history has revealed the consequences. It is much harder to recognize the moment when courage is required while the outcome remains uncertain. Most people living through history do not know what the next chapter will contain.

The pastor in 1933 could not see 1945.

That is precisely the point.

Moral responsibility cannot depend upon knowing how terrible events will eventually become. A Christian does not need to foresee a death camp before deciding that humiliating Jewish neighbors is wrong. He does not need to know the future before rejecting racial hatred. He does not need to predict genocide before opposing the exclusion of people because of their ancestry.

We should resist evil because it is evil at the stage at which we encounter it.

This principle is enormously important for today's Church. Christians sometimes respond to warnings about antisemitism by saying that present circumstances are not comparable to the Holocaust. In most

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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situations that observation is obviously correct. A hateful slogan, an antisemitic social-media post, or vandalism against a synagogue is not Auschwitz, and careless historical comparisons can themselves distort the Holocaust. But the relevant lesson is not that every antisemitic incident inevitably leads to genocide. The lesson is that serious hatred should be confronted before anyone discovers how far it might go.

We do not wait for a fire to consume the entire house before deciding that smoke deserves attention.

Pastors therefore need discernment. Not every criticism of Israel is antisemitism, as we have already established. Not every protest is an expression of hatred. Not every offensive statement represents an approaching catastrophe. Christian leaders should avoid alarmism just as they should avoid complacency. The goal is not to make congregations afraid. The goal is to teach them to recognize the difference between political disagreement and prejudice, between criticism and collective blame, between debate and intimidation.

Once that distinction is clear, silence becomes harder to justify.

If a synagogue in our community is threatened because it is Jewish, the issue is no longer an abstract debate about Middle Eastern politics. If Jewish children are afraid to attend school because of threats, the issue is no longer merely political. If a Jewish student is told that he must answer for actions taken by Israel, collective blame has entered the conversation. If conspiracy theories about Jewish control are circulating among Christians, the pastor has a responsibility to correct them. If Holocaust denial appears within a congregation, silence is not neutrality.

Pastors teach by what they refuse to tolerate as well as by what they preach.

This is one of the reasons pastoral courage matters. The shepherd sets moral boundaries for the flock. If racism is expressed openly, a pastor should make clear that it contradicts Christian teaching. If hatred toward Muslims appears, the pastor should confront it. If contempt for Palestinians appears, it should be challenged. If antisemitism appears, it should be challenged with the same clarity. Moral consistency strengthens Christian witness because it demonstrates that our principles do not change according to the identity of the victim.

Standing against antisemitism therefore does not require pastors to endorse every Israeli policy. It does not require the Church to adopt a political party's platform. It does not require Christians to deny Palestinian suffering. It requires something much simpler and much deeper: when people are hated because they are Jewish, Christians should refuse to participate and refuse to remain indifferent.

The distinction is important because fear of appearing political is one of the most common reasons churches avoid difficult subjects. Pastors rightly recognize that congregations contain people with different political opinions. A church should not become the religious branch of a political party. The pulpit should not be used to dictate how Christians must vote on every issue. Yet there is a difference between partisan politics and moral teaching. The command to love one's neighbor is not partisan. The prohibition against false witness is not partisan. Condemning racial hatred is not partisan. Protecting people from intimidation because of their religious or ethnic identity is not partisan.

Sometimes moral questions become politicized precisely because society is arguing about them. That does not relieve the Church of its responsibility to think biblically.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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If every issue that becomes politically controversial is removed from Christian teaching, then politics has effectively gained veto power over the pulpit.

That cannot be the standard.

Another reason leaders remain silent is fear of division. Pastors know that a statement about Israel, antisemitism, war, or the Middle East can generate strong reactions. Some congregants may accuse the pastor of being too pro-Israel, while others may accuse him of not being supportive enough. Some may insist that Palestinian suffering receive greater attention. Others may believe any criticism of Israel is dangerous. In such an environment, silence can seem like the safest option.

But pastoral leadership is not the art of ensuring that no one is ever uncomfortable.

A good shepherd seeks unity, but biblical unity is not achieved by refusing to teach difficult truths. Sometimes unity requires helping believers disagree without hatred. A pastor can say that Christians may hold different opinions concerning Israeli government policies while agreeing that antisemitism is wrong. He can affirm Israel's right to security while insisting upon the humanity of Palestinians. He can condemn terrorism while also mourning civilian suffering. He can teach covenant theology without turning every contemporary political decision into prophecy.

Such teaching does not create confusion. It teaches maturity.

The pastor's responsibility is not to tell the congregation what political opinion to hold on every matter. It is to provide biblical principles by which believers can evaluate difficult matters themselves.

Another temptation toward silence arises from the belief that speaking will not accomplish anything. What difference will one sermon make? What difference will one statement from a church make? What difference will it make if a pastor contacts a local rabbi after a synagogue is vandalized?

Perhaps more than we imagine.

To the person facing hatred, knowing that someone is willing to stand beside him can matter enormously. A pastor may not be able to eliminate antisemitism from society, but he can ensure that Jewish neighbors know where his congregation stands. A church cannot erase centuries of Christian-Jewish tension, but it can demonstrate through its conduct that friendship is real.

Small acts of courage accumulate just as small acts of silence accumulate.

Imagine what might happen if every church in a city contacted its neighboring synagogue after an antisemitic threat. Imagine pastors publicly telling their congregations that Jewish neighbors should never face hatred alone. Imagine Christians correcting antisemitic conspiracy theories when they hear them rather than quietly changing the subject. Imagine church members attending a community gathering after a synagogue is vandalized, not to evangelize or draw attention to themselves, but simply to stand beside their neighbors.

None of these actions requires political expertise.

They require neighborly courage.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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The same principle applies inside the Church. Antisemitism does not always enter Christian communities wearing an obvious uniform. Sometimes it appears through conspiracy theories. Sometimes it hides inside careless theology. Sometimes it emerges through social media posts shared without thought. Sometimes it appears in jokes or stereotypes. Sometimes it hides behind exaggerated claims about Jewish influence. Sometimes legitimate criticism of Israel gradually becomes hostility toward Jews.

Pastors who recognize these patterns should not wait until they become dominant before addressing them.

Correction is easier before prejudice becomes identity.

Once someone has built an entire worldview around conspiracy, correction becomes difficult because every challenge can be interpreted as proof that the conspiracy is powerful. Churches therefore need teaching before crisis comes. Congregations should understand the Jewish roots of Christianity, the dangers of collective guilt, the history of Christian antisemitism, the difference between Israel and Jewish people throughout the world, and Paul's warning against boasting over the natural branches.

Prevention is part of shepherding.

There is another kind of silence that deserves examination: the silence that occurs when Christians privately care but publicly calculate. A leader may know what should be said but ask whether speaking will damage his reputation, ministry, platform, finances, or influence. At that moment leadership becomes a test of priorities.

What is influence for if it disappears when using it becomes costly?

A pastor who has spent years earning the trust of a congregation possesses something valuable. His words matter. People listen because he has walked with them through births, marriages, illnesses, funerals, celebrations, disappointments, and crises. That moral capital should not be squandered recklessly, but neither should it be preserved forever like money locked in a vault. There are moments when influence exists precisely so that it can be spent in defense of truth.

This is where the contrast between the shepherd and the hired hand becomes important. In John 10, Yeshua describes the hired hand who sees the wolf coming and abandons the sheep because the sheep are not his own. The good shepherd acts differently because he cares for the flock. The image concerns Yeshua Himself in its fullest meaning, but the principle of shepherding remains powerful for Christian leadership. The shepherd moves toward danger rather than away from it.

Pastoral courage does not mean recklessness. It does not mean shouting louder than everyone else or speaking before the facts are known. Courage can be quiet. It may look like a carefully prepared sermon. It may involve correcting a respected church member privately. It may mean calling a rabbi after a threat against the synagogue. It may mean refusing to allow antisemitic literature to circulate in a congregation. It may mean telling a friend that a conspiracy theory he has repeated is false. It may mean standing publicly with people whose theology differs profoundly from ours because they are being targeted by hatred.

Courage is not measured by volume.

It is measured by faithfulness.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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History also reminds us that silence affects the credibility of Christian witness. If Christians tell Jewish people that we love them because Yeshua loves them, but disappear when they are threatened, what does our declaration of love mean? If we speak enthusiastically about Israel in prophecy but remain silent when a synagogue down the street is vandalized, Jewish neighbors may reasonably question whether our concern is actually for them or merely for our theology.

Jewish people are not illustrations in a Christian prophecy chart.

They are people.

They are neighbors.

They have names, families, fears, memories, disagreements, beliefs, hopes, and stories.

Christian concern for Israel should therefore produce concern for actual Jewish people. Otherwise our theology risks becoming detached from human beings.

This is where history confronts the Church most sharply. During periods of persecution, there were Christians who spoke and Christians who remained silent. Those who spoke did not always stop the persecution. Some failed. Some suffered. Some died. But their witness survived because they demonstrated that Christian conviction could produce courage rather than conformity.

We remember people such as Corrie ten Boom not because she solved the problem of antisemitism but because when Jewish people were in danger, she and her family made a decision.

They would not remain spectators.

That decision cost them dearly.

Most pastors today will never face anything approaching that level of danger. For many of us, the cost of speaking may be criticism, an angry email, an uncomfortable meeting, a social-media argument, or the departure of someone from the congregation. We should be careful before comparing such inconveniences with the risks faced by people who resisted totalitarian regimes.

But the principle remains.

Courage must be practiced before it is desperately needed.

A pastor who cannot risk an angry email may struggle when the cost becomes greater. A congregation never taught to resist prejudice may not suddenly discover courage when society becomes more hostile. Character is formed gradually, both in individuals and communities.

The Church should therefore prepare believers not merely to recognize antisemitism but to respond to it. Teach them not to forward conspiracy theories. Teach them to verify claims before sharing them. Teach them not to hold Jewish neighbors responsible for Israel. Teach them how to disagree with Israeli policies without demonizing Jews. Teach them to recognize Holocaust distortion. Teach them that standing beside Jewish neighbors does not require abandoning concern for Palestinians. Teach them that courage and compassion are not competing virtues.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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Above all, teach them that silence is also a choice.

We often imagine moral decisions as choices between doing something good and doing something evil. Many of history's most important moral decisions, however, were choices between action and inaction. Do I speak or remain quiet? Do I intervene or walk away? Do I correct the lie or allow it to circulate? Do I stand beside the person being targeted or convince myself that someone else will?

The priest and the Levite in Yeshua's parable of the Good Samaritan are not described as attacking the wounded man. They passed by.

That is what makes the parable so uncomfortable.

They did not create the man's suffering. They simply encountered suffering and chose not to become involved.

The Samaritan chose differently.

For the Church, perhaps that is one of the most important lessons. We may not have created the hatred confronting our Jewish neighbors. We may not have written the antisemitic message, painted the swastika, threatened the synagogue, or spread the conspiracy theory. But once we see what is happening, a question remains: will we pass by?

History cannot answer that question for us.

The generation before us cannot answer it.

Our church traditions cannot answer it.

Each generation of Christians must answer for itself.

There may come moments when speaking costs us something. We may be misunderstood. We may be accused of taking sides. We may lose approval. We may discover that some people prefer a pastor who never challenges them. Yet Christian leadership cannot be governed entirely by the avoidance of discomfort.

The shepherd must sometimes stand where the sheep would rather he did not stand.

This does not mean speaking carelessly. Pastors should know the facts, distinguish antisemitism from legitimate criticism, acknowledge Palestinian humanity and suffering, refuse partisan propaganda, and avoid exaggeration. Moral courage without truth can become recklessness. But truth without courage can become silence.

The Church needs both.

We cannot return to the moments when Christians of previous generations remained silent. We cannot stand in their pulpits, rewrite their sermons, challenge their congregations, or knock on the doors of Jewish families who needed friends. History does not permit us to edit yesterday.

But history can teach us how to live today.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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It can teach us that hatred should be confronted before it becomes normal, that stereotypes should be challenged before they become convictions, that neighbors should be defended before they become victims, and that shepherds should speak before silence becomes complicity.

The question facing the Church is therefore not simply, “What would we have done then?”

That question is too easy because we already know how the story ended.

The harder question is, “What will we do now?”

What will we do when Jewish neighbors tell us they are afraid? What will we do when antisemitic conspiracy theories appear among Christians? What will we do when a synagogue in our community is threatened? What will we do when criticism of Israel becomes collective hatred of Jews? What will we do when speaking is inconvenient, when the congregation is divided, or when silence would be safer?

Those questions reveal whether we have truly learned from history.

The Church does not honor the courageous Christians of the past merely by telling their stories. We honor them by practicing the courage they demonstrated. We do not honor the victims of antisemitism merely by remembering them. We honor them when their memory changes how we respond to hatred in our own generation.

There may be moments when the Church must speak even though speaking is uncomfortable.

There may be moments when the pastor must stand even though standing is costly.

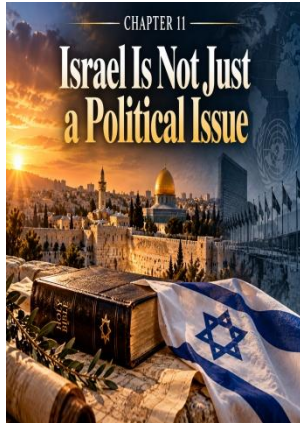
There may be moments when the shepherd must refuse silence because the wolf is already approaching.

When those moments come, may the Church remember what history has taught us. May we remember those who spoke, those who stood, those who opened their doors, and those who refused to abandon their neighbors. May we also remember the terrible cost of waiting too long.

We cannot change the silence of yesterday. We cannot undo what happened when voices that should have spoken remained quiet. But the silence of tomorrow has not yet been written.

That decision belongs to us.

We cannot change yesterday's silence, but with God's help, we can refuse to be silent today.



### Chapter 11 — Israel Is Not Just a Political Issue

For many Christians, the word Israel immediately brings politics to mind. We think about elections, prime ministers, political parties, military operations, settlements, borders, terrorism, peace negotiations, the Palestinians, Iran, the United Nations, or the latest crisis in the Middle East. News reports reinforce this perspective because Israel most often appears on our television screens when something has happened politically or militarily. As a result, Christians can gradually begin to think about Israel primarily as a geopolitical problem that must be analyzed, defended, criticized, or solved.

Those questions are real and important. The modern State of Israel is a nation governed by human beings, and its political decisions deserve the same careful examination applied to the decisions of other nations. Christians do not honor Israel by pretending that every Israeli government is correct, every Israeli politician is wise, or every Israeli policy is beyond criticism. We have already established that biblical support for Israel does not require political blindness. Yet an equally serious error occurs when Christians move in the opposite direction and reduce Israel entirely to politics.

For Christians, Israel cannot be understood only through newspapers, television reports, political parties, military briefings, or diplomatic negotiations. Long before there was a modern Israeli parliament, there was Abraham. Long before there was a prime minister, there was Moses. Long before there were debates about modern borders, there were biblical covenants. Long before Israel became a subject at the United Nations, Israel was a subject in the Word of God. The Christian discussion of Israel therefore begins somewhere deeper than politics. It begins with Scripture.

The biblical story of Israel begins not with a political movement but with the call of Abraham. In Genesis 12, God calls Abram to leave his country and promises to make of him a great nation. God promises blessing, a great name, and a purpose extending far beyond Abraham himself: “in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” That promise becomes foundational to the biblical story. In Genesis 15, God confirms His covenant with Abraham and speaks specifically about his descendants and the land. In Genesis 17, the covenant is described as an everlasting covenant. The promises are then reaffirmed to Isaac and Jacob. Jacob receives the name Israel, and his descendants become the people of Israel.

Before Israel was a modern state, therefore, Israel was a biblical people. Before Israel possessed a parliament, an army, political parties, or internationally disputed borders, Israel possessed a covenantal identity within Scripture. Christians may disagree about precisely how Old Testament promises should be understood in relation to the modern State of Israel. Some see the establishment of Israel in 1948 as having significant prophetic meaning, while others are more cautious about drawing direct lines between biblical prophecy and modern political events. Those disagreements should be discussed seriously and respectfully. Yet whatever position one takes concerning modern prophecy, Christians cannot remove Israel from the biblical story without removing something fundamental from Christianity itself. Israel is woven throughout the Scriptures.

Scripture repeatedly identifies the Lord as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This language is not incidental. It anchors God's revelation within a particular historical story. The God of Scripture acts in history, makes promises, establishes covenants, calls people, judges sin, demonstrates mercy, and remains faithful to His word. This is one reason Israel raises a theological question far larger than contemporary politics: can God be trusted to keep His promises?

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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If God's covenant commitments disappear whenever His people fail, what does that teach us about the character of God? Israel certainly failed throughout biblical history. The prophets describe idolatry, injustice, rebellion, unbelief, and disobedience with remarkable honesty. Scripture does not romanticize Israel. Yet judgment never becomes evidence that God has forgotten His covenant. The prophets repeatedly speak of both judgment and restoration. Israel may be disciplined, scattered, and confronted because of sin, but God continues to identify Israel as the people with whom He established covenant.

This pattern becomes especially important when Christians reach Romans 9–11, where Paul confronts the question directly: “Hath God cast away his people?” His answer is unmistakable: “God forbid.” For Paul, Israel's unbelief creates a profound theological problem, but it does not prove that God has become unfaithful. Paul continues to speak of Israel as beloved “for the fathers' sakes” and declares that “the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.” Israel therefore raises a question that touches the foundation of Christian confidence. If God is faithful to His covenant promises even when human beings are unfaithful, then Israel becomes a testimony not merely to Jewish history but to the character of God Himself.

Christians sometimes speak about Israel as though it were a separate subject from Christianity, something that can be studied if one happens to be interested in prophecy or Middle Eastern affairs. Yet Christianity cannot be understood properly without Israel because the Christian faith emerged from within Israel's story. The Scriptures Yeshua read were the Scriptures of Israel. The God He addressed was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The feasts He observed belonged to Israel. The prophets He quoted were Israel's prophets. The city toward which His ministry moved was Jerusalem. Yeshua was not a European Christian who happened to visit the Middle East. He was Jewish. He was born into a Jewish family, circumcised according to Jewish practice, presented at the Temple, attended synagogue, celebrated Jewish festivals, quoted the Torah and the Prophets, and was called Rabbi by His disciples. His ministry took place largely among the Jewish people in the land of Israel.

When Christians forget this, something strange happens. We can begin treating Jewish identity as though it belongs outside Christianity even though the One at the center of our faith entered history as a Jew. The Jewish identity of Yeshua is not a minor historical detail. It connects the New Testament directly to the covenantal story that preceded it.

The same is true of the earliest followers of Yeshua. Peter was Jewish, John was Jewish, James was Jewish, and Paul was Jewish. The first believers in Yeshua were Jewish, and the earliest debates recorded in the book of Acts were not debates about whether Jews could become Christians. The surprising question was whether Gentiles could enter the community of believers without first becoming Jews. That fact alone should transform how Christians think about their origins.

Christianity did not begin as a Gentile religion that later developed an interest in Jews. It began as a Jewish Messianic movement centered upon the conviction that the promised Messiah of Israel had come and that through Him the blessing promised to Abraham was extending to the nations. The entrance of Gentiles was extraordinary precisely because they had previously stood outside Israel's covenantal privileges. Paul reminds Gentile believers in Ephesians 2 that they had been “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise.” Through Messiah they had been “made nigh.” Paul does not describe Gentile believers as people who had always possessed these privileges. They were brought near.

This is the same theological movement represented by the olive tree in Romans 11. The wild branches are grafted into an existing tree. They receive nourishment from a root they did not create. This is not

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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primarily political language. It is covenantal language, and it should shape the way Gentile Christians understand their relationship to Israel and the Jewish people.

When Christians discuss Israel, therefore, we are ultimately discussing something about God's faithfulness. This does not mean that every event in modern Israel is the direct fulfillment of a biblical prophecy. Christians should be cautious about confidently attaching chapter and verse to every election, military operation, diplomatic agreement, or political development. Scripture deserves more careful treatment than that. Yet neither should Christians conclude that because prophecy can be misused, Israel has no continuing theological significance. Paul did not respond to Israel's unbelief by declaring the subject irrelevant. He devoted Romans 9, 10, and 11 to the question. His anguish is personal, his theology is careful, and his warning to Gentiles is direct.

Paul writes, "Boast not against the branches." Why would Gentile believers need such a warning if Israel had become theologically meaningless? Paul tells the Gentile believer, "thou bearest not the root, but the root thee." The Church therefore does not stand independently of Israel's story. The patriarchs, covenants, Scriptures, promises, prophets, and Messiah form the historical and theological soil from which Christianity grew. This realization should produce humility rather than superiority.

Israel also raises unavoidable questions about biblical prophecy. The Hebrew prophets repeatedly speak about Israel's judgment, scattering, preservation, return, restoration, Jerusalem, and the nations. Christians disagree about how particular prophetic passages should be interpreted and how they relate to the modern State of Israel. Those disagreements have produced different theological approaches, but the existence of disagreement does not justify ignoring the passages. Christians should read Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Amos, Zechariah, and the other prophets carefully. We should ask what their words meant to their original audiences, what promises were fulfilled historically, what elements may have a later or greater fulfillment, and how the New Testament uses those promises.

We should avoid two opposite mistakes. One is turning every newspaper headline into prophecy. The other is reading prophetic passages concerning Israel and automatically assuming that Israel can no longer mean Israel. Responsible interpretation requires patience. When Ezekiel speaks of Israel, when Jeremiah speaks of Israel, when Zechariah speaks of Jerusalem, or when Paul speaks of his "kinsmen according to the flesh," we should allow the biblical text to establish its own categories before imposing ours upon it.

Nowhere is the difference between politics and biblical theology more obvious than Jerusalem. To the modern world, Jerusalem is one of the most politically sensitive cities on earth. Questions concerning sovereignty, borders, holy sites, security, and competing national claims make it a constant subject of international diplomacy. All of that is real, but Jerusalem entered Scripture thousands of years before the modern political disputes surrounding it.

Jerusalem is associated with David. Solomon built the Temple there. The prophets spoke about it. Jewish exiles longed for it. The Psalms celebrate it. Yeshua wept over it. He was crucified and raised in its vicinity. The earliest believers gathered there, and the Gospel began moving outward from Jerusalem. The city also appears in biblical expectations concerning the future. A Christian therefore cannot look at Jerusalem only as disputed real estate. Jerusalem is part of the biblical story and the biblical imagination.

When Psalm 122 says, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem," Christians are encountering something far older than today's political arguments. Jerusalem belongs to the story through which God revealed His purposes. This does not answer every modern political question concerning the city. Scripture is not a substitute for responsible diplomacy or careful analysis of contemporary claims. It does remind Christians, however, that Jerusalem cannot be reduced to the politics of the present moment.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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Reducing Israel to politics also creates another danger: Jewish people themselves can become political symbols. A Jewish person living in Toronto, New York, London, Paris, or Melbourne may suddenly be viewed primarily through the lens of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Instead of being encountered as a neighbor, colleague, doctor, teacher, shopkeeper, student, friend, or fellow citizen, the person becomes “a Jew” who is expected to explain Israel. That is profoundly unfair.

A Jewish person should not need to defend an Israeli prime minister before being treated with respect. A Jewish student should not be required to explain an Israeli military operation. A synagogue should not become the target of anger over a decision made by the Israeli cabinet. When we reduce Jewish identity to Israeli politics, we stop seeing people and begin seeing representatives of a political controversy. Christians should resist that temptation. Jewish people existed long before the modern State of Israel, and Jewish identity encompasses religion, ancestry, culture, history, family, language, tradition, memory, and peoplehood. Israel is deeply important to many Jews, but Jewish identity cannot be reduced to the actions of an Israeli government.

At the same time, Christians should resist the opposite temptation of turning modern Israel into a purely theological symbol. Israel is also a real country inhabited by real people. They go to work, raise children, attend universities, operate businesses, vote in elections, argue about politics, serve in the military, worship, protest, celebrate holidays, worry about mortgages, sit in traffic, disagree about religion, and debate what kind of nation Israel should be. Israeli Jews do not all think alike. Secular and religious Israelis can see the world very differently, and political divisions within Israel can be intense. Arab citizens of Israel, Druze, Christians, Muslims, Bedouins, and other communities add further complexity to Israeli society.

Christians should therefore be cautious about creating an imaginary Israel that exists only in sermons. Biblical theology should help us see Israel more clearly, not cause us to ignore the actual people who live there. Loving Israel does not mean turning Israelis into characters in our prophetic expectations. They are human beings, not pieces on an end-times chessboard.

The same principle must apply to Palestinians. If Israel is reduced entirely to politics, Palestinians can also become symbols rather than people. Christians may begin seeing them only as opponents of Israel, security threats, victims, or components of a theological argument. Palestinians are people with families, communities, histories, churches, mosques, businesses, schools, fears, aspirations, and political disagreements of their own. Palestinian Christians in particular remind the global Church that the Middle East cannot be divided into simplistic categories in which every Christian belongs to one side and every Palestinian to another.

A biblical understanding of Israel should never require Christians to deny Palestinian humanity. We can affirm God's faithfulness to Israel while grieving Palestinian suffering. We can reject antisemitism while also rejecting hatred of Arabs or Muslims. We can recognize Israel's legitimate security concerns without concluding that every Israeli policy is beyond criticism. If our theology makes us less capable of seeing the humanity of another person, we should examine whether we have understood our theology correctly.

One of the most important distinctions Christians can make is the distinction between God's covenantal purposes involving Israel and the policies of a particular Israeli government. Governments change, prime ministers change, coalitions rise and fall, policies change, and political parties gain and lose influence. God's faithfulness is not dependent upon any particular political leader. This distinction protects Christians from an unhealthy tendency to baptize politics with biblical language.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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Supporting God's covenant faithfulness to Israel does not require us to declare every action of an Israeli government righteous. Scripture itself never treated Israel's kings that way. David was chosen by God, yet Scripture records David's sins. Solomon received extraordinary wisdom, yet Scripture records his failures. The prophets confronted kings of Israel and Judah repeatedly. Nathan did not believe that confronting David meant rejecting Israel. Elijah did not believe that confronting Ahab meant opposing God's covenant. Jeremiah did not cease loving Jerusalem because he warned Jerusalem of judgment. Biblical love has never required political flattery. Sometimes faithfulness requires correction.

This is one of the strongest reasons Christians should not be afraid to hold together biblical support for Israel and moral discernment concerning Israel. The Bible itself does this. Scripture tells Israel's story with extraordinary honesty. Abraham has moments of weakness, Jacob deceives, Moses fails, David sins grievously, Solomon turns toward idolatry, kings become corrupt, priests fail, the nation rebels, and the prophets issue severe warnings. Yet Scripture does not conclude that God's covenant has therefore become meaningless.

That pattern should shape Christian thinking today. We do not need to choose between pretending Israel is perfect and concluding Israel has no biblical significance. Those are false alternatives. Israel can matter biblically while Israeli leaders remain accountable morally. Indeed, the prophets demonstrate that covenant relationship increases moral responsibility rather than eliminating it.

Perhaps one reason Israel remains uncomfortable for some Christians is that Israel reminds the Church that Christianity did not begin with us. We inherited something. Gentile Christians did not invent the God of Scripture. We did not produce the prophets. We did not write the Psalms. We did not establish the Abrahamic covenant. We did not give the world the Hebrew Scriptures. We did not produce the Messiah according to the flesh. We were brought into a story that was already underway.

Paul's olive tree forces Gentile Christianity to remember this. The wild branch does not become the root. It is grafted into the tree and begins receiving nourishment from it. This is profoundly humbling. Christian history has sometimes forgotten that humility. The Church became powerful, culturally dominant, politically influential, and overwhelmingly Gentile. Eventually Christians could begin thinking of Jews as outsiders to a story that had originally come through them. Paul's warning cuts through that arrogance: "thou bearest not the root, but the root thee." Remembering Israel therefore helps the Church remember where it came from.

Ultimately, Israel matters to Christianity because Israel raises a question about God. Does God remember His promises? Does human failure cancel divine faithfulness? Does election disappear when the elect are disobedient? Does judgment mean abandonment? Can God discipline and still love? Can God scatter and still restore? Can unbelief exist alongside continuing covenantal purpose? Paul wrestles with these questions precisely because they matter beyond Israel. If God's word concerning Israel has simply failed, then something fundamental must be explained. Paul therefore begins this section of Romans by declaring, "Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect." The faithfulness of God is at stake.

For Christians, this should be deeply personal because our salvation also rests upon the faithfulness of God. We trust His promises, depend upon His mercy, and believe that what He has spoken He will fulfill. Israel therefore becomes more than a theological curiosity. Israel becomes a testimony to the seriousness with which God regards His word.

Christians should certainly learn about modern Israel. We should understand its political system, security challenges, relationship with Palestinians, regional threats, internal debates, religious divisions, and diplomatic relationships. We should listen to Israelis and Palestinians rather than assuming we already

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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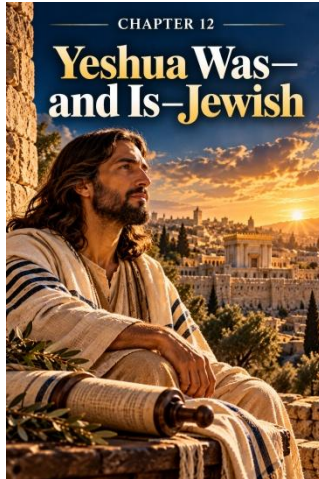
understand their experiences. We should distinguish facts from propaganda and avoid allowing partisan narratives to replace careful thinking. Yet we must never imagine that understanding Israeli politics means we have understood Israel.

Israel existed in Scripture before it existed in today's headlines. Israel is connected to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, the prophets, Jerusalem, the covenants, the Scriptures, the apostles, and Yeshua Himself. When Christians speak about Israel, therefore, we are not merely discussing a modern country on the eastern Mediterranean. We are touching a story that runs through the Bible from Genesis into the New Testament. We are speaking about covenant and promise, judgment and restoration, the Jewish people and the roots of Christianity, the Jewish identity of Yeshua and the character of the God who makes promises and keeps them.

The next time Israel appears in the news, Christians should certainly ask political questions. What happened? Why did it happen? Was the decision wise? Was it just? What are the consequences? What are Israelis saying? What are Palestinians saying? What facts are established, and what remains disputed? Those are legitimate questions, and responsible Christians should not be afraid of them. But we should also remember that the biblical question is larger.

Long after today's politicians are gone, the words of Scripture will remain. Long after today's political parties have changed, God's covenant will still confront us with questions about His faithfulness. Long after today's headlines have been forgotten, Christians will still open a Bible whose story moves through Abraham and Israel, Jerusalem and the prophets, and reaches its center in Yeshua the Jewish Messiah before carrying the blessing promised to Abraham outward to the nations.

Israel is political because Israel is a modern nation living in a difficult and contested region of the world, but Israel is not just a political issue. For the Christian, Israel is also biblical, historical, theological, covenantal, and deeply connected to the identity of our Messiah and the origins of our faith. If we see Israel only through politics, we will see only a fraction of the picture. To understand why Israel matters to the Church, we must look beyond the headlines and return to the Scriptures.



### Chapter 12 — Yeshua Was—and Is—Jewish

Christians know that Yeshua was Jewish. The statement is so familiar that we can repeat it without stopping to consider what it actually means. We see paintings of Him, read His words, sing songs about Him, preach sermons about Him, and confess Him as Messiah, Savior, Lord, and King. Yet after nearly two thousand years of predominantly Gentile Christianity, it is surprisingly easy to imagine Yeshua apart from the Jewish world into which He was born. We can unconsciously separate Him from Abraham, from Israel, from the Torah and the Prophets, from the synagogue, from the feasts, from Jerusalem, and from the Jewish people among whom He lived. When that happens, we may still worship Yeshua sincerely, but we risk forgetting the historical and biblical identity of the One we worship.

Yeshua did not simply happen to be born among Jewish people. He entered a story that Scripture had been telling for generations. Matthew begins his Gospel by identifying Him as “the son of David, the son of Abraham.” Those words immediately locate Yeshua within Israel's covenantal history. Abraham takes us back to the promises of Genesis. David takes us to the royal covenant and the expectation of a coming King. Before Matthew tells us about Bethlehem, the wise men, the Sermon on the Mount, the miracles, the crucifixion, or the resurrection, he places Yeshua within the story of Israel.

His Jewish identity begins with His family. His mother Miriam was Jewish. Joseph was Jewish. His relatives were Jewish. He was born into the people of Israel and into the line of David. Luke tells us that when He was eight days old, He was circumcised. His parents then brought Him to Jerusalem and presented Him at the Temple in accordance with the Law of Moses. They were not acting out an abstract religious ritual disconnected from their identity. They were living as a Jewish family within the covenantal world of Israel.

The childhood of Yeshua also unfolded within that world. Luke records that His parents went to Jerusalem every year for Passover. When Yeshua was twelve years old, He accompanied them and remained behind at the Temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking questions. The scene is deeply Jewish. The Temple is Jewish, the feast is Jewish, the teachers are Jewish, the Scriptures under discussion are Israel's Scriptures, and the young Yeshua sitting among them is Jewish. Christianity had not yet appeared as a separate Gentile religion. We are standing inside the continuing biblical story of Israel.

As Yeshua began His public ministry, He continued to live within Jewish life. Luke tells us that He came to Nazareth and, “as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day.” The synagogue was not an unfamiliar place that He occasionally visited. It was part of His normal religious environment. There He stood and read from the prophet Isaiah. The scroll placed into His hands contained the words of a Jewish prophet spoken to Israel centuries earlier. Yeshua's proclamation of His mission emerged from those Scriptures.

When Yeshua taught, His language was saturated with the Hebrew Scriptures. He quoted Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Hosea, Zechariah, and the Psalms. He spoke of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, and other figures from Israel's history. His teachings cannot be separated from that world because that world provides their vocabulary, imagery, categories, and expectations. When He spoke about the kingdom of God, Messiah, resurrection, righteousness, judgment, mercy,

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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covenant, commandments, the Temple, or Jerusalem, His hearers understood these ideas within Israel's biblical story.

Yeshua also participated in the Jewish feasts. The Gospels place important moments of His ministry around Passover, the Feast of Tabernacles, and other Jewish observances. John records Yeshua going up to Jerusalem for the feasts and teaching in the Temple. The Last Supper itself occurs in the setting of Passover. Christians rightly see profound Messianic meaning in these events, but we should not allow their Christian significance to erase their Jewish setting. The bread, the cup, Jerusalem, Passover, sacrifice, redemption, and deliverance all emerge from Israel's story.

Even the title Messiah is Jewish before it is Christian. The English word Christ comes from the Greek *Christos*, corresponding to the concept of the Anointed One, the Messiah. When Christians call Yeshua “Jesus Christ,” we are not using Christ as though it were His surname. We are confessing Him as the promised Messiah. The expectation of Messiah did not originate in Rome, Athens, Europe, or later Christian civilization. It emerged from the Scriptures and hopes of Israel.

This becomes particularly important when we consider the way Christians sometimes imagine the relationship between Yeshua and Judaism. Because Yeshua confronted certain religious leaders, some readers can begin to picture Him as standing outside Judaism and condemning Judaism from a Christian perspective. But that places later history back into the Gospel accounts. Yeshua's disputes with Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, and other leaders occurred within the Jewish world of His day. Jewish teachers debated Scripture, law, interpretation, purity, resurrection, Temple practice, and religious authority. Yeshua's strongest confrontations should therefore not be transformed into a license for Christians to condemn Jewish people collectively.

This is especially important when reading passages in which the English text uses expressions such as “the Jews.” Careless preaching has sometimes taken conflicts involving particular Jewish leaders or groups in the first century and turned them into accusations against Jewish people everywhere. That is both historically careless and spiritually dangerous. Yeshua was Jewish. His disciples were Jewish. The earliest believers were Jewish. The crowds listening to Him were largely Jewish. The people who welcomed Him into Jerusalem were Jewish. The women who followed Him were Jewish. Joseph of Arimathea was Jewish. The apostles who proclaimed His resurrection were Jewish. A Gospel account describing conflict among Jewish people cannot honestly be transformed into a story of Christians standing against Jews.

Nowhere has this failure been more damaging than in the way the crucifixion has sometimes been presented. For centuries Jewish people were accused collectively of killing Christ. The accusation became one of the most destructive ideas in Christian-Jewish history. Jewish communities living many centuries after the crucifixion were treated as though they personally carried guilt for Yeshua's death. Such collective guilt cannot be reconciled with the Gospel itself.

The crucifixion involved identifiable historical actors, including Roman political authority and certain Jewish leaders of that particular period, but the New Testament's theological explanation reaches far beyond assigning blame to an ethnic people. Yeshua gives His life willingly. His death is understood within the purposes of God and the problem of human sin. If Christians believe that He died for the sins of the world, then the appropriate response to the cross is repentance and gratitude, not ethnic accusation. The cross should humble Christians, not provide an excuse for hostility toward the people from whom Yeshua came.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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There is something profoundly contradictory about Christians despising Jewish people while worshipping a Jewish Messiah. Imagine a Christian kneeling in prayer before Yeshua while harboring contempt for Jews. Imagine reading the Psalms, quoting Isaiah, preaching from Moses, celebrating the apostles, singing about Jerusalem, and then repeating stereotypes about Jewish people. Something has gone terribly wrong. The Christian has embraced the treasures that came through Israel while developing hostility toward the people through whom those treasures came.

Paul reminds Gentile believers of precisely this danger in Romans 11. They have been grafted into the olive tree. They have received spiritual blessings connected to Israel's covenantal story, but Paul immediately warns them against arrogance: “Boast not against the branches.” He then adds, “thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.” The warning becomes even more powerful when we remember that Yeshua Himself came from Israel according to the flesh.

Paul states this directly in Romans 9 when speaking of his fellow Israelites. He writes that to them belong “the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises,” and that from them, “as concerning the flesh Christ came.” The Messiah came through Israel. This does not mean Israel possesses salvation apart from Messiah, nor does it diminish the universal scope of the Gospel. It means that God's plan of redemption unfolded through a particular people and a particular history before extending outward to all nations.

The Gospel therefore moves from Israel to the nations rather than appearing independently of Israel. Yeshua tells His disciples that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name among all nations, “beginning at Jerusalem.” The movement is significant. Jerusalem is not an embarrassing beginning that Christianity must outgrow. It is where the Gospel proclamation begins before moving outward.

The book of Acts follows exactly this pattern. The Holy Spirit comes upon Jewish disciples gathered in Jerusalem. Peter preaches there. Thousands of Jewish people respond. The earliest congregation develops within Jerusalem. The Gospel then moves through Judea, Samaria, and eventually toward the Gentile world. By the time Paul carries the message throughout the Roman Empire, Gentiles are entering in large numbers. What began within Israel becomes a blessing to the nations, echoing the promise given to Abraham centuries earlier.

As the centuries passed, however, something remarkable happened. The Church became overwhelmingly Gentile. The geographical and cultural center of Christianity moved away from Jerusalem. Greek and Latin became dominant Christian languages. Christianity spread through Europe and eventually throughout the world. Jewish believers became a small minority within a predominantly Gentile Church. Gradually the Jewish context of the New Testament could become less visible.

Artists portrayed Yeshua according to their own cultures. European artists often painted Him with European features. Churches developed traditions shaped by their own histories and societies. None of this automatically represented hostility toward Jews; cultures naturally express faith through familiar forms. The danger came when cultural representations began replacing historical memory. Yeshua could become so thoroughly absorbed into Gentile Christianity that Christians forgot He was Jewish at all.

Recovering the Jewish identity of Yeshua does not mean Christians must attempt to become Jewish. Paul did not tell Gentile believers that they had to become Jews in order to follow Messiah. Indeed, Acts 15 records an important dispute concerning precisely that question. Gentiles were welcomed as Gentiles. The Gospel did not require the nations to abandon their national and cultural identities and become ethnically Jewish. Unity in Messiah does not require uniformity.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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Yet neither should Gentile inclusion require Jewish erasure. The fact that Gentiles do not need to become Jews does not mean Yeshua must stop being Jewish in Christian understanding. It means that through the Jewish Messiah, people from every nation are invited into the blessings of God's redemptive purposes. The vision is not the disappearance of Jewish identity but the gathering of the nations around the Messiah of Israel.

This is why the title “King of the Jews” deserves greater attention than Christians sometimes give it. The Gospel accounts record that the title was placed above Yeshua at the crucifixion. It was intended in part as a Roman political designation and mockery, yet the Gospel writers preserve it because it contains a profound irony. The One being mocked as King of the Jews is indeed the Messiah of Israel. Christians worship Him as Lord of all, but His universal kingship does not erase the particular history through which He came.

There is another important point hidden within the title of this chapter. Yeshua not only **was** Jewish. He **is** Jewish.

Christians believe in the bodily resurrection. We do not believe Yeshua ceased to exist after the crucifixion or that His humanity was discarded when He rose from the dead. The risen Yeshua is the same Yeshua who was crucified. His resurrection affirms rather than erases His incarnation. The scars shown to His disciples testify to continuity between the crucified and risen Messiah.

This means we should be cautious about speaking of Yeshua's Jewishness as though it were merely a temporary feature of His earthly life. The New Testament continues to identify Him with David and Israel even when speaking about His exalted and future role. In Revelation, He is called “the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David.” His identity is not detached from Israel after the resurrection.

The Christian hope therefore centers upon a Jewish Messiah who has become the Savior of the world. There is no contradiction in that statement. In fact, it reflects the pattern announced to Abraham from the beginning: through the particular comes blessing to the universal. God chooses Abraham, and through Abraham the nations are blessed. God forms Israel, and through Israel comes the Messiah. The Messiah comes first within Israel's story, and through Him salvation is proclaimed to every nation, tribe, people, and tongue.

The particular does not prevent the universal. It becomes the means through which the universal blessing comes.

Understanding this should profoundly affect Christian attitudes toward Jewish people. It should not produce romanticism or the idea that Jewish people are morally superior to everyone else. Scripture certainly does not teach that. Nor should it cause Christians to abandon their conviction that Yeshua is Messiah. Christian friendship with Jewish people does not require Christians to stop being Christians. But it should make contempt for Jewish people impossible to reconcile with mature Christian faith.

How can we love the Jewish Messiah while despising Jews? How can we celebrate the apostles while treating their descendants with contempt? How can we read the Hebrew prophets every Sunday and then remain indifferent when Jewish neighbors are threatened? How can we sing songs about Jerusalem while ignoring a synagogue in our own city that needs support after an antisemitic attack? These are not merely historical questions. They are questions of Christian consistency.

Recognizing Yeshua's Jewishness should also change the way pastors teach Scripture. When preaching from the Gospels, pastors can explain the Jewish setting rather than treating it as irrelevant background.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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When Yeshua celebrates a feast, the congregation can learn what that feast meant. When He quotes the Hebrew Scriptures, the passage can be examined in its original context. When He debates religious leaders, the discussion can be situated within first-century Jewish life rather than presented as Christianity attacking Judaism. When Paul speaks about Israel, pastors can resist the temptation to redefine Israel before allowing Paul to make his argument.

Such teaching does more than improve biblical knowledge. It helps remove soil in which antisemitism has sometimes grown. Christians who understand that their Savior was Jewish, their apostles were Jewish, their Scriptures emerged from Israel, and their faith is rooted in Israel's story are less likely to imagine Jewish people as mysterious outsiders who stand completely apart from Christianity.

This understanding can also deepen Christian appreciation of the Gospel. Yeshua does not appear suddenly in Matthew without preparation. His coming stands at the culmination of promises, covenants, prophetic expectations, and centuries of biblical history. The Gospel becomes richer when we understand that story. Bethlehem matters because of David. Passover matters because of Exodus. Messiah matters because of Israel's prophetic hope. Jerusalem matters because of its biblical history. The cross is illuminated by the sacrificial language of Scripture. The resurrection fulfills hopes rooted in the prophets. The New Testament continually reaches backward into Israel's Scriptures because the story is connected.

The more Christians understand the Jewish world of Yeshua, the more clearly many parts of the New Testament come into focus. This does not require Christians to recreate first-century Judaism or to adopt every Jewish tradition. It simply requires us to read the Bible in the world in which God chose to reveal it.

There is also a pastoral dimension to this truth. Imagine what it means for a Jewish person to hear Christians speak lovingly about Yeshua while speaking contemptuously about Jews. From the Christian perspective, the contradiction may go unnoticed. From the Jewish perspective, it may be impossible to miss. History has given Jewish communities many reasons to be cautious when Christians speak about them. If Christians genuinely desire friendship, dialogue, and meaningful witness among Jewish people, acknowledging the Jewish identity of Yeshua is not a public-relations strategy. It is simply telling the truth about our own Messiah.

That truth should lead to humility. Christianity did not give Yeshua to the Jewish people. In historical terms, the Jewish people gave Yeshua to the nations. Christians believe, of course, that ultimately God gave His Son to the world, but the incarnation took place within Israel. The Messiah came through a Jewish mother, within a Jewish family, among a Jewish people, in the land associated with Israel's biblical story. The apostles who first proclaimed Him were Jews. The Scriptures they used to explain Him were Jewish Scriptures. The message that eventually reached Rome, Europe, Africa, Asia, the Americas, and the ends of the earth began in Jerusalem.

Gentile Christians therefore stand as recipients of extraordinary grace. We were invited into a story we did not begin. We were grafted into an olive tree we did not plant. We received Scriptures we did not write and promises whose foundations were laid long before our nations existed. Above all, we received a Messiah who came through Israel and who opened the blessing of Abraham to the nations.

That should never produce arrogance toward the Jewish people. It should produce gratitude.

The Church does not need to become Jewish in order to remember this. It simply needs to remember its Bible. When we read Scripture carefully, Israel is everywhere in the story. Abraham is there. Isaac is there. Jacob is there. Moses is there. David is there. Isaiah is there. Jeremiah is there. Jerusalem is there.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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The apostles are there. Paul is there. And at the center of the New Testament stands Yeshua of Nazareth, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham, the Messiah of Israel and Savior of the world.

The Jewish identity of Yeshua should therefore never be treated as a footnote to Christianity. It is part of the historical reality of the incarnation and part of the biblical story of redemption. The eternal Son entered human history not as an abstract man without ancestry, culture, language, history, or people. He came within a particular family, a particular people, and a particular covenantal story. Through that particular story, God's invitation of salvation has gone out to the entire world.

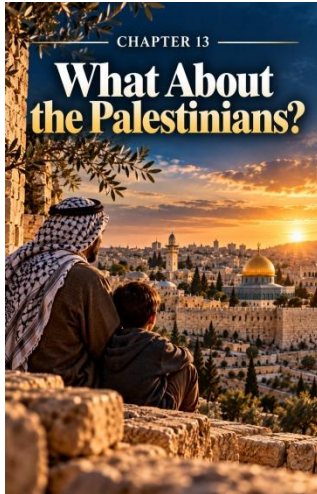
When Christians remember this, our relationship with the Jewish people should change. We may disagree profoundly about the identity of Yeshua. Most Jewish people do not accept the Christian confession that He is Messiah, while Christians cannot surrender that confession without surrendering the heart of their faith. Genuine friendship does not require pretending that this difference does not exist. But disagreement does not require contempt. Christian conviction does not require antisemitism. Faithfulness to Yeshua can never justify hatred toward the people from whom He came.

Perhaps the Church needs to look again at the Messiah we proclaim. Look at Him in Bethlehem. Look at Him being circumcised on the eighth day. Look at Him being presented at the Temple. Look at Him traveling to Jerusalem for Passover. Look at Him standing in the synagogue and reading Isaiah. Look at Him teaching from the Torah and the Prophets. Look at Him walking through Galilee among Jewish villages. Look at Him sitting with His disciples at Passover. Look at Him entering Jerusalem. Look at the inscription placed above His cross: “King of the Jews.” Then look at the risen Messiah whom Revelation calls the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Root of David.

The evidence is woven throughout the New Testament.

Yeshua was Jewish. Yeshua is Jewish.

And the Church cannot properly understand its Messiah while becoming indifferent or hostile toward the people from whom He came.



### Chapter 13 — What About the Palestinians?

Whenever Christians speak strongly about Israel, sooner or later an important question will be asked: What about the Palestinians? It is a legitimate question, and pastors should not be afraid of it. If our theology concerning Israel leaves people with the impression that Palestinian lives do not matter, something has gone wrong. Affirming God's covenantal purposes concerning Israel does not require Christians to become indifferent to Palestinian suffering. Believing that the Jewish people have a continuing place within God's purposes does not require us to ignore the grief of a Palestinian mother, the fear of a Palestinian child, or the suffering of a family caught in war. Biblical conviction and human compassion are not enemies.

Christians sometimes feel pressured to choose between two positions. On one side they are told that supporting Israel requires defending virtually everything Israel does. On the other side they are told that caring about Palestinians requires rejecting Israel's legitimacy or denying the Jewish people's historical connection to the land. Neither position provides an adequate biblical framework. Christians should be capable of holding more than one truth at the same time. We can affirm God's faithfulness to Israel and acknowledge Palestinian suffering. We can condemn terrorism and grieve for civilians killed in war. We can recognize Israel's need for security and still ask serious moral questions about how military power is used. We can reject antisemitism without becoming hostile toward Arabs or Muslims. We can care about Jewish children hiding from rockets while also caring about Palestinian children hiding from bombs. Compassion does not become less Christian because the person suffering belongs to the other side of a political conflict.

The starting point must be something more fundamental than politics. Human beings are created in the image of God. Genesis does not teach that only Jews bear God's image, nor does it teach that only Christians do. Palestinians, Israelis, Arabs, Jews, Muslims, Christians, and people of no religious faith possess human dignity because human worth ultimately comes from the Creator. Political identity does not determine whether a person deserves compassion. Nationality does not determine whether the death of a child should grieve us. The image of God comes before the political labels by which the world divides people.

This means Christians must learn to see individuals where political rhetoric often sees categories. It is easy to speak about "the Palestinians" as though millions of people formed a single mind with one political opinion, one religious conviction, and one attitude toward Israel. They do not. Palestinians are individuals and families. They include Muslims and Christians, religious and secular people, political activists and people who want little to do with politics. They disagree with one another, just as Israelis disagree with one another. Some hold deeply hostile views toward Israel. Others seek coexistence. Some have suffered directly because of terrorism, warfare, displacement, restrictions, or political decisions. Others have entirely different experiences. No single description can adequately capture every Palestinian life.

The same principle applies to Israelis and Jewish people. Israelis are not identical with their government. Jewish people throughout the world are certainly not identical with the Israeli government. An Israeli citizen may strongly support a government policy, oppose it, protest against it, or remain undecided. A Jewish person living in Canada may have no vote in an Israeli election and no influence whatsoever over

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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Israeli military policy. Yet political conflicts repeatedly encourage people to replace individuals with categories. Once that happens, collective blame becomes easier.

Christians must resist collective guilt wherever it appears. A Palestinian civilian should not automatically be treated as responsible for the actions of Hamas or another terrorist organization. An Israeli civilian should not automatically be treated as responsible for every action of the Israeli government. A Jewish student in Toronto should not be held responsible for a military decision made in Jerusalem. A Muslim family in Canada should not be treated as though it bears responsibility for an act of terrorism committed thousands of miles away. Moral responsibility belongs first to those who make decisions and commit actions.

This distinction becomes particularly important during war. Terrorist organizations may deliberately operate within civilian environments, and military forces may conduct operations in densely populated areas. The result can be morally and strategically complex, but one principle should remain clear: civilians are not interchangeable with combatants. The existence of terrorists within a population does not transform every person in that population into a terrorist. Children are not combatants simply because of where they were born. Families do not lose their humanity because armed organizations operate around them.

At the same time, compassion for civilians should never require Christians to minimize terrorism. Deliberately attacking civilians, murdering families, kidnapping hostages, or intentionally terrorizing communities cannot be excused because the perpetrators claim a political grievance. We should be capable of condemning such acts clearly while also refusing to treat an entire population as though it shares the guilt of those who committed them. Moral clarity requires both distinctions.

This is where political tribalism can become dangerous. Once we decide that one side represents everything good and the other represents everything evil, suffering itself begins to become political. We grieve when “our side” suffers but explain away the suffering of the other. Photographs of dead children become arguments. Casualty figures become weapons in political debates. Grief is filtered through ideology. Christians should resist this instinct. A child's death is tragic before it becomes politically useful to anyone.

Imagine two mothers. One is an Israeli mother who hears a warning siren and rushes her children toward a shelter, uncertain whether a rocket will strike nearby. The other is a Palestinian mother who hears explosions and gathers her children close, uncertain whether they will survive the night. Their politics may be different. Their histories may be different. Their understanding of the conflict may be completely different. Yet at that moment both mothers are experiencing something painfully human: the fear that they may lose their children.

A Christian should be able to look at both mothers and feel compassion.

That compassion does not tell us that every political claim is equally correct, every military action is morally equivalent, or every historical interpretation is equally accurate. Compassion is not the abandonment of moral judgment. It is the refusal to allow moral judgment to destroy our ability to recognize another person's humanity.

Yeshua repeatedly demonstrated this kind of compassion. He encountered individuals before categories. One of the most striking examples is His parable of the Good Samaritan. The power of the story depends partly upon the social and religious distance between Jews and Samaritans. Yeshua deliberately makes the unexpected person the one who stops, approaches the wounded man, binds his wounds, carries him to

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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safety, and pays for his care. The question becomes not simply, “Who belongs to my group?” but “Who is my neighbor?”

That question should trouble Christians whenever politics teaches us to limit compassion.

If a Palestinian child is suffering, the Christian response cannot simply be, “But what about terrorism?” Terrorism may be relevant to understanding how the suffering occurred, but it does not erase the child's humanity. In the same way, when an Israeli family has been murdered or taken hostage, the Christian response cannot simply be, “But what about occupation?” Political context may matter, but it does not make deliberate violence against civilians morally acceptable. Human suffering should not become an opportunity to explain why the victim somehow deserves less compassion.

The Hebrew Scriptures themselves repeatedly command concern for the vulnerable. Israel was instructed to remember the stranger because Israel knew what it meant to be a stranger. The prophets repeatedly condemn injustice, oppression, violence, corruption, and the mistreatment of the weak. These principles do not disappear when Christians discuss the modern Middle East. If we claim to care about biblical Israel, then we should also care about the biblical moral principles Israel's Scriptures teach.

This does not mean every modern political question has a simple biblical answer. Scripture does not provide a detailed contemporary peace agreement, draw every modern border, determine every security checkpoint, settle every property dispute, or tell a modern government precisely how to respond to every military threat. Christians should be cautious about claiming divine authority for political conclusions that require historical, legal, military, and diplomatic judgments beyond what a biblical passage directly addresses.

This humility is particularly important for Christians living thousands of miles away from the conflict. It is easy to form absolute opinions from a comfortable distance. Israelis and Palestinians live with consequences that outsiders do not. Israelis have experienced wars, terrorism, rocket attacks, hostage-taking, and the continuing question of national security in a hostile region. Palestinians have experienced war, displacement, military occupation, restrictions, economic hardship, loss of homes and loved ones, and profound uncertainty about their political future. These histories are not identical, and recognizing one does not require denying the other.

Christians should therefore learn before speaking. We should listen to Israelis without assuming every Israeli is simply repeating government propaganda. We should listen to Palestinians without assuming every Palestinian is sympathetic to terrorism. We should distinguish firsthand testimony from political messaging and verified information from social-media claims. The conflict is difficult enough without Christians adding misinformation to it.

Pastors have a particularly important responsibility because congregations often look to them for moral guidance. A pastor does not need to become an expert in Middle Eastern diplomacy, but he should model careful language. He should resist describing millions of people with sweeping statements. He should refuse rhetoric that dehumanizes Arabs, Palestinians, Muslims, Jews, or Israelis. He should distinguish political leadership from civilian populations and terrorist organizations from the people among whom they operate.

Language matters because dehumanization almost always begins with words. When people are described only as enemies, invaders, colonizers, terrorists, oppressors, occupiers, extremists, or obstacles, it becomes increasingly difficult to see them as human beings. Some of these terms may have legitimate

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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applications in specific political or legal contexts, but when an entire population is reduced to a label, individual humanity disappears.

Christians should be especially cautious because Scripture warns repeatedly about the power of the tongue. False witness does not become acceptable because the subject is political. Rumors do not become truth because they support our preferred side. Images should not be shared without knowing whether they are authentic. Statistics should not be repeated merely because they strengthen our argument. Christians should be people who care about truth even when the truth complicates the position we would prefer to defend.

Caring about Palestinians also requires Christians to remember Palestinian Christians. Their existence sometimes surprises Western believers because the conflict is often presented simply as Jews against Muslims. Yet Christian communities have existed in the region for many centuries. Palestinian Christians worship Yeshua, read the Scriptures, gather in churches, raise families, and wrestle with the same political and security realities surrounding their Muslim neighbors while possessing their own distinct religious identity.

Christians may disagree strongly with some Palestinian Christian theological or political perspectives, just as they may disagree with Israeli Jewish perspectives. Disagreement should not make their existence invisible. If the global Church claims to care about the body of Messiah, it should at least be willing to listen carefully when fellow believers describe their experiences.

At the same time, concern for Palestinians should never become an excuse for reviving old Christian hostility toward Jews. This danger is real. Political language can sometimes become a vehicle through which ancient prejudices return in modern clothing. Jewish people can once again be portrayed as uniquely cruel, secretly powerful, collectively guilty, or responsible for events far beyond their control. Christians should be alert whenever political criticism begins repeating patterns historically used against Jews.

The answer to Palestinian suffering is not antisemitism.

Just as the answer to Jewish suffering is not hatred of Palestinians.

Christians should reject the idea that compassion must operate like a scale, as though adding compassion to one side removes compassion from the other. Human compassion is not a limited resource. We do not need to care less about Jewish suffering in order to care more about Palestinian suffering. We do not need to ignore Palestinian suffering in order to stand against antisemitism.

This becomes particularly important when discussing God's covenant with Israel. Some Christians fear that acknowledging Palestinian suffering somehow weakens the biblical case for God's continuing purposes concerning Israel. It does not. God's faithfulness does not depend upon our pretending that everyone associated with Israel is always right. The Bible itself records Israel's failures with remarkable honesty. The prophets could affirm Israel's covenantal identity while condemning injustice within Israel. Their criticism did not prove that the covenant had disappeared. It demonstrated that covenant and moral accountability belong together.

Likewise, a Christian can believe that God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has not been forgotten while also believing that Palestinians should be treated with dignity and justice. These convictions are not contradictory. The God who keeps covenant is also the God who commands righteousness.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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Indeed, if Christians believe Israel has a particular biblical calling, that should never become an argument for lower moral expectations. Biblical election was never permission to disregard justice. Israel's prophets often argued precisely the opposite. Because Israel belonged to God, Israel was accountable to Him.

The same principle should shape Christian attitudes toward modern Israel. We can support Israel's right to exist while asking difficult questions about particular policies. We can recognize the historical persecution that helped create the urgency for Jewish national refuge while also recognizing that Palestinians have their own history of displacement and loss. We can understand why Israelis place enormous importance on security while understanding why Palestinians desire freedom, dignity, stability, and a future for their children.

None of this requires Christians to pretend that every political claim on either side is equally persuasive. Christians can reach different conclusions about borders, settlements, Palestinian statehood, security arrangements, Jerusalem, military strategy, and other political questions. Those are subjects requiring careful factual and moral analysis. The purpose of Christian compassion is not to predetermine every political answer. It is to ensure that whatever answer we reach does not require us to stop seeing human beings.

This is particularly important when discussing children. Children inherit conflicts they did not create. An Israeli child does not choose the geopolitical circumstances into which he is born. A Palestinian child does not choose them either. Neither child designed the borders, negotiated previous agreements, launched previous wars, established settlements, created terrorist organizations, ordered military operations, or wrote the competing historical narratives surrounding the conflict. Yet children often carry the consequences of decisions made generations before they were born.

What will the Church teach those children through its words?

Will Jewish children hear Christians speak as though their fears do not matter because we disapprove of an Israeli government? Will Palestinian children hear Christians speak as though their suffering does not matter because we support Israel? If so, we have allowed politics to overpower something fundamental in the Gospel.

Yeshua said, "Blessed are the peacemakers." Peacemaking is not the same as pretending there is no evil. Peace cannot be built upon denying terrorism, antisemitism, injustice, or suffering. Biblical peace is not sentimental. It requires truth. Yet truth without compassion easily becomes a weapon, while compassion without truth can become moral confusion. Christians are called to hold the two together.

Perhaps this is where the Church can offer something different from the political world. Politics often demands that we choose a camp and repeat its language. The Gospel allows us to refuse that pressure. We can say that Jewish people should not live in fear. We can say that Palestinians should not be dehumanized. We can say that terrorism is evil. We can say that civilian suffering matters. We can say that Israel has legitimate security concerns. We can say that Palestinians have legitimate human needs and aspirations. We can reject antisemitism and anti-Arab hatred in the same breath.

Pastors should teach congregations how to hold these truths together because the alternative is allowing political movements to disciple Christians in how they think about human beings. When political identity becomes stronger than biblical identity, believers can begin excusing behavior they would condemn if the other side committed it. Our moral standards should not change according to the flag carried by the person involved.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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The Church must also learn to pray differently. Christians who pray for Israel should pray for Palestinians. Christians who pray for Palestinian civilians should pray for Israelis. We should pray for Jewish families, Muslim families, Christian families, soldiers, hostages, the wounded, the displaced, political leaders, and those working for peace. We should pray for wisdom for those making decisions whose consequences may involve thousands of lives. We should pray for protection from terrorism and protection of innocent life. We should pray against hatred, vengeance, deception, and despair.

To pray this way is not political weakness. It is Christian consistency.

There is another reason this chapter belongs in a book written for pastors. Jewish people will notice how Christians speak about Palestinians, and Palestinians will notice how Christians speak about Jews. If our love for one people requires contempt for another, both will eventually recognize the contradiction. Christian witness becomes more credible when people discover that our convictions are strong enough to survive compassion.

We do not need to abandon our theology concerning Israel in order to care about Palestinians. We need to understand our theology deeply enough that it produces humility, justice, truth, and compassion. God's covenant faithfulness should make us trust Him, not become arrogant toward others. The olive tree of Romans 11 should produce humility, not superiority. Yeshua's Jewish identity should deepen our appreciation for the Jewish people, while Yeshua's command to love our neighbor should prevent that appreciation from becoming indifference toward anyone else.

The question "What about the Palestinians?" should therefore never be treated as an irritating interruption to Christian support for Israel. It is an opportunity to demonstrate what biblical conviction actually looks like. We can answer that Palestinian lives matter because human beings bear the image of God. Palestinian suffering should concern Christians because suffering should concern Christians. Palestinian civilians should not be treated as terrorists simply because terrorists operate among them. Palestinian children should not inherit moral guilt for actions they did not commit.

At the same time, caring about Palestinians does not require Christians to deny Jewish history, erase Israel's biblical significance, excuse terrorism, minimize antisemitism, or abandon belief in God's continuing purposes for Israel. Compassion does not require theological surrender.

Perhaps the question should therefore be turned around. Instead of asking whether Christians should care about Israel or Palestinians, we should ask why Christians believe they must choose whose humanity to recognize.

The Gospel does not force that choice upon us.

We can stand against antisemitism and against hatred of Palestinians. We can grieve an Israeli mother and a Palestinian mother. We can pray for Jerusalem and pray for Gaza. We can care about a frightened Jewish child and a frightened Palestinian child. We can defend Israel's existence without pretending Israel is perfect. We can acknowledge Palestinian suffering without turning Jewish people into villains. We can seek truth without surrendering compassion and practice compassion without surrendering truth.

Pastors should help their congregations reach that maturity. The Church should be a place where people learn that moral clarity does not require hatred and compassion does not require abandoning conviction. We can disagree about political solutions while agreeing that every human life has value before God.

So what about the Palestinians?

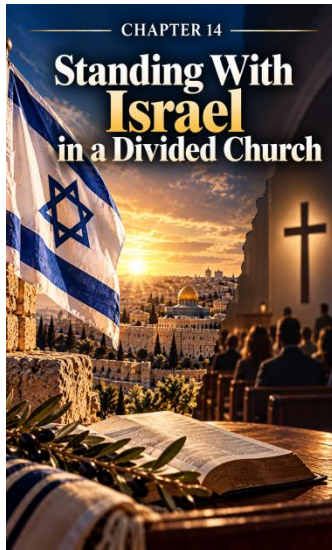
## Standing with Israel without Fear

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They are not an inconvenient footnote to the story of Israel. They are not merely a political problem to be solved, a population to be feared, or an argument to be answered. They are human beings. They are men and women, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, neighbors and strangers, Muslims and Christians, people with histories, hopes, fears, failures, dreams, and grief.

We may disagree about the politics. We may disagree about history. We may disagree about borders, governments, security, settlements, diplomacy, and the path toward peace. Those discussions matter, and they should be pursued honestly.

But before all of those questions stands something more fundamental. They are people created in the image of God. And that should always matter to the Church.



### Chapter 14 — Standing With Israel in a Divided Church

Few subjects can divide a congregation as quickly as Israel.

In the same church, sitting only a few pews apart, there may be people who passionately support Israel, people who strongly criticize Israel, people who know almost nothing about the subject, and people who would prefer that it never be mentioned from the pulpit.

There may be Jewish believers, Arab believers, Palestinian Christians, people who have traveled to Israel, people who have relatives there, and people whose understanding of the entire conflict comes primarily from television or social media.

One person may hear the word Israel and immediately think of biblical prophecy. Another may think of terrorism and Israel's need for security. Another may think of Palestinians, Gaza, settlements, checkpoints, or military operations. Another may think of antisemitism and the long history of Jewish persecution. All of them may be sitting in the same congregation listening to the same pastor.

This creates a difficult pastoral responsibility. How does a pastor teach what Scripture says about Israel without turning the pulpit into a political platform? How does he speak about antisemitism without implying that every criticism of Israel is antisemitic? How does he affirm God's continuing purposes for Israel without suggesting that every decision of an Israeli government carries divine approval? How does he acknowledge Palestinian suffering without allowing compassion to become hostility toward Israel or the Jewish people? How does he teach conviction without creating political camps within the church?

The answer does not begin with politics. It begins with understanding what the pulpit is for. The pastor has not been called primarily to interpret political parties, governments, elections, or international diplomacy. He has been called to teach the Word of God. That distinction is essential. A sermon should not become a campaign speech, and the church should never become the religious extension of a political movement. Yet avoiding partisan politics does not mean avoiding every subject that politicians also discuss. If the Bible speaks about something, the fact that the subject has become politically controversial does not remove it from Christian teaching.

Israel is a perfect example. Abraham is not a political party. The Abrahamic covenant is not a campaign platform. Romans 11 is not an election manifesto. The prophets are not government spokesmen. Yeshua's Jewish identity is not a partisan position. Antisemitism is not merely a political issue. The command to love our neighbor does not belong to the political left or right. The dignity of human life is not the property of one political movement. These are biblical matters, and pastors should not surrender biblical teaching simply because contemporary politics has attached itself to them.

At the same time, pastors must recognize the difference between biblical conviction and political interpretation. Scripture clearly teaches that God called Abraham and made promises to him. Scripture clearly traces those promises through Isaac and Jacob. Scripture clearly identifies Jacob's descendants as Israel. Scripture clearly records God's covenantal relationship with Israel. Scripture clearly presents Yeshua as Jewish. Scripture clearly warns Gentile believers against boasting over the natural branches. These truths can be taught directly from the biblical text.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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The moment we move from those biblical truths to questions about a particular Israeli government, military strategy, settlement policy, judicial reform, election, coalition, peace proposal, or diplomatic decision, however, we have entered a different category. Biblical principles remain relevant, but Scripture does not provide a verse naming the correct policy for every modern controversy. Pastors should be careful not to place divine authority behind conclusions that actually involve political judgment.

This distinction protects both the pastor and the congregation. A pastor can say with confidence that Christians should reject antisemitism because hatred and collective guilt violate biblical principles. He can teach that God's covenant faithfulness matters. He can explain Romans 9–11. He can remind the congregation that Yeshua and the apostles were Jewish. He can teach that Palestinian civilians bear the image of God. He can condemn terrorism and deliberate attacks upon civilians. He can teach compassion, justice, truth, and mercy. These are legitimate pastoral responsibilities. But he should be much more cautious before telling the congregation exactly what borders Israel should accept, what military operation should be undertaken, which Israeli political party should govern, or what diplomatic arrangement must be adopted.

The pastor should teach the congregation how to think biblically rather than simply telling people what to think politically.

That distinction becomes especially important because people enter the church carrying different experiences. Imagine a congregation containing an elderly Jewish believer whose relatives were murdered in the Holocaust. Sitting several rows away is an Arab Christian whose family has experienced displacement or war. Nearby is a young Christian who recently returned from Israel and developed a deep affection for the Jewish people. Across the aisle is someone who has become deeply concerned about Palestinian civilian suffering. Another person knows almost nothing about the history but has watched hundreds of social-media videos and now speaks with great confidence. Each person hears the pastor through a different set of memories and assumptions.

A wise pastor understands that words landing gently upon one person may land painfully upon another. This does not mean truth should be softened until it means nothing. It means truth should be spoken carefully enough that people hear what the pastor actually intends to say. If he speaks about Israel's security, he should not do so in a way that suggests Palestinian lives are irrelevant. If he speaks about Palestinian suffering, he should not do so in language that implies Jewish people are collectively guilty. If he condemns terrorism, he should distinguish terrorists from the broader population among whom they operate. If he criticizes an Israeli policy, he should make clear that criticism of a government is not hostility toward a people.

Such distinctions may appear complicated, but pastoral ministry has always required the ability to hold truths together. Pastors regularly teach both grace and obedience, justice and mercy, God's sovereignty and human responsibility, truth and love. Why should the subject of Israel require us suddenly to abandon nuance?

The problem often begins when political identity becomes stronger than biblical identity. Christians may arrive at church having spent the week listening to commentators who interpret every event through a particular ideological framework. Social media intensifies the problem because algorithms often reward outrage rather than careful thought. People repeatedly encounter voices confirming what they already believe. Gradually they become more certain and less curious. The person on the other side is no longer merely mistaken but dangerous, immoral, ignorant, or malicious.

Then the congregation gathers on Sunday.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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The pastor stands before people who may have been politically disciplined for many hours during the previous week. If he uses one phrase associated with one side, some listeners immediately assume they know his entire position. If he expresses concern for Palestinians, someone may conclude that he has turned against Israel. If he expresses support for Israel, someone else may conclude that he does not care about Palestinians. If he condemns antisemitism, someone may assume he is attempting to silence criticism of Israeli policy. If he criticizes an Israeli action, another may assume he has embraced replacement theology.

This environment creates enormous pressure to say nothing.

But silence is not the only alternative to political preaching. There is another path: careful biblical teaching.

The pastor can slow the conversation down. Instead of reacting to every headline, he can build a biblical foundation over time. He can teach Genesis 12 and the call of Abraham. He can examine Genesis 15 and 17 and ask what covenant means. He can trace the promises through Isaac and Jacob. He can explain Israel's election without presenting election as moral superiority. He can teach the prophets, including both their promises of restoration and their severe criticism of Israel's sin. He can teach the Jewish identity of Yeshua. He can carefully work through Romans 9–11 rather than quoting isolated verses. He can explain the olive tree and Paul's warning to Gentile believers: “Boast not against the branches.”

Once this biblical foundation exists, the congregation is better equipped to encounter political questions without allowing politics to control its theology.

This is particularly important because some Christians construct their theology of Israel almost entirely from current events. When Israel appears strong, they see prophecy being fulfilled. When Israel experiences crisis, they search for another prophetic explanation. Every election, war, peace agreement, natural disaster, diplomatic development, or military operation becomes a possible sign. Such enthusiasm may come from sincere interest in Scripture, but pastors should encourage caution. Biblical prophecy deserves more than newspaper interpretation.

The opposite error is equally dangerous. Some Christians react against sensational prophecy teaching by concluding that modern Israel has no theological significance whatsoever. They may treat the Jewish people merely as another ethnic group and Israel merely as another country. Romans 9–11 becomes largely disconnected from contemporary Christian thought. The pastor's responsibility is not to move the congregation from one extreme to the other but to return repeatedly to Scripture.

This means admitting where faithful Christians disagree. A pastor does not lose authority by acknowledging that Christians have different interpretations of prophecy, the land promises, the modern State of Israel, or the relationship between biblical Israel and contemporary Israel. In fact, such honesty can strengthen pastoral authority because it demonstrates that the pastor distinguishes between the clear teaching of Scripture and his interpretation of difficult questions.

There are truths Christians can affirm together even while disagreeing about important details. God called Abraham. Israel has a particular place within the biblical story. Yeshua is Jewish. The Gospel came through Israel and went to the nations. Gentile believers have no biblical basis for boasting over Jewish people. Antisemitism is incompatible with Christian conduct. Jewish people should not be held collectively responsible for the actions of an Israeli government. Palestinians are human beings created in the image of God. Palestinian civilians should not be treated as though they are automatically terrorists.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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Terrorism and intentional violence against civilians should be condemned. Christians should care about truth and refuse propaganda, conspiracy theories, and collective blame.

A congregation capable of affirming these principles already possesses a strong foundation for discussing Israel without destroying fellowship.

The pastor should also teach believers how to disagree. This may be one of the most important pastoral tasks in an increasingly polarized culture. Christian unity does not mean everyone reaches the same political conclusion. It means our allegiance to Messiah is greater than our allegiance to our political opinions.

Two Christians may examine the same Israeli policy and reach different conclusions. One may believe it is necessary for security. Another may believe it creates unnecessary hardship or injustice. They may disagree strongly. The question for the Church is whether they can disagree without accusing one another of abandoning the faith.

One Christian may believe the establishment of the modern State of Israel in 1948 represents a significant fulfillment of biblical prophecy. Another may believe it is historically important but be cautious about identifying it directly with prophetic fulfillment. They can study Scripture together. They can challenge one another's interpretations. They can search the text carefully. Neither should automatically question the other's salvation or commitment to Scripture.

Pastors can model this kind of disagreement. They can say, "Here is what the text clearly says. Here is how I understand its application. Here is where faithful Christians differ." That sentence alone can transform the atmosphere of a congregation because it teaches people that conviction and humility can exist together.

Humility is especially important when discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. People who have never lived in the region sometimes speak with extraordinary certainty about solutions to problems that have resisted generations of diplomats, historians, military leaders, political negotiators, religious leaders, and local communities. A pastor should resist the temptation to become an instant geopolitical expert simply because the congregation expects an answer.

Sometimes one of the wisest things a pastor can say is, "I do not know."

There is no spiritual weakness in admitting uncertainty. Scripture commands truthfulness, not omniscience. Pastors should know what they know, know what they do not know, and distinguish biblical conviction from political speculation.

This becomes particularly important during periods of war or crisis when information moves quickly and false reports spread widely. Videos may appear without context. Photographs may come from another conflict. Casualty figures may be disputed. Governments, militaries, activists, terrorist organizations, and advocacy groups may present events in ways designed to shape public opinion. Christians should not become eager distributors of unverified information simply because it supports their preferred narrative.

The command against bearing false witness applies to social media.

Pastors can teach congregations to slow down before sharing. Ask where the information came from. Is there independent confirmation? Is the source reliable? Is the photograph authentic? Is the quotation

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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complete? Is the claim fact or interpretation? Would I believe this as quickly if it made my preferred side look bad?

These habits are not merely media literacy. They are spiritual disciplines because Christians are called to love truth.

The pastor must also watch the language being used within the congregation. Political disagreements become spiritually dangerous when they move from policies to peoples. Criticizing the Israeli government is one thing; speaking contemptuously about Jews is another. Criticizing Palestinian political leadership is one thing; speaking as though Palestinians are inherently violent is another. Condemning Hamas is one thing; treating every Palestinian as Hamas is another. Condemning antisemitism is one thing; accusing everyone who criticizes Israel of antisemitism is another.

Language reveals when political disagreement is becoming prejudice.

This is why a pastor may sometimes need to correct someone on the very side with which he generally agrees. If a strong supporter of Israel speaks contemptuously about Palestinians, the pastor should not remain silent because they share certain theological convictions. If someone advocating for Palestinian civilians begins repeating antisemitic conspiracy theories, the pastor should challenge them even if their humanitarian concern is sincere. Moral consistency means refusing to excuse wrong behavior because it comes from our own camp.

Nothing tests integrity quite like correcting our own side.

The divided church desperately needs that kind of integrity. Political culture teaches people to expose the faults of opponents and minimize the faults of allies. Biblical leadership should operate differently. Truth remains truth regardless of who benefits from it. Wrong remains wrong regardless of who commits it.

Pastors should also remember that standing with Israel is not identical to standing with an Israeli government. Governments are temporary. God's Word is not. Prime ministers come and go. Coalitions change. Political parties rise and fall. Military strategies change. The biblical story of Israel cannot be reduced to any one administration.

This distinction allows a pastor to stand with Israel in a deeper sense. He can stand against antisemitism. He can affirm the Jewish people's right to live without fear. He can recognize the historical connection of the Jewish people to the land. He can teach God's covenant faithfulness. He can pray for the peace of Jerusalem. He can build friendships with Jewish neighbors. He can stand beside a synagogue after an antisemitic attack. None of these actions requires him to approve every decision made by the Israeli government.

In the same way, caring about Palestinians does not require adopting every Palestinian political claim. A pastor can care about Palestinian families, Palestinian Christians, children, civilians, refugees, and people living through war without endorsing terrorism or denying Israel's right to security.

This is where the Church can demonstrate something increasingly rare in the political world: the ability to care about two peoples at the same time.

An Israeli mother afraid for her children matters.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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A Palestinian mother afraid for her children matters.

A Jewish family grieving someone murdered in a terrorist attack matters.

A Palestinian family grieving a child killed during war matters.

Recognizing both does not mean every action is morally equivalent. It means every human life possesses dignity.

The pastor who teaches this is not weakening conviction. He is strengthening it by refusing to allow conviction to become dehumanization.

Prayer can become one of the most powerful ways of demonstrating this maturity. When the congregation prays for Israel, pray for wisdom for Israel's leaders, protection for civilians, safety for soldiers, the return of hostages, peace for families, and freedom from terrorism and antisemitism. Pray for Jewish communities throughout the world who may experience fear because of events in the Middle East.

Then pray for Palestinians. Pray for civilians caught in war, children who are afraid, families who have lost loved ones, Palestinian Christians, those who need food and medical care, and leaders who carry responsibility for the future. Pray that hatred will not define another generation.

A church that can sincerely pray for both peoples has already rejected the demand that compassion must choose a side.

Pastors should also encourage relationships rather than merely opinions. It is easy to have strong views about people we have never met. A Christian who knows Jewish people personally may begin seeing the impact of antisemitism differently. A Christian who speaks with Palestinian Christians may begin understanding experiences that rarely appear in his preferred news sources. Relationships complicate stereotypes because real people rarely fit neatly into political categories.

This is one reason local relationships matter. A pastor concerned about antisemitism does not need to begin with an international organization. He can introduce himself to a rabbi in his own community. If a synagogue is threatened or vandalized, the church can send a message expressing concern. These gestures should not be performed as publicity opportunities or disguised evangelistic strategies. Friendship loses its meaning when it becomes manipulation.

Likewise, churches can listen to Arab and Palestinian Christians without assuming that listening means agreement. Christian maturity allows us to hear someone's experience before deciding how every part of it fits into our political framework.

The divided church does not need fewer convictions. It needs deeper convictions.

Shallow conviction is threatened by complexity. Deep conviction can face complexity without fear. If our belief in God's faithfulness to Israel collapses the moment we acknowledge Palestinian suffering, our theology was not very strong. If our compassion for Palestinians requires us to deny Jewish history or tolerate antisemitism, our compassion has lost its moral foundation.

Biblical truth should be strong enough to allow us to look directly at suffering wherever it occurs.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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The pastor's task, therefore, is not to keep everyone politically comfortable. It is to help the congregation become biblically mature. Sometimes that will mean challenging people who strongly support Israel. Sometimes it will mean challenging people who strongly criticize Israel. Sometimes it will mean correcting people who know little about the subject but repeat confident claims from social media. Sometimes it will mean telling everyone to wait until the facts are clearer.

A shepherd does not ask first, "Which statement will receive the least criticism?" He asks, "What is true, what is biblical, what is just, and what will help the people entrusted to me become more like Messiah?"

That question changes the entire discussion.

The goal is not to create a pro-Israel political church or an anti-Israel political church. The goal is to create a biblically grounded church that understands God's faithfulness, remembers its Jewish roots, rejects antisemitism, values Palestinian lives, condemns terrorism, cares about justice, loves truth, resists propaganda, and refuses to allow political divisions to become spiritual hatred.

Such a congregation will not agree about everything.

It does not need to.

Christian unity has never required complete agreement on every political question. What it requires is a shared allegiance greater than those disagreements. For the Church, that allegiance is to Yeshua.

And Yeshua Himself should transform the way we conduct these conversations. He is the Jewish Messiah through whom salvation has gone to the nations. Around Him gather Jews and Gentiles, people from different cultures, languages, nations, and histories. The Church should therefore be one of the places where political hostility loses its power to define human relationships.

This does not mean difficult questions disappear. Israel will remain controversial. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict will continue to produce powerful emotions. Antisemitism will need to be confronted. Palestinian suffering will need to be acknowledged. Governments will make decisions Christians may support or oppose. Wars and political crises may force pastors to address events they would rather avoid.

But the pulpit does not need to become another cable-news program.

The pastor can do something better.

He can open the Scriptures.

He can teach Abraham and the covenant. He can teach Moses and the prophets. He can teach the Jewish identity of Yeshua. He can teach Romans 9–11. He can explain the olive tree. He can warn against boasting over the branches. He can teach the image of God. He can teach love of neighbor. He can condemn hatred and false witness. He can teach believers to mourn with those who mourn and to seek peace without surrendering truth.

Then he can trust the congregation to grow.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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A mature church should eventually be able to hear the words “Israel,” “Jew,” “Palestinian,” “Arab,” or “Gaza” without immediately retreating into opposing political camps. It should be able to ask questions, examine facts, search Scripture, listen to people, disagree respectfully, and pray sincerely.

That kind of church will be increasingly unusual in a polarized world.

And perhaps that is precisely why it is needed.

Standing with Israel in a divided Church does not mean demanding that every Christian hold the same political opinion. It means refusing to allow political division to erase biblical truth. It means standing against antisemitism without ignoring Palestinian humanity. It means affirming God's covenant faithfulness without turning an Israeli government into an object of unquestioning loyalty. It means recognizing suffering without surrendering discernment. It means speaking truth without hatred and showing compassion without abandoning conviction.

Above all, it means remembering that the Church belongs neither to the political right nor to the political left. It belongs to Yeshua.

The pastor who remembers that will not need to turn his pulpit into a political platform.

He will have something far more powerful to offer.

He will have the Word of God.



### Chapter 15 — What Should Pastors Teach Their Congregations?

After considering covenant, Israel, the Jewish people, antisemitism, Palestinian suffering, the Jewish identity of Yeshua, and the challenge of leading a divided congregation, we arrive at the practical question every pastor eventually must answer: What should I actually teach my congregation? It is one thing to agree that Israel matters. It is another thing to know how that conviction should shape preaching, Bible study, discipleship, and the spiritual formation of the people entrusted to our care.

Most pastors cannot devote an entire year of sermons to Israel, nor should every sermon somehow be turned into a message about the Middle East. Israel should not become an obsession that pushes the rest of Scripture aside, but neither should Israel remain a subject mentioned only during a prophecy conference or when war breaks out in the Middle East.

The goal is not to create congregations filled with amateur geopolitical analysts. The goal is to create biblically literate Christians who understand the story into which they have been brought. If believers understand Abraham, covenant, Israel's election, exile and restoration, the prophets, the Jewish context of the New Testament, Romans 9–11, the olive tree, the history and danger of antisemitism, and their responsibility toward Jewish neighbors, they will possess a foundation strong enough to approach contemporary questions with greater wisdom. Without that foundation, Christians are vulnerable to whatever political commentator, social-media personality, prophecy teacher, activist, or news network happens to speak most persuasively.

The place to begin is where Scripture begins the covenantal story: Abraham. Congregations should understand Genesis 12. God's words to Abram are among the foundational passages of Scripture. God promises to make of him a great nation, to bless him, to make his name great, and ultimately that through him all the families of the earth will be blessed. Christians rightly emphasize the universal blessing contained in this promise, but we should not rush past the particular man and people through whom that blessing comes. God chooses Abraham and establishes a covenantal story that will eventually reach the nations.

Pastors should then take their congregations into Genesis 15 and 17 and explain what covenant means rather than merely mentioning the word. In Genesis 15, God confirms His promises concerning Abraham's descendants and the land. In Genesis 17, He describes His covenant as an everlasting covenant. The promises do not end with Abraham but continue through Isaac and then Jacob, whose name becomes Israel. This matters because congregations need to understand that Israel does not suddenly appear in the Bible as a modern political problem. Israel emerges from a covenantal story initiated by God.

This foundation allows pastors to ask one of the most important theological questions in the entire discussion: upon whose faithfulness does the covenant ultimately depend? Abraham has weaknesses, Isaac has weaknesses, Jacob certainly has weaknesses, and Israel repeatedly fails. Yet Scripture continues to return to the faithfulness of God. This becomes essential when the congregation later encounters Israel's unbelief, exile, judgment, and restoration. If believers understand covenant from the beginning, they are less likely to assume that human failure automatically means divine promises have disappeared.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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Congregations should also understand what it means for Israel to be chosen. The language of election can easily be misunderstood, especially in the modern world. Some hear the expression “chosen people” and assume that it means God declared Jewish people morally superior to everyone else. Scripture teaches nothing of the kind. Israel's election is a calling, not a declaration of human superiority. Deuteronomy makes clear that Israel was not chosen because it was greater or more numerous than the other nations. God's choice rested upon His love and covenant faithfulness. Israel was called to be “a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.” Election brought privilege, but it also brought responsibility, and the prophets demonstrate repeatedly that because Israel belonged to God, Israel was accountable to God.

Pastors should make this clear because it prevents two opposite errors. Christians should not despise Israel, but neither should they idolize Israel. Biblical election gives us no basis for antisemitism and no basis for pretending Israel has never sinned. The same Scriptures that record God's covenant also record Israel's failures. The Bible itself teaches Christians how to affirm Israel's election without romanticizing Israel or treating election as a declaration that everything Israel does must therefore be right.

Congregations should also understand the biblical pattern of exile and restoration. Much confusion about Israel comes from reading the promises while ignoring the judgments, or reading the judgments while ignoring the promises. The prophets refuse both approaches. Israel's disobedience brings consequences. The northern kingdom falls, Judah is eventually carried into Babylonian exile, Jerusalem is devastated, and the Temple is destroyed. The prophets had warned that covenant rebellion would bring judgment. Yet judgment is not the end of the story. Again and again, the prophets speak about restoration. Jeremiah speaks of Israel's future, Ezekiel speaks of gathering and restoration, and Isaiah repeatedly looks beyond judgment toward hope. The prophetic message contains both accountability and mercy. God disciplines, but He does not simply forget.

This pattern is vital for understanding the character of God. Pastors should help believers see that restoration does not mean sin was insignificant. Judgment demonstrates precisely the opposite. Yet judgment also does not necessarily mean covenant abandonment. God's faithfulness is capable of surviving human unfaithfulness. This is one of the central lessons of Israel's biblical story, and it has enormous significance for Christians who themselves depend upon the mercy and faithfulness of God.

The prophets therefore deserve far more attention in Christian teaching about Israel. Too often prophetic books are approached in one of two ways. Some Christians use them primarily as codes for predicting modern events, while others avoid their future-oriented passages almost entirely. Neither approach does justice to the richness of the prophetic writings. Pastors should teach congregations to read the prophets in context. What was happening when Isaiah spoke? Why was Jeremiah weeping? What circumstances surrounded Ezekiel's visions? What did restoration mean to people experiencing exile? What did Jerusalem mean to Israel? What did the land mean within the covenant? What did the prophets mean when they spoke about the nations? These questions help believers understand the text before attempting to connect it with modern events.

Pastors should also teach caution concerning prophecy. Not every event in the modern Middle East should immediately be declared a fulfillment of a particular biblical passage. Not every war is Armageddon, not every political leader is a prophetic figure, and not every peace agreement begins a prophetic countdown. When Christians repeatedly make confident predictions that fail, the credibility of biblical prophecy itself can suffer in the eyes of those listening. We honor prophecy by handling it carefully. At the same time, caution must not become an excuse for ignoring what the prophets actually say about Israel and Jerusalem. When a prophet speaks of Israel, Judah, Jerusalem, Zion, the nations, exile, or restoration, pastors should first establish what those terms mean within the passage before deciding how they should be applied.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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Another major area congregations need to understand is the Jewish context of the New Testament. Many Christians unconsciously begin reading the Bible as though the Old Testament were Jewish and the New Testament suddenly became Christian. The transition is nowhere near that simple. The New Testament opens inside the Jewish world. Yeshua is Jewish. Miriam is Jewish. Joseph is Jewish. John the Baptist is Jewish. Peter, John, James, and Paul are Jewish. The earliest disciples are Jewish. Jerusalem stands at the center of the opening chapters of Acts. The Temple is still present, synagogues appear throughout the Gospels and Acts, and the Hebrew Scriptures provide the theological language through which Yeshua and the apostles explain what God is doing.

Congregations should understand that Yeshua was circumcised, presented at the Temple, attended synagogue, celebrated Jewish feasts, quoted Israel's Scriptures, taught among the Jewish people, traveled to Jerusalem, and was crucified beneath a sign identifying Him as "King of the Jews." His Jewish identity is not incidental background. It belongs to the historical reality of the incarnation. Understanding this helps Christians recognize that their faith did not emerge in isolation from Israel but from within Israel's covenantal and biblical story.

Pastors should be especially careful when teaching Gospel passages describing conflicts between Yeshua and Jewish religious leaders. These should not be presented as though Christianity were confronting Judaism from the outside. These were disputes occurring within the Jewish world of the first century. Yeshua's criticisms of certain Pharisees or other leaders cannot legitimately be transformed into condemnations of Jewish people across history. The same care is necessary when explaining the crucifixion. Jewish people as an ethnic group must never be presented as collectively guilty for the death of Yeshua. The historical events involved particular people and Roman political authority, while the theological meaning of the cross concerns the sin of humanity and the redemptive purposes of God. Christians who believe Yeshua died for our sins should approach the cross with repentance and gratitude, not ethnic accusation. Teaching this carefully is one practical way pastors can prevent antisemitism from finding theological support within their churches.

Congregations should then spend serious time in Romans 9, 10, and 11. These chapters should not be treated as an obscure theological appendix to Romans. Paul is wrestling with a profound question. Israel has received extraordinary privileges, yet many Israelites have not believed in Yeshua. Has God's word failed? Paul's answer is no. Pastors should resist the temptation to reduce these chapters to one or two favorite verses. Paul develops an argument across all three chapters in which he speaks of election, mercy, unbelief, righteousness, the remnant, Gentile inclusion, Israel's stumbling, Israel's future, and God's faithfulness.

Then comes the question that should be heard clearly in every congregation: "Hath God cast away his people?" Paul answers, "God forbid." Whatever theological system a Christian adopts, those words must be taken seriously. Paul does not speak as though Israel's unbelief has made Israel irrelevant. He describes himself as an Israelite and points to the remnant before developing the image that should become familiar to every Christian congregation: the olive tree.

Pastors should teach the olive tree slowly and carefully. Paul describes natural branches, broken branches, wild olive branches, grafting in, and the possibility of natural branches being grafted in again. Gentile believers are not pictured planting a new tree after destroying the old one. They are grafted into an existing olive tree. The image is one of inclusion, but it is also one of warning. Paul tells the Gentiles, "Boast not against the branches," and reminds them, "thou bearest not the root, but the root thee." Gentile believers possess no biblical basis for spiritual arrogance toward Jewish people. We did not create the root, establish the covenants, produce the prophets, or bring the Messiah into the world according to the flesh. We have been brought near by grace.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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Imagine the olive tree for a moment. The natural branches belong to the cultivated tree. Some have been broken off because of unbelief. Wild branches are brought from elsewhere and grafted in. Those wild branches truly belong to the tree. They receive life from the same root and share in its richness, yet their inclusion does not require them to pretend that they were the original branches. They enter by grace. That picture should produce profound humility within the Church rather than the arrogance against which Paul specifically warned.

Pastors should also teach Romans 11:25–29, including Paul's language concerning the mystery, Israel's partial blindness, “all Israel shall be saved,” the patriarchs, and the declaration that “the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.” Christians disagree about some details of these verses, but disagreement should lead to deeper study rather than avoidance. The congregation should at least understand that Paul ends his discussion of Israel not with contempt or dismissal but with hope, mystery, mercy, and confidence in God's faithfulness.

Congregations also need to understand the history of antisemitism. This does not mean every church must conduct an exhaustive historical course, nor should pastors constantly condemn previous generations of Christians. The purpose is not to produce inherited guilt but to develop awareness. Christians should know enough history to understand why Jewish people may hear certain Christian words differently than Christians intend them. They should know about the accusation that Jews were collectively responsible for killing Christ and that Jewish communities experienced expulsions, forced conversions, discriminatory laws, pogroms, conspiracy theories, blood libels, and other forms of persecution. They should understand that antisemitism did not begin with Nazi Germany and that older prejudices helped create environments in which later hatred could flourish.

They should also know that there were Christians who resisted hatred, protected Jewish neighbors, hid families, challenged injustice, and sometimes paid a terrible price for doing so. History should teach both warning and courage. The purpose is not to tell Christians that the Church has always been the enemy of the Jewish people. That would be historically unfair. The purpose is to recognize that Christians, like everyone else, are capable of courage and failure, and that remembering both can help the Church choose courage when similar moral tests arise.

Pastors should explain that antisemitism can change its vocabulary while retaining familiar patterns. Claims that Jews secretly control governments, banks, media, or world events did not become harmless simply because they migrated from printed pamphlets to social media. Conspiracy theories should not be welcomed into Christian communities simply because they are presented as political analysis. Christians should be trained to recognize these patterns and reject them.

At the same time, congregations should understand that criticism of Israel is not automatically antisemitic. This distinction is essential. Israeli governments, politicians, laws, military decisions, and policies may be criticized, and Israelis themselves vigorously criticize their government. Christians should be able to discuss political questions honestly without immediately accusing one another of antisemitism. The line begins to be crossed when political criticism turns into hostility toward Jews as Jews, when Jewish people everywhere are blamed for actions of the Israeli government, when historic antisemitic stereotypes are revived, or when synagogues, Jewish schools, businesses, and individuals become targets because of events in the Middle East. A Jewish student is not the Israeli government, a synagogue is not an Israeli embassy, and a Jewish business owner is not responsible for an Israeli military operation. Teaching these distinctions can protect congregations from serious moral confusion.

Pastors should also teach believers how to speak about Palestinians. Supporting Israel should never require contempt for Palestinian people. Palestinians are human beings created in the image of God. They

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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are not a theological inconvenience or merely a political problem. They are men and women, children and families, Muslims and Christians, political activists and people simply trying to live their lives. Congregations should understand the difference between civilians and terrorist organizations. Condemning Hamas does not justify treating every Palestinian as a terrorist, just as condemning a decision of the Israeli government does not justify treating Jewish people as collectively guilty.

Christians should be capable of grieving for an Israeli mother and a Palestinian mother, caring about a Jewish child hiding from rockets and a Palestinian child hiding from explosions. Compassion does not require us to conclude that every political claim is equally valid or every action morally equivalent. It simply requires us to recognize human beings before turning them into political categories. This is where pastors can teach moral consistency. Terrorism should be condemned regardless of who commits it, antisemitism should be condemned regardless of which political movement expresses it, hatred of Arabs or Muslims should be condemned regardless of who expresses it, and civilian suffering should never become something Christians celebrate because the civilians belong to the “wrong” side. Truth and compassion belong together.

Pastors should also teach Christians to distinguish the modern State of Israel from the biblical category of Israel without completely separating the two. This requires careful thought. The modern State of Israel is a contemporary political state established in 1948. It has a parliament, courts, political parties, military institutions, elections, laws, and governments. These are modern institutions, and they should not automatically be treated as though every decision they make carries biblical authority. At the same time, the Jewish people who established and inhabit the modern State of Israel did not suddenly appear in 1948. They possess a long historical, religious, cultural, and ancestral connection to the land. The relationship between biblical Israel, the Jewish people, and the modern state deserves thoughtful teaching rather than slogans.

Christians may reach different conclusions about exactly how modern Israel relates to biblical prophecy. Pastors should acknowledge those disagreements while insisting that disagreement does not justify either hostility toward Israel or unquestioning political loyalty to it. A pastor should be able to say that Israel matters biblically while also recognizing that a modern government is composed of fallible human beings whose policies can be examined and criticized.

Congregations should also learn the importance of Jerusalem. Jerusalem should not appear in Christian consciousness only when a political controversy erupts. The city runs through Scripture. David established his capital there, Solomon built the Temple there, the prophets spoke of Jerusalem, the Psalms celebrate it, Jewish exiles remembered it, Yeshua wept over it, and the earliest believers gathered there. The Gospel itself went outward from Jerusalem to the nations. When the Psalmist says, “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem,” Christians encounter a biblical concern that long predates contemporary political disputes. Pastors can teach that prayer without pretending it settles every modern question concerning Jerusalem.

Perhaps most practically, pastors should teach congregations how to relate to Jewish people who live near them. Israel should not remain a distant theological subject located thousands of miles away. Jewish people are our neighbors. A church may have a synagogue only a few kilometers away and yet never have spoken to anyone there. Pastors can introduce themselves to rabbis, churches can express concern when a synagogue is threatened or vandalized, and Christians can attend appropriate public Jewish-community events when invited. Congregations can learn about Jewish holidays and understand why they matter to their neighbors. None of this requires Christians to abandon belief in Yeshua. Friendship is not theological surrender.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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Christian witness is strengthened when Jewish people discover that Christians can hold sincere convictions about Yeshua while treating them with respect, listening to their experiences, rejecting antisemitism, and standing beside them when they are threatened. Pastors should teach their congregations that Jewish people are not evangelistic projects. They are people. Christian witness should never become manipulation. If friendship disappears the moment someone rejects our beliefs, it was not much of a friendship. At the same time, respect does not require Christians to hide their faith. Christians believe Yeshua is Messiah, while most Jewish people do not. That disagreement is real and profound, but honest friendship can acknowledge it without hostility.

Pastors should also teach believers to examine information carefully. Israel generates enormous amounts of political propaganda, misinformation, selective reporting, and emotionally charged social-media content. Christians should not become careless simply because a claim supports the side they favor. Before sharing something, we should ask whether it is true. Before forwarding a photograph, we should ask where it came from. Before repeating a quotation, we should determine whether it is accurate and complete. Before believing a dramatic claim, we should ask whether reliable evidence confirms it. Before sharing something about Jews, Palestinians, Muslims, Israelis, or Arabs, we should ask whether we would demand the same standard of evidence if the claim targeted people with whom we sympathized. The biblical command against false witness applies online just as surely as it applies anywhere else. A lie repeated for a supposedly righteous cause remains a lie, and Christians do not defend truth by spreading falsehood.

Congregations should also be taught to pray in a way that prevents Christian concern from becoming political tribalism. Christians should pray for Israel, the Jewish people, the peace of Jerusalem, protection from terrorism, hostages and their families, wisdom for Israeli leaders, and Jewish communities throughout the world experiencing antisemitism. They should also pray for Palestinians, including civilians caught in war, frightened children, grieving families, Palestinian Christians, and those who need food, medicine, shelter, security, and hope. They should pray that hatred and terrorism will not define another generation. They should pray for Jews who are afraid because antisemitism is rising and for Muslims who experience hatred because others associate them collectively with terrorism. They should pray for peacemakers, justice, truth, and mercy. A congregation that sincerely prays for all those who suffer is being trained to see people rather than political abstractions.

Pastors should also remind their congregations that Christians do not need to solve the entire Middle East before they can act faithfully. The scale of the conflict can make people feel powerless. Most Christians will never negotiate a peace agreement, determine an international border, command an army, or sit in the Israeli Knesset, but they can refuse antisemitism. They can reject hatred of Palestinians. They can correct a conspiracy theory, comfort a Jewish neighbor after an antisemitic attack, listen to a Palestinian Christian, refuse to forward misinformation, teach their children that Jewish classmates are not responsible for the Israeli government, and pray faithfully for those caught in conflict.

Faithfulness often begins locally. This may be one of the most important lessons pastors can teach. Christians sometimes become so absorbed in global events that they overlook the person standing in front of them. We debate Israel while never meeting an Israeli. We debate Palestinians while never listening to a Palestinian. We discuss antisemitism while never introducing ourselves to the Jewish community down the street. The Gospel continually moves us from abstractions toward people.

A pastor therefore does not need to turn his church into a Middle East policy institute. He needs to teach his people Scripture. He should teach Abraham and the covenant, Isaac and Jacob, Israel's election, exile and restoration, the prophets and Jerusalem, the Jewish world of the New Testament, Yeshua as the Jewish Messiah, Romans 9–11, the olive tree, and Paul's warning against boasting over the branches. He

## Standing with Israel without Fear

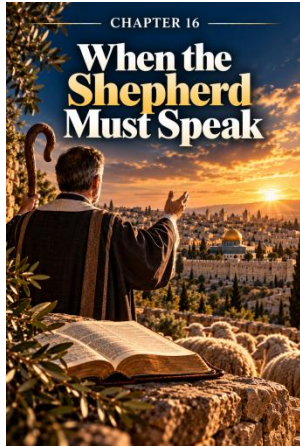
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should teach the history and danger of antisemitism, the dignity of Palestinian lives, the importance of distinguishing governments from peoples and terrorists from civilians, and the responsibility of believers to recognize propaganda and reject false witness. He should teach them to pray, to love their neighbors, and to speak truth with humility.

Above all, pastors should teach their congregations about the faithfulness of God, because beneath all the questions about Israel lies a deeper question: Does God keep His word? That question reaches far beyond Israel. Every Christian depends upon the answer. We trust God because we believe His promises are reliable. We preach the Gospel because we believe His Word is true. We face death with hope because we believe He will fulfill what He has promised.

Israel's story repeatedly confronts us with human failure and divine faithfulness. Abraham failed, Jacob failed, Israel failed, kings failed, priests failed, the disciples failed, and the Church itself has failed many times. Yet Scripture continually directs our attention back to the God who remains faithful. That may ultimately be the greatest lesson pastors can teach their congregations about Israel. The subject is not merely about a people, a land, prophecy, politics, antisemitism, or the modern Middle East. At its deepest level, the story of Israel is also a story about the character of God.

If the Church learns to see that clearly, perhaps it will approach Israel and the Jewish people with greater biblical understanding, humility, courage, and compassion. Christians can learn to stand against antisemitism without becoming politically blind, care about Palestinians without abandoning Israel, disagree without hatred, speak without arrogance, and refuse silence when their Jewish neighbors are threatened. That is what pastors should teach their congregations: not a political platform, not a collection of slogans, and not unquestioning loyalty to a government, but the whole counsel of Scripture taught carefully enough that God's people learn to recognize truth, love their neighbors, reject hatred, remember the root that supports them, and trust the faithfulness of the God who keeps His promises.



### Chapter 16 — When the Shepherd Must Speak

There is a time for a pastor to remain quiet. Not every headline requires a sermon, not every political controversy belongs in the pulpit, and not every disagreement within society requires an official statement from the church. Wisdom sometimes means waiting until the facts are known, refusing to react emotionally, and recognizing that a pastor's calling is not to provide commentary on every event occurring in the world. Yet there are also moments when silence ceases to be wisdom. There are moments when neutrality becomes avoidance, caution becomes fear, and the shepherd must speak because something dangerous is approaching the flock or threatening the people standing outside its doors.

The difficulty is knowing the difference. A pastor who speaks too quickly can create unnecessary controversy, repeat inaccurate information, or turn the pulpit into a political platform. A pastor who never speaks, however, can unintentionally teach his congregation that hatred is someone else's problem. The shepherd must therefore develop the discernment to know when silence protects the church from unnecessary political conflict and when silence leaves people unprotected in the presence of genuine hatred.

This is where the idea of *Without Fear* becomes more than a phrase. Courage is not the absence of wisdom, and wisdom is not the absence of courage. The courageous pastor is not the one who comments loudly on everything, nor is the wise pastor the one who avoids everything controversial. Biblical courage knows when the moment has arrived when truth must be spoken, even if speaking carries a cost. The image of the shepherd helps us understand this responsibility. A shepherd does not spend every hour shouting warnings about wolves. If he did, the sheep would eventually stop listening. Most of his work is ordinary and patient. He leads, feeds, watches, guides, protects, and cares. But when the wolf actually appears, everything changes. At that moment silence is no longer calm leadership. The shepherd must respond.

Yeshua uses this imagery powerfully in John 10 when He contrasts the shepherd with the hired hand. The hired hand sees the wolf coming and flees because the sheep are not truly his concern. The shepherd remains because the sheep matter to him. The lesson extends beyond physical danger. Spiritual leadership carries responsibility. The pastor is entrusted with people, and there are moments when protecting them requires speaking clearly about dangers that others would prefer not to discuss. Antisemitism is one of those dangers.

A pastor should not wait until a synagogue is burning before deciding that antisemitism deserves attention. Hatred rarely begins with broken windows. It begins with ideas, language, stereotypes, jokes, conspiracy theories, accusations, and the gradual normalization of contempt. By the time hatred becomes violence, it has often spent years learning how to speak. This is why pastors must learn to recognize antisemitism before it reaches its most obvious forms. When someone says that Jews secretly control governments, banks, media, or world events, the pastor should recognize an old conspiracy theory even when it is presented in modern political language. When Jewish people are collectively blamed for the actions of an Israeli government, the pastor should recognize collective guilt. When the Holocaust is denied, trivialized, mocked, or deliberately distorted, the pastor should understand that something more serious than an ordinary historical disagreement is occurring. When Jewish students are intimidated

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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because they are Jewish, when synagogues receive threats, when Jewish businesses are targeted, or when Jewish families become afraid to display symbols of their identity, Christians should pay attention.

The pastor does not need to become an expert on every manifestation of antisemitism before saying something simple and clear: hatred of Jewish people is wrong. Sometimes moral clarity really can be that straightforward. The difficulty increases when antisemitism appears alongside legitimate political criticism. Israel is a nation-state with a government, military, political parties, courts, policies, and leaders. Those institutions can be criticized. Christians should not label every criticism of Israel antisemitic, because doing so weakens the meaning of the term and makes genuine antisemitism harder to identify. A pastor should be able to distinguish between someone saying, “I believe this particular Israeli policy is wrong,” and someone saying, “The Jews are responsible for what is happening.” The first addresses a policy. The second assigns collective guilt to a people.

Likewise, someone may criticize an Israeli prime minister, military operation, settlement policy, political coalition, or legislation without expressing hostility toward Jews. Israelis themselves debate these matters vigorously. Pastors should therefore resist the temptation to use the accusation of antisemitism as a shield against every uncomfortable political question. Truth requires greater precision. Yet precision works in both directions. Political language should not become camouflage for hatred. Sometimes the vocabulary changes while the prejudice remains. A person may insist that he has nothing against Jewish people while repeating centuries-old claims about Jewish control, manipulation, greed, bloodthirstiness, or secret power. Changing the vocabulary does not necessarily change the idea. The pastor must therefore listen not merely for political labels but for the moral content beneath them.

This is particularly important when hatred masquerades as activism. Political activism is not inherently wrong. People have the right to advocate, protest, criticize governments, campaign for policy changes, and express concern for Palestinians or Israelis. Christians should not assume that every demonstration, slogan, or criticism contains antisemitism. Yet activism does not receive moral immunity simply because it claims to pursue justice. A movement that says it opposes injustice must still be examined by the way it treats people.

If Jewish students are threatened because of their identity, that should concern the Church. If a synagogue is targeted because of events in Israel, that should concern the Church. If Jewish-owned businesses are vandalized because someone wants to make a political statement about the Middle East, that should concern the Church. If Jewish people are told they are unwelcome because they refuse to denounce Israel, the pastor should recognize that a serious moral line may be being crossed. Political disagreement does not grant permission to intimidate people because they are Jewish.

The same moral standard must apply in the other direction. A pastor should speak when Arabs or Muslims are threatened, when Palestinians are dehumanized, or when people are collectively blamed for terrorism because of their ethnicity or religion. Christian opposition to antisemitism loses credibility if it becomes an excuse for hatred toward someone else. The shepherd protects people because they are people. This is not political neutrality. It is moral consistency.

There are also moments when the pastor must speak because Scripture itself is being distorted. This can happen when biblical passages are used to justify contempt for Jewish people. The long history of Christian antisemitism demonstrates that theology can have consequences. Ideas taught from pulpits eventually shape attitudes in congregations, and attitudes can shape behavior. One dangerous distortion is the idea that Jewish people living today carry collective guilt for the crucifixion of Yeshua. The pastor should correct this clearly. The death of Yeshua occurred within a specific historical setting involving particular Jewish leaders, Roman authority, and the sovereign redemptive purposes of God. The New

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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Testament does not give Christians permission to transfer guilt from particular historical actors to generations of Jewish people. If we believe Yeshua died for the sins of humanity, then the cross should lead us to examine our own sin rather than assign inherited guilt to another ethnic group.

Another distortion occurs when Christians read every negative reference to “the Jews” in the Gospel of John as though it referred to every Jewish person everywhere. Context matters. Yeshua was Jewish, His disciples were Jewish, the Gospel writers operated within a Jewish world, and many of the people who followed Yeshua were Jewish. Conflicts described in the Gospels often involve particular leaders, authorities, or groups within that world. A pastor who fails to explain this can unintentionally reinforce ideas the text itself does not require.

There are also theological distortions that arise when Christians speak as though God's relationship with Israel ended simply because many Jewish people did not believe in Yeshua. Whatever conclusions Christians reach concerning covenant theology, Romans 9–11 must be allowed to speak. Paul asks, “Hath God cast away his people?” and answers, “God forbid.” He warns Gentile believers, “Boast not against the branches.” The pastor should make sure his congregation hears those warnings because the shepherd must speak when Scripture is being used to cultivate arrogance.

The pastor must also speak when conspiracy theories begin circulating within the church. Christians are not immune to them. Religious communities can sometimes become vulnerable when political suspicion combines with apocalyptic speculation. A dramatic internet video may claim to expose a secret plan. A social-media post may announce that a particular group controls the world. Someone may connect unrelated events and present the result as hidden knowledge that others supposedly do not want people to know. The pastor should teach his congregation to ask a simple question: Is it true?

Christianity does not become stronger when Christians believe things without evidence. The biblical command against bearing false witness applies even when the falsehood confirms our political suspicions. A lie does not become righteous because we believe the people it accuses are bad. When conspiracies specifically target Jews, the pastor should be especially alert because such accusations have a long and destructive history. Jewish communities have repeatedly been accused of secretly causing economic crises, wars, disease, political upheaval, and social decline. Modern technology can spread these accusations around the world in hours. A shepherd should not allow poison to circulate among the sheep simply because it arrived through a smartphone rather than a pamphlet.

There are also moments when events outside the church require a pastoral response. Suppose a synagogue in the community is vandalized, threatening messages are painted on its walls, Jewish families are frightened, or a Jewish school receives threats. The pastor may decide that the congregation needs to hear something. It does not necessarily require a forty-minute sermon on Middle Eastern politics. It may require only a few sentences explaining that Jewish neighbors have been threatened, that the church condemns antisemitism, and that Christians should pray for those affected. Sometimes the most powerful pastoral statement is also the simplest.

The church might also contact the synagogue. The pastor might telephone the rabbi and express concern, ask whether everyone is safe, and inquire whether there is an appropriate way the church can help. No political manifesto is necessary, no theological compromise is necessary, and no publicity is necessary. It is simply neighborliness. Imagine the effect if every time a synagogue were threatened, nearby churches contacted the Jewish community before being asked. Imagine if Jewish families knew that when antisemitism appeared, Christians would not wait to determine whether defending them was politically convenient. Imagine if rabbis knew that pastors in their community would stand beside them even though

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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profound theological differences remained between them. That would communicate something about Christianity that no argument could communicate as powerfully.

There may also be moments when the pastor needs to speak because members of his own congregation are becoming involved in hateful rhetoric. This can be difficult because confrontation may involve faithful members, generous donors, respected leaders, or personal friends. The temptation to remain silent can be strong, but shepherding becomes meaningless if correction applies only to people outside the church. If someone in the congregation repeatedly spreads antisemitic conspiracy theories, the pastor should speak with that person. If someone uses contemptuous language about Palestinians or Arabs, the pastor should address that as well. If political arguments begin dividing the church into hostile camps, pastoral intervention may become necessary. The goal is not punishment for having the wrong political opinion. The goal is spiritual correction when political passion begins producing behavior inconsistent with Christian discipleship.

Pastors should also understand that silence communicates something. We often imagine silence as neutral, but people experiencing hatred may interpret it differently. A Jewish family attending a church may hear antisemitic comments circulating in society and wonder whether their pastor notices. A Jewish neighbor whose synagogue has been threatened may notice which community leaders speak and which remain silent. This does not mean pastors must issue statements about every incident. If every event receives a statement, statements eventually become meaningless. The pastor must use judgment. Yet there are moments when the seriousness of an event, its proximity to the congregation, or the moral clarity of the issue makes silence difficult to justify. The question is not simply whether speaking will create controversy. The more searching question is what silence will communicate.

Pastors sometimes remain silent because they fear being misunderstood. That fear is understandable. Speak against antisemitism and someone may accuse you of endorsing every Israeli policy. Speak about Palestinian suffering and someone may accuse you of abandoning Israel. Condemn terrorism and someone may accuse you of ignoring political context. Criticize an Israeli government decision and someone may accuse you of opposing Israel. In a polarized culture, almost anything can be misinterpreted, but the answer cannot be permanent silence. The answer is careful speech.

A pastor can affirm God's continuing purposes concerning Israel while making clear that this does not mean every decision of an Israeli government is correct. He can care deeply about Palestinian civilians without excusing terrorism. He can defend the right of Jewish people to live without fear while also insisting that Arabs and Muslims should not be targets of hatred. He can explain that criticism of Israel is not automatically antisemitic while also warning that antisemitism does not become acceptable merely because it uses political language. These convictions are not contradictory. They are examples of the moral maturity pastors should model for their congregations.

The pastor must also resist the temptation to wait until everyone agrees before speaking. If Nathan had waited for David's approval before confronting him, he would never have said, "Thou art the man." If the prophets had waited until their messages became popular, much of the prophetic literature would not exist. Biblical leadership has never been defined by the ability to avoid disagreement. Yet this does not give pastors permission to become reckless. Nathan confronted David because truth required it, not because Nathan enjoyed confrontation. The prophets were not performing outrage for an audience. Their courage came from responsibility before God.

Some people enjoy controversy and build platforms around it. Every issue becomes a battle, every opponent becomes an enemy, and every disagreement becomes evidence of compromise. That is not the courage being advocated here. The shepherd does not go looking for wolves because he enjoys fighting

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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wolves. He confronts the wolf because he loves the sheep. Pastoral courage is therefore rooted in love. The pastor speaks against antisemitism because Jewish people matter. He speaks against hatred of Palestinians because Palestinians matter. He corrects distorted Scripture and challenges conspiracy theories because truth matters. He refuses collective guilt because justice matters. He confronts hatred because people created in the image of God matter, and he is willing to accept misunderstanding because faithfulness matters more than popularity.

History should make pastors particularly sensitive to this responsibility. There have been periods when hostility toward Jewish people increased gradually while many Christians remained quiet. We should be careful about judging people of earlier generations as though every person possessed all the information available to historians today. History is complicated, Christians responded in different ways, and some displayed extraordinary courage. Yet one lesson remains difficult to escape: hatred rarely begins at its final stage.

People do not normally wake up one morning and move immediately from peaceful coexistence to mass violence. Language changes first. Stereotypes spread. Conspiracy theories become respectable. Humiliation becomes normal. Discrimination becomes easier to justify. People who once would have objected become accustomed to hearing things they previously would have rejected. The shepherd should understand the importance of those early stages.

A pastor living in Germany in 1933 did not need to foresee everything that would happen by 1945 in order to know that humiliating Jewish neighbors was wrong. He did not need a complete understanding of the future to recognize the danger of treating an entire people as enemies. That lesson should make the modern pastor attentive without making him hysterical. Not every offensive comment signals another Holocaust, not every protest is the beginning of organized persecution, and not every political dispute is evidence of antisemitism. Historical awareness should produce discernment rather than panic, but discernment includes recognizing danger before it reaches its final form.

The pastor should therefore listen to Jewish communities when they describe what they are experiencing. Listening does not mean accepting every interpretation without examination. Jewish communities themselves contain many different political and religious perspectives. But Christians who claim to care about antisemitism should be willing to hear Jewish people describe the forms it takes in their own lives. There is something deeply inconsistent about telling Jewish people that Christians stand with them while refusing to listen when they say they are afraid. The same principle applies when listening to Palestinians, Arabs, Muslims, or other communities experiencing hostility. Listening is not surrender. It is one of the ways we learn to see people beyond our assumptions.

The shepherd should speak when Jewish people are threatened because they are Jewish, when synagogues, Jewish schools, or community institutions are attacked, when antisemitic conspiracy theories enter his congregation, when Scripture is distorted to justify contempt for Jews, when Jewish people are collectively blamed for the actions of Israel, when Holocaust denial or deliberate distortion appears, and when political activism crosses into intimidation or hatred directed at Jews as Jews. He should also speak when silence would reasonably be interpreted as indifference toward serious wrongdoing. Yet when he speaks, he should verify facts, distinguish individuals from groups, distinguish governments from peoples, distinguish political criticism from ethnic hatred, avoid exaggeration, refuse rumors, acknowledge genuine complexity, and apply the same moral principles to people with whom he disagrees. That is what makes pastoral speech credible.

The shepherd must also remember that courage is not measured by volume. Sometimes courage stands behind a pulpit and speaks publicly, but sometimes it occurs in a private conversation with a church

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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member. Sometimes it is a telephone call to a rabbi, a letter to a synagogue, correcting a false statement during a Bible study, refusing to share an inflammatory social-media post, or simply telling a friend that a statement about Jewish people is not true and should not be repeated. Small acts of courage matter because moral culture is built through ordinary decisions as much as through dramatic moments.

A congregation learns what is acceptable partly through what its leaders consistently tolerate and consistently challenge. The pastor is therefore always teaching, even when he is not preaching. He teaches by what he laughs at, what he ignores, what he corrects, whom he defends, whether his principles change depending upon which political side is involved, and whether frightened people believe they can come to him. This is why pastoral neutrality has limits. There are matters about which Christians may legitimately disagree and political questions on which pastors should give congregations room to reach different conclusions. Hatred of people because they are Jewish, however, is not merely another political opinion. Threatening a synagogue is not a policy debate. Blaming every Jewish person for the decisions of Israel is not legitimate political analysis. Holocaust denial is not a reasonable alternative interpretation of history. Deliberately intimidating Jewish students because they are Jewish is not ordinary democratic disagreement. There comes a point when the shepherd must call something wrong.

The Church does not need pastors who react angrily to every controversy, turn Sunday worship into political rallies, or use Israel to build platforms, generate fear, or demonstrate ideological loyalty. It needs shepherds who know Scripture, recognize danger, distinguish danger from disagreement, and care about Jewish people as people rather than merely as characters in a prophetic timetable. It needs shepherds who care about Palestinians without abandoning biblical convictions concerning Israel, who will correct their own side when necessary, who understand that truth without love can become harsh and love without truth can become empty, and who know both when to remain quiet and when silence is no longer faithfulness.

There may come a moment when a pastor looks at what is happening around him and realizes that speaking will cost something. Some members may complain. Someone may accuse him of becoming political. A donor may be unhappy. Social media may criticize him. People may misunderstand what he meant. At that moment he must remember why he became a shepherd. He was not called merely to preserve an institution. He was called to care for people and to teach truth. There are times when the safest sermon is not the faithful sermon, when protecting one's reputation can conflict with protecting people, and when a shepherd must decide whether avoiding controversy has become more important than confronting hatred.

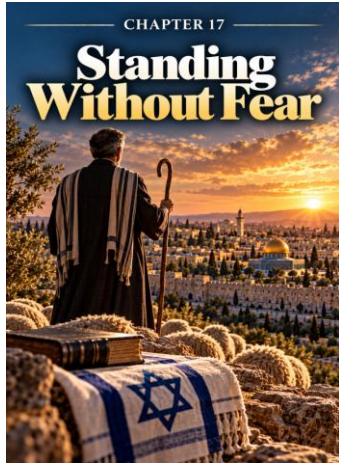
Those moments reveal something about leadership. The question is not whether we can eliminate fear, because courage rarely means feeling no fear. Courage means fear no longer determines obedience. The shepherd may speak with trembling hands, carefully choose every word, wish someone else would address the issue, and know that whatever he says will be criticized by someone. Yet if truth requires speech, he speaks, not because he wants controversy or attention and not because he wants to be political, but because he is a shepherd.

There is a time to listen, investigate, wait until the facts are known, lower the temperature of a heated discussion, and remind people that faithful Christians can disagree. There is also a time when the shepherd must stand. When hatred becomes acceptable, lies are repeated about a people, Scripture is distorted to justify contempt, Jewish neighbors are threatened, or fear begins silencing the Church, the shepherd must speak. When another generation asks what Christians did when antisemitism became visible, may they be able to say that the shepherds were not silent.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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We cannot change yesterday's silence. We cannot return to earlier generations and speak the words that should have been spoken or undo the moments when Christians looked away or waited too long. But we can decide what we will do today. We can refuse to allow fear to become our theology, politics to determine whom we defend, or hatred to hide behind religious and political language. We can refuse to remain silent when our Jewish neighbors are threatened. We can teach truth without hatred, show compassion without abandoning conviction, and stand with courage without turning the pulpit into a political platform. The shepherd does not need to speak about everything, but there are moments when he must speak, and when that moment comes, may he speak without fear.



### Chapter 17 — Standing Without Fear

Fear has always been one of the great tests of spiritual leadership. It rarely announces itself openly. A pastor seldom says, “I know what is right, but I am afraid to do it.” Fear usually speaks more quietly. It tells us that this is not the right time, that the congregation is not ready, that the subject is too controversial, that people may misunderstand, that someone important may leave, that giving may decline, that friends may criticize us, or that silence would be more prudent. Sometimes those concerns are legitimate. Wisdom requires timing, discernment, and careful speech. Yet there are moments when prudence becomes a respectable name for fear, and the shepherd must know the difference.

Standing without fear does not mean standing without wisdom. It does not mean speaking loudly, reacting impulsively, or turning every disagreement into a battle. It does not mean that pastors should become political activists or use the pulpit to promote governments, parties, candidates, or ideological movements. Courage is not measured by how many people we offend, and sometimes the loudest person in the room is not the bravest. Biblical courage is quieter and deeper. It is the willingness to remain faithful when faithfulness carries a cost, to speak when truth requires speech, and to remain silent when wisdom requires restraint.

That kind of courage is desperately needed when Christians speak about Israel and the Jewish people. Few subjects today produce such immediate reactions. Mention Israel and people begin arranging themselves into camps. Some hear the word and think immediately of biblical covenant and prophecy. Others think of war, Gaza, Palestinians, settlements, terrorism, military power, or international politics. Some Christians passionately defend Israel, while others strongly criticize it. Some have carefully studied the issues, while others have formed convictions from a handful of social-media posts. The pastor standing before such a congregation may quickly discover that almost anything he says can be misunderstood, and the temptation to say nothing can become very strong.

Yet silence is not always neutral. There are times when the Church must speak, not because it has become political, but because it is called to be faithful. If Jewish people are threatened because they are Jewish, the Church should not need a political consultation before deciding that hatred is wrong. If a synagogue is attacked, Christians should not first ask whether speaking in support of their Jewish neighbors will be interpreted as approval of every action of the Israeli government. If antisemitic conspiracy theories enter the congregation, the pastor should not ignore them because confronting them might create tension. There are moments when the shepherd must stand because remaining silent would communicate something he does not intend to communicate.

Standing with Israel, however, must be understood correctly. It does not mean declaring every action of an Israeli government righteous. It does not mean believing every military decision is beyond criticism. It does not mean assuming every political leader in Israel is fulfilling biblical prophecy or treating the Israeli flag as though it were equivalent to Scripture. Israel is a modern nation governed by human beings, and human governments are fallible. The Bible itself gives us no reason to confuse covenant faithfulness with political perfection. Israel's kings were criticized. David was confronted by Nathan, Ahab was confronted by Elijah, and the prophets repeatedly rebuked Israel and Judah for injustice, idolatry, corruption, violence, and unfaithfulness. Their criticism did not mean they hated Israel. In many cases, they confronted Israel precisely because they understood Israel's calling.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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Standing with Israel therefore means something deeper than standing with a government. It means recognizing the Jewish people as a people whose story is inseparable from Scripture. It means remembering the covenantal promises given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It means taking seriously Paul's question, "Hath God cast away his people?" and his answer, "God forbid." It means remembering the olive tree and Paul's warning to Gentile believers, "Boast not against the branches." It means refusing the arrogance that imagines the Church can enjoy Israel's Scriptures, Israel's prophets, Israel's covenants, Israel's Messiah, and Israel's spiritual heritage while becoming indifferent or hostile toward Jewish people. Standing without fear means being willing to say that clearly even when the subject has become politically uncomfortable.

It also means being willing to say just as clearly that Palestinians matter. Their suffering matters, their children matter, their families matter, and their lives possess value before God. A Christian does not weaken his support for Israel by acknowledging Palestinian humanity. Compassion is not betrayal. This is one of the places where fear can control Christians from opposite directions. Some fear that acknowledging Palestinian suffering will cause others to question their support for Israel. Others fear that acknowledging Jewish suffering or Israel's legitimate security concerns will cause people to question their concern for Palestinians. The result can become selective compassion in which we learn to grieve only for those whose suffering supports our argument.

The follower of Yeshua should reject that temptation. We should be capable of grieving when an Israeli mother loses a child and when a Palestinian mother loses a child. We should be able to condemn terrorism without becoming indifferent to civilians caught in war. We should be able to acknowledge Palestinian suffering without assigning collective guilt to Jewish people. We should be able to support Israel's existence without pretending every policy is correct. Standing without fear means refusing to allow political camps to determine whom we are permitted to love.

The pastor who teaches this may disappoint people on both sides. That may sometimes be unavoidable. The strong supporter of Israel may wish the pastor would speak less about Palestinians, while the passionate advocate for Palestinians may wish he would speak less about antisemitism or biblical covenant. One group may accuse him of compromise, while another accuses him of bias. The pastor must listen carefully to criticism because he may genuinely have something to learn, but he cannot allow the fear of criticism to become the standard by which truth is measured. The shepherd's first question cannot simply be what will keep everyone happy. It must be what is true and how that truth can be spoken faithfully and lovingly. Truth without love can become a weapon, while love without truth can become empty sentimentality. Yeshua embodied both grace and truth, and His shepherds should seek the same balance.

Standing without fear also means refusing to surrender Scripture to politics. The Church should not allow political movements to determine which biblical passages may be taught. Genesis 12 does not become politically inappropriate because it speaks about Abraham. Romans 11 does not become partisan because it speaks about Israel. Psalm 122 does not become propaganda because it tells us to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Neither does the command to love our neighbor become political merely because the neighbor is Palestinian. Scripture must be permitted to challenge every political tribe.

This is one of the great tests of whether our theology is genuinely biblical. If Scripture only challenges the people with whom we disagree, we may not be allowing Scripture to challenge us at all. The Word of God should sometimes make the supporter of Israel uncomfortable, and it should sometimes make the critic of Israel uncomfortable. It should confront antisemitism and hatred of Arabs. It should challenge political idolatry and theological indifference. It should expose arrogance, prejudice, falsehood, cruelty, and fear wherever they appear. The shepherd who stands without fear must therefore be willing to correct

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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his own side. This may be one of the clearest signs of integrity. It is easy to identify the failures of opponents, but it is much harder to challenge people whose general position we share.

If a Christian who strongly supports Israel speaks contemptuously about Palestinians, the pastor should challenge that contempt. If someone advocating for Palestinians repeats an antisemitic conspiracy theory, the pastor should challenge that as well. If someone uses Scripture to justify hatred, the pastor should correct the misuse of Scripture regardless of the political direction from which it comes. Truth does not change according to who is speaking, and neither should Christian morality.

Standing without fear also requires the courage to say, “I do not know.” This may sound like the opposite of courage, but it is not. In an age when everyone is expected to have an immediate opinion about everything, admitting uncertainty can require considerable humility. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict contains layers of history, competing narratives, security concerns, religious claims, legal arguments, political interests, and human suffering. A pastor does not become more spiritual by pretending to possess expertise he does not have. There will be times when the facts are unclear, reports conflict, videos appear without context, governments make claims, activists make counterclaims, and social media circulates images faster than they can be verified. In those moments, standing without fear may mean resisting the pressure to speak before we know what happened. Courage is not recklessness, and sometimes the courageous response is to acknowledge that we need to wait until we know more.

At other times, the facts will be clear enough that silence is no longer justified. A synagogue may have been vandalized, Jewish students may have been threatened, an antisemitic conspiracy theory may be circulating, Holocaust denial may appear within the community, or Jewish families may be blamed for events in Israel. At such moments the pastor does not need to understand every detail of Middle Eastern history before saying that hatred of Jewish people is wrong. The same principle applies when Palestinians, Arabs, or Muslims are threatened because of who they are. Christian moral consistency requires us to defend human dignity even when the people being mistreated belong to a group with which we may have serious theological or political disagreements. This is what it means to stand on principle rather than tribe.

The pastor should also remember that courage is contagious. Congregations learn courage partly by watching their leaders. When a pastor calmly confronts a falsehood, members learn that truth matters. When he reaches out to a Jewish community after an antisemitic incident, members learn that neighborly love requires action. When he refuses to repeat unverified information, members learn intellectual discipline. When he acknowledges Palestinian suffering while affirming God's faithfulness to Israel, members learn that compassion and conviction can coexist.

The opposite is also true. Fear can become contagious. If pastors consistently avoid difficult subjects because they fear controversy, congregations learn that Christian conviction should retreat whenever cultural pressure becomes strong. If leaders remain silent when Jewish neighbors are threatened, members may conclude that the matter is unimportant. If pastors refuse to correct antisemitic language because the person using it is influential, the congregation learns that influence can purchase silence. A shepherd therefore teaches not only through sermons but through what he tolerates, what he challenges, whom he defends, and what he is willing to risk for the sake of truth.

This is why history matters. We cannot revisit the moments when Christians in previous generations should have spoken more clearly. We cannot stand beside Jewish families who faced hatred decades or centuries ago. We cannot rewrite sermons that were preached or recover sermons that were never preached. History is fixed, but history can instruct us. One of its most sobering lessons is that people living through dangerous times rarely know exactly where events are heading. Looking backward, we see

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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patterns that were much harder to recognize while they were developing. That should make us humble when judging previous generations, but it should also make us attentive in our own.

We do not need to predict the future in order to recognize hatred in the present. A pastor does not need to know where antisemitic rhetoric will eventually lead before saying it is wrong. He does not need to know whether a threat will become an attack before taking the threat seriously. He does not need to predict another historical catastrophe before defending a Jewish neighbor. The moral question comes before the historical comparison.

Christians should therefore avoid careless comparisons with the Holocaust. Not every act of antisemitism means another Holocaust is beginning, not every government policy is equivalent to the Nuremberg Laws, and not every political leader is Hitler. When such comparisons are used casually, history is distorted and genuine warnings can lose their force. Standing without fear requires seriousness rather than sensationalism. We do not need exaggerated language to confront real hatred. If a synagogue is vandalized, call it wrong. If Jewish students are intimidated, call it wrong. If people spread lies about Jews, correct the lies. If someone denies the Holocaust, answer with truth. Moral clarity does not require rhetorical exaggeration.

Pastors must also guard against another form of fear: the fear of losing influence. Churches are organizations as well as spiritual communities. They have budgets, buildings, programs, staff, donors, attendance numbers, and reputations. Those realities cannot simply be ignored, and responsible leadership requires stewardship. Yet there is a danger when preserving the institution becomes more important than fulfilling its purpose. A pastor may know that speaking about antisemitism will upset an influential member. He may know that teaching Romans 11 will challenge a theological tradition deeply embedded in the congregation. He may know that acknowledging Palestinian suffering will upset some supporters of Israel or that defending Israel's right to exist will anger others. At such moments institutional considerations can quietly become theological ones.

The question then becomes whether the pastor serves the institution or whether the institution serves the mission. A shepherd is not merely a chief executive whose highest responsibility is preserving market share. The Church is not a corporation whose ultimate measure of success is growth, revenue, or public approval. Pastors must certainly lead wisely, but Christian leadership cannot be reduced to institutional management. Yeshua's great image of spiritual leadership is the shepherd who knows the sheep, feeds them, leads them, searches for those who wander, protects them when danger comes, and, when necessary, stands between the flock and the wolf. That image should shape Christian leadership in every generation.

Standing without fear also requires humility concerning our own history. Christians have sometimes stood courageously beside Jewish people, and those stories should be remembered. Christians have also sometimes remained silent, repeated harmful theology, or participated in prejudice. Those failures should be remembered as well, not because Christians must live permanently under historical guilt, but because memory can become instruction. We should not ask history merely whom we should blame. We should ask what we should learn. We should ask what causes ordinary people to become accustomed to hatred, what causes churches to remain silent, what causes religious language to be used against vulnerable people, what causes leaders to choose institutional safety over moral courage, and what allows stereotypes to become normal.

Those questions are more useful than self-righteous declarations that we would certainly have behaved differently. None of us knows exactly how courageous we would have been in another generation. The question is how courageous we will be in this one.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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That brings us back to the Jewish people living around us today. They are not historical abstractions, nor are they simply descendants of biblical characters. They are our neighbors. They own businesses, teach in universities, attend schools, raise families, worship in synagogues, work in hospitals, serve communities, and live ordinary lives. Some are deeply religious, some are secular, some strongly support Israel, some criticize Israeli governments, and some rarely think about Israel at all. Christians should resist turning Jewish people into symbols. They are not merely evidence for prophecy, nor are they objects through which Christians prove theological arguments. They are people.

The same is true of Palestinians. They are not merely a problem within the story of Israel. They are human beings with families, histories, fears, aspirations, and grief. Christian concern for Israel becomes morally distorted if it requires us to stop seeing Palestinians as people. Standing without fear means refusing both forms of dehumanization. The Church should be capable of something better than the political culture surrounding it. It should be a place where a Jewish person can hear Christians affirm their faith in Yeshua without hearing contempt for Jews. It should be a place where a Palestinian can hear Christians speak about God's covenant with Israel without being told that Palestinian suffering is irrelevant. It should be a place where disagreement does not require hatred and conviction does not destroy compassion. That will not happen accidentally. Pastors must teach it, parents must model it, Christians must practice it, and churches must choose it.

There is another reason Christians should stand without fear. Our confidence ultimately does not rest in governments, armies, elections, political parties, or international institutions. All of these can change. Governments fall, coalitions collapse, leaders die, nations rise and decline, and political arrangements that seem permanent can disappear within a generation. The Christian's confidence rests in the character of God.

That is why the question of Israel ultimately reaches beyond politics. If God made promises, does He remember them? If human beings fail, does God's faithfulness fail with them? If Israel stumbles, does that mean God's Word has failed? Paul confronted precisely that concern in Romans, and his answer directs us away from human boasting and toward divine mercy. The story is ultimately about God, and that truth should produce courage.

We do not need to manipulate events to defend God. We do not need to force every headline into a prophetic timetable. We do not need to pretend Israel is perfect in order to defend God's faithfulness. We do not need to deny Palestinian suffering to protect our theology, and we do not need to fear difficult questions. If our theology is true, it can withstand examination. If God's promises are reliable, they do not require propaganda. If Scripture is trustworthy, we do not need to distort facts in order to defend it.

Standing without fear therefore includes intellectual courage. Christians should ask difficult questions, examine biblical passages, study history, listen to Jewish voices, listen to Palestinian voices, compare claims with evidence, admit uncertainty, correct mistakes, refuse conspiracy theories, and refuse to be frightened by complexity. Truth has nothing to fear from honest examination. Pastors should give their congregations that confidence. They should not create believers who are frightened whenever someone asks a difficult question about Israel. They should create disciples who know how to open Scripture, examine context, listen carefully, distinguish theology from politics, and respond with both conviction and humility.

There will always be disagreements. Christians will continue to debate prophecy, modern Israel, the land, politics, war, and peace. Those debates can be vigorous without becoming hateful. The goal is not uniformity of opinion but faithfulness of character. We should be able to disagree without contempt, defend Israel without idolizing it, care about Palestinians without demonizing Jews, condemn terrorism

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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without losing compassion for civilians, criticize governments without blaming peoples, confront antisemitism without labeling every disagreement antisemitic, remember history without becoming trapped by it, and speak truth without allowing fear to determine our convictions.

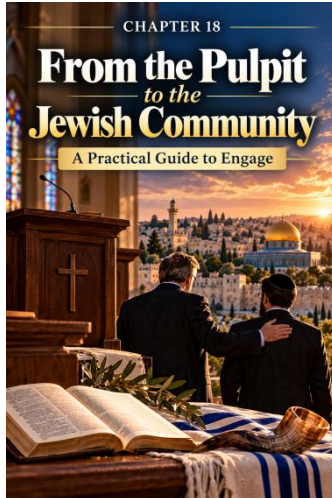
Perhaps the greatest danger is not that Christians will answer every political question incorrectly. Perhaps the greater danger is that political fear will cause us to forget who we are. The Church does not belong to Israel, Palestine, Canada, the United States, Europe, the political right, or the political left. The Church belongs to Yeshua, and Yeshua was not afraid to speak truth. He spoke truth to religious leaders, political authority, His disciples, and the crowds. He also showed compassion to people others ignored. He touched the unclean, welcomed the outsider, defended the vulnerable, confronted hypocrisy, and wept over Jerusalem. The shepherd who follows Him must learn both courage and compassion.

There will be moments when speaking is difficult, when silence appears safer, and when the pastor knows that whatever he says will disappoint someone. In those moments he must return to the question that has run through these chapters: What does faithfulness require? The answer cannot simply be whatever protects our reputation, preserves our platform, satisfies our political tribe, or receives the most applause. Sometimes faithfulness will require silence because the facts are unclear. Sometimes it will require listening because another person needs to be heard. Sometimes it will require admitting that we were wrong. Sometimes it will require compassion for someone whose politics we reject. Sometimes it will require defending a Jewish neighbor or speaking for a Palestinian civilian. Sometimes it will require confronting antisemitism within our own circles, telling our own supporters that they have crossed a moral line, or standing almost alone.

That is when the words *standing without fear* become personal. Standing without fear does not mean that we feel nothing. It means that fear does not determine where we stand. The shepherd may tremble, he may be criticized, he may be misunderstood, and he may not know exactly what the consequences will be, but he stands because faithfulness requires it. He stands on Scripture rather than slogans, truth rather than propaganda, compassion rather than hatred, humility rather than arrogance, and the faithfulness of God rather than the approval of people.

The Church does not need louder shepherds merely for the sake of being loud. It needs faithful shepherds who know when to listen and when to speak, when to comfort and when to confront, when to wait and when to act. Israel does not need Christians who blindly defend everything done in its name. The Jewish people do not need Christians who treat them merely as pieces in an end-times puzzle. Palestinians do not need Christians who regard their suffering as inconvenient. The Church does not need leaders whose convictions change according to the direction of political pressure. What is needed is faithfulness to Scripture, truth, the dignity of human life, our Jewish neighbors, compassion toward Palestinians, the responsibility to confront antisemitism, and the refusal to allow hatred to determine our response.

The generation before us had its moments of decision, and future generations will have theirs. This one belongs to us. We cannot change yesterday's silence. We cannot rewrite the moments when Christians should have spoken and did not. But with God's help, we can refuse to repeat them. We can remember the covenant, the olive tree, the Jewish Messiah, the Jewish people, the stranger, and those who suffer. We can remember that truth and compassion belong together. When the moment comes and fear tells the shepherd to remain silent, we can remember whom we serve and stand, not in anger, arrogance, hatred, or pursuit of political applause, but in truth, humility, compassion, and faith. That is what it means to stand without fear.



## Chapter 18 — From the Pulpit to the Jewish Community

### Beyond the Sermon

There comes a point when what is preached from the pulpit must walk out the church door. A pastor may preach faithfully about God's covenant with Israel, explain Romans 9–11, warn against antisemitism, teach the Jewish identity of Yeshua, and remind the congregation to “boast not against the branches,” but eventually those truths should influence how Christians relate to Jewish people who actually live around them. Theology that never becomes relationship remains incomplete.

For many Christians, the Jewish people remain surprisingly distant. They know Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Peter, Paul, and Yeshua, yet they may never have had a meaningful conversation with a Jewish neighbor. They read Jewish history in Scripture, discuss Israel in Bible studies, pray for the peace of Jerusalem, and follow events in the Middle East, yet the synagogue only a few kilometers from their church may remain an unfamiliar world. It is possible to care deeply about Israel as a theological subject while knowing almost nothing about Jewish people as neighbors. The Church should be capable of moving beyond that distance and turning biblical conviction into genuine human relationship.

### Jewish People Are Not a Theological Project

One of the first lessons Christians must learn is that Jewish people are not merely subjects of Christian theology. They are not illustrations for prophecy charts, evidence for an argument about the end times, or objects through whom Christians prove the reliability of Scripture. They are people with families, professions, memories, beliefs, questions, joys, fears, disagreements, traditions, and stories. This may sound obvious, but the distinction matters because Christians sometimes approach Jewish people primarily through theological categories. We think about covenant, election, prophecy, Israel, Messiah, Romans 11, and salvation. Those subjects are important, and Christians should not abandon their convictions concerning them, but a relationship cannot flourish if one person constantly feels that he exists mainly as the other person's theological project.

Friendship begins differently. It begins by learning someone's name, asking questions, listening to the answers, and becoming interested in a person's story rather than merely waiting for an opportunity to present our own. For pastors, this means teaching congregations that loving Jewish people requires more than holding the correct theology concerning Israel. A Christian can possess a strong theology of Israel and still never know a Jewish person. Biblical conviction should eventually produce human relationship.

### Start With the Jewish Community Nearby

Pastors do not need to travel to Jerusalem before beginning this work. There may already be a Jewish community nearby. There may be a synagogue, Jewish community centre, Holocaust education organization, Jewish school, cultural organization, or local group confronting antisemitism. The first step may be as simple as learning what exists in the community and introducing oneself.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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A pastor might contact a local rabbi without arriving with an elaborate agenda. He does not need to propose a joint conference, interfaith program, or public event. He can simply explain that he pastors a Christian congregation in the area, that he cares about Christian-Jewish relations, and that he would appreciate an opportunity to become better acquainted. That first conversation may not immediately produce anything visible, and that is perfectly acceptable. Trust does not need to be manufactured, and relationships should be allowed to develop at their own pace. The objective is not to accomplish something quickly but to begin knowing one another.

This requires patience, particularly because Jewish communities may have understandable reasons for approaching Christian interest cautiously. Christian-Jewish history contains both friendship and painful chapters. Some Jewish people have experienced Christian conversations in which apparent friendship quickly became pressure to convert. Others may associate Christian outreach with historical efforts to erase Jewish identity. Even when today's Christian approaches with completely different intentions, he should understand that the Jewish person may bring a different historical memory into the conversation. That should not offend us. It should make us patient.

### **Listen Before You Speak**

Pastors spend much of their lives speaking. They preach sermons, teach Bible studies, conduct meetings, counsel people, lead prayers, and answer questions. Yet one of the most important ministries a pastor can offer the Jewish community may be listening. Ask a Jewish neighbor what being Jewish means to him. The answer may surprise you. For one person, Jewish identity may be deeply religious. For another, it may be primarily cultural. For another, it may be connected to family, history, ancestry, language, Israel, tradition, or the memory of persecution. For many, it may be some combination of all of these.

Jewish identity cannot be reduced simply to religious belief, and Jewish people themselves understand their identity in diverse ways. Christians who approach Jewish people assuming they already understand them can easily miss this complexity. Listening also means hearing how antisemitism is experienced rather than merely discussing it academically. A Christian may know the definition of antisemitism, but a Jewish parent may know what it feels like to wonder whether a child should wear a Star of David in public. A pastor may have studied Holocaust history, but a survivor carries memories no textbook can reproduce. A Christian may have read about attacks against synagogues, while a rabbi has had to think about security at the entrance to his own congregation. There is a difference between knowing about fear and listening to someone who has experienced it. The Church needs both knowledge and listening.

### **Friendship Without an Agenda**

Genuine friendship cannot be built entirely around an agenda. If every conversation with a Jewish person becomes an attempt to move toward a theological argument, trust will be difficult to establish. Friendship means being willing to know another person even when no immediate ministry objective is accomplished. This does not require Christians to conceal their faith. A pastor should not pretend that he does not believe Yeshua is the Messiah. Honesty matters in friendship, and Jewish friends should never discover months later that a Christian concealed his convictions in order to gain their trust.

Honesty, however, is different from pressure. A Christian can explain that faith in Yeshua is central to his life while also making clear that he values the Jewish person as a person whether or not that individual ever agrees with him. Those convictions can coexist. Christians should remember that Jewish people are not projects to be completed. We do not befriend people merely because we hope eventually to report a

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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spiritual result. We befriend them because they are our neighbors and because love of neighbor is itself a Christian responsibility.

If a Jewish friend asks what we believe about Yeshua, we should answer honestly. If theological questions arise, we should discuss them respectfully. If disagreement remains, friendship does not need to end. A relationship that disappears the moment someone rejects our theological position was never much of a friendship.

### Learning From the Synagogue

Many Christians have never entered a synagogue, and many Jewish people have never entered a church. That unfamiliarity can allow assumptions to develop on both sides. Where appropriate and when invited, Christians can learn a great deal by attending public Jewish events or synagogue programs open to visitors. They may hear Hebrew prayers, see Torah scrolls, learn about Jewish holidays, encounter Jewish interpretations of Scripture, and begin to understand the rhythms of Jewish communal life.

The purpose should not be to judge everything according to Christian practice but to learn. A pastor who has spent years preaching from the Hebrew Scriptures may discover how meaningful it is to watch a Torah scroll being handled with reverence. A Christian who has preached about Passover may benefit from listening to Jewish people explain what Passover means within their families. Someone who has read about Yom Kippur may better appreciate its significance after hearing Jewish people describe the Day of Atonement from within their own tradition. Learning does not require agreement with every theological interpretation. Christians and Jews have profound disagreements, especially concerning Yeshua, and respect does not require pretending otherwise. Disagreement, however, should not prevent understanding.

### When a Synagogue Is Threatened

Relationships become especially meaningful during difficult moments. If a synagogue is vandalized, threatened, or attacked, nearby churches should not have to wonder whether they are permitted to care. The pastor can telephone the rabbi, the church can send a letter, members can express concern, and, if appropriate, Christian leaders can attend a community gathering standing against antisemitism. These actions should not be performed primarily for publicity. The church does not need photographs proving that it cares. Sometimes the most meaningful acts of friendship happen quietly.

A pastor might simply tell the rabbi that he heard what happened, that his congregation is thinking of the Jewish community and praying for its safety, and that he would like to know whether there is an appropriate way the church can help. Those few words may accomplish more than another conference about Christian-Jewish relations because the difference is relationship. Imagine the effect if every time a synagogue were threatened, nearby churches contacted the Jewish community before being asked. Imagine if Jewish families knew that when antisemitism appeared, Christians would not wait to determine whether defending them was politically convenient. That kind of response communicates something about Christianity that no theological argument can communicate as powerfully.

### Meeting Holocaust Survivors

One of the extraordinary privileges still available to some communities is the opportunity to hear directly from Holocaust survivors. As that generation becomes smaller, their testimonies become increasingly precious. Where opportunities exist, pastors and churches should consider listening to survivors, attending

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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community events where they speak, supporting Holocaust education, and encouraging younger Christians to hear their stories.

Survivors, however, should never be treated as historical exhibits. They are people before they are witnesses to history. Their stories may contain experiences difficult to hear. Some may remember hiding, deportation, ghettos, concentration camps, murdered relatives, lost childhoods, or rebuilding lives after unimaginable destruction. Others may have survived because neighbors hid them or because someone took a risk. Christians should listen without defensiveness. If a survivor describes antisemitism associated with Christians, the first Christian response should not be to protect Christianity's reputation. Historical truth requires us to recognize that some Christians participated in hatred, some remained silent, some resisted, and some risked their lives to save Jews. The survivor sitting before us, however, does not primarily need an argument. He or she deserves to be heard.

### **Remembering Christians Who Stood With Jews**

Christian-Jewish relationship should not be built solely around Christian failure. There are also stories of extraordinary courage that deserve to be remembered. Christians such as Corrie ten Boom and her family risked themselves to protect Jewish people, while André Trocmé and the community associated with Le Chambon-sur-Lignon became known for sheltering people who were endangered. Many other Christians, some famous and many almost forgotten, made decisions that demonstrated what Christian neighbor-love could look like under pressure.

These stories matter because they remind the Church that history was never inevitable. People made choices. Some looked away while others opened their doors. Some protected themselves while others protected their neighbors. The point is not to use heroic Christians to excuse Christian failures but to ask what made courage possible and how the Church can cultivate that same moral character today. We cannot hide a Jewish family from the Nazis in 1943 because that moment belongs to another generation, but we can stand beside a Jewish family facing antisemitism today. History does not ask us to reenact someone else's courage. It asks us to discover what courage requires now.

### **Build Relationships Before a Crisis**

One of the worst times to introduce yourself to your neighbor is when his house is already burning. Relationships between churches and Jewish communities should not begin only after an antisemitic attack. Pastors can build relationships during ordinary times. A coffee with a rabbi does not require a crisis, and a conversation between Christian and Jewish community leaders does not need to begin with tragedy. Churches can attend Holocaust remembrance events, educational programs, public lectures, and appropriate community gatherings. Pastors can learn about Jewish holidays and offer respectful greetings when appropriate.

These may seem like small gestures, but relationships are usually built through small gestures repeated over time. Then, if a crisis comes, the telephone call is not from a stranger. It is from someone who has already demonstrated that the relationship matters.

## Relationships With Israelis

Churches should also consider relationships with Israelis themselves. Israel should not exist in Christian imagination merely as a biblical landscape or political headline. Israelis are people living ordinary lives in an extraordinarily complicated environment. Christians who travel to Israel can make an effort to speak with people rather than merely visit biblical sites. Tourists can move from one holy place to another while having surprisingly little meaningful interaction with the people who actually live there.

Christians should listen to Israelis from different backgrounds because Jewish Israelis themselves represent enormous diversity. Their families have roots across Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, Ethiopia, the former Soviet Union, the Americas, and elsewhere. Some are Orthodox, some traditional, some secular, and some Messianic. Their political views vary dramatically. Israel also includes Arab citizens, Druze, Christians, Muslims, Bedouins, and other communities whose experiences form part of the country's complicated social reality. Listening to people does not require agreeing with them. It simply helps replace abstractions with human beings.

## Working With Those Who Confront Antisemitism

Churches do not need to reinvent every form of ministry. Jewish and non-Jewish organizations are already engaged in Holocaust education, monitoring antisemitism, supporting threatened communities, teaching history, and building relationships. Pastors can learn from such organizations and, where appropriate, cooperate with them.

Cooperation does not require theological agreement on every issue. Christians routinely work with others on matters of shared concern while maintaining their own convictions. A church can support efforts opposing antisemitic hatred without surrendering its Christian identity. The important thing is discernment. Churches should understand the organizations with which they associate, know their purposes, and avoid assuming that every organization speaks for all Jewish people. Jewish communities contain political, theological, and cultural diversity just as Christian communities do. Partnership should therefore be thoughtful rather than merely symbolic.

## The Jewish Community Does Not Speak With One Voice

Christians sometimes speak about “the Jewish view” as though one such view exists. It does not. Jewish people disagree about religion, politics, Israel, Zionism, Israeli governments, peace negotiations, settlements, military policy, theology, tradition, and countless other subjects. Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, secular, cultural, Israeli, Diaspora, and other Jewish identities cannot simply be collapsed into one perspective.

A pastor who develops relationships with Jewish people will quickly discover this diversity, and that discovery is healthy because it prevents us from treating one Jewish friend as the representative of millions of people. We would not expect one Christian to explain every Christian denomination, theological tradition, political opinion, and historical controversy. We should not place that burden on Jewish friends either. One of the simplest forms of respect is to ask people what they believe rather than assuming that we already know.

# Standing with Israel without Fear

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## **Do Not Begin With Politics**

When Christians meet Jewish people, there is no requirement that the first conversation be about Israel. Imagine meeting someone at church and having that person immediately ask you to defend every decision made by your national government simply because you are a citizen of that country. The assumption would seem strange. Yet Jewish people are sometimes expected to explain or defend decisions made by an Israeli government thousands of kilometers away.

A Jewish person living in Toronto, London, Paris, New York, or elsewhere is not automatically a spokesperson for the Israeli government. Friendship can begin with ordinary things such as family, work, community, books, history, food, music, faith, children, travel, or whatever naturally arises. If Israel eventually enters the conversation, listen before assuming. The Jewish person may have strong views, or perhaps not. Allow the person to be a person before asking him to represent a nation.

## **Share Faith Without Manipulation**

Eventually Christians will face an important question: if we genuinely believe Yeshua is the Messiah, how can we have Jewish friendships without either hiding our faith or making the relationship feel like a conversion strategy? The answer is honesty. Christians should never be ashamed of Yeshua. Our faith is central to who we are, and if someone asks what we believe, we should answer openly. At the same time, Christian witness should reflect the character of the Messiah we proclaim. Manipulation, deception, pressure, and conditional friendship do not honor Him.

Jewish-Christian conversation about Yeshua can be profound because the question itself emerges from Jewish Scripture, Jewish history, and the Jewish world of the first century. Those conversations deserve patience and respect. A Jewish friend may disagree strongly. The Christian should listen, ask why, explain what he believes, and open Scripture if the conversation naturally moves there. If the disagreement remains, friendship can remain as well. The Gospel does not require Christians to stop loving people who disagree with us. Quite the opposite.

## **Let Jewish Friends Teach Us**

Christian-Jewish friendship should not operate on the assumption that Christians are always the teachers and Jewish people are always the students. Christians have much they can learn. We can learn about Jewish history and memory. We can learn how Jewish communities preserved identity through centuries of dispersion. We can learn how Jewish families understand festivals Christians often encounter only as biblical passages. We can hear interpretations of the Hebrew Scriptures that challenge us to examine assumptions we have inherited.

Learning does not mean accepting every interpretation. It means possessing enough humility to listen. Christians sometimes forget that the Bible did not begin in a European or North American church. The Hebrew Scriptures emerged from Israel, the prophets were Israelites, the Psalms arose from Israel's worship, and Yeshua entered a Jewish world. Listening to Jewish people can sometimes help Christians see aspects of Scripture that familiarity has caused us to overlook.

## **From Theology to Friendship**

The great danger is that churches will talk about Jewish people without ever talking with Jewish people. A pastor can preach twenty sermons about Israel and never meet a rabbi. A church can hold prophecy conferences and never visit the Jewish community down the street. Christians can debate antisemitism online while never asking a Jewish neighbor whether he feels safe. Something is missing when that happens.

Theology should lead us toward people. If Romans 11 teaches humility, that humility should become visible in how we listen. If Genesis 12 teaches that God's covenant with Abraham matters, that conviction should influence how we regard Abraham's descendants. If Yeshua teaches us to love our neighbor, that command should cross the street. If history teaches us what silence can cost, memory should move our feet.

## **When Friendship Becomes Witness**

There is a form of Christian witness that occurs before a theological argument is ever made. It happens when Jewish people discover that Christians are willing to stand beside them when there is nothing to gain. A Jewish community experiencing an antisemitic threat may discover that local churches are already calling. A Holocaust survivor may speak and see young Christians listening carefully. A rabbi may know that the pastor down the street disagrees with him profoundly about Yeshua but also know that if his synagogue is threatened, that pastor will telephone. Jewish parents may discover that Christian parents are teaching their children not to blame Jewish classmates for events in Israel. Christians may refuse antisemitic jokes, conspiracy theories, and stereotypes even when no Jewish person is present to hear them.

That is a form of witness. It does not replace proclamation of the Gospel, but it may influence whether people believe us when we speak about the love of God. Our conduct cannot save anyone, but our conduct can either support or contradict the message we proclaim.

## **A Relationship That Costs Something**

Friendship eventually costs something. It costs time, attention, patience, and sometimes reputation. A pastor who develops genuine friendships with Jewish leaders may be criticized by Christians who misunderstand what he is doing. A rabbi who develops friendships with Christian pastors may face questions from within his own community. Historical wounds and theological differences do not disappear simply because two people drink coffee together.

That is precisely why these relationships matter. Friendship across genuine differences demonstrates that disagreement does not require hostility. The Christian does not need to stop believing in Yeshua, and the Jewish person does not need to pretend that Christian claims are acceptable to him. Both can acknowledge the disagreement honestly while still choosing to treat the other with dignity.

## **From the Pulpit to the Street**

Eventually every pastor must leave the pulpit. The sermon ends, the Bible is closed, the congregation goes home, and then comes the question of whether anything changes. Does the teaching about Israel remain inside the sanctuary, or does it shape how Christians treat Jewish neighbors? Does the sermon

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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about antisemitism remain words, or does the church stand beside the local synagogue when hatred appears? Does the lesson about the olive tree create humility? Does teaching about Yeshua's Jewish identity produce greater respect for the people from whom He came?

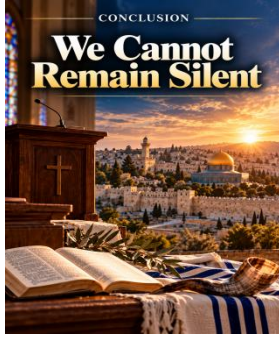
This is where theology becomes discipleship. The distance from the pulpit to the Jewish community may be geographically short but spiritually significant. Sometimes it is only a telephone call, a coffee, attending a Holocaust remembrance event, visiting a synagogue when invited, listening to someone's family story, or simply saying, "I would like to understand." These actions will not solve centuries of Christian-Jewish tension, and they do not need to. Friendship usually begins with something smaller. It begins when one person walks toward another.

### **Refusing Yesterday's Silence**

The Church cannot change the past. We cannot undo expulsions, forced conversions, pogroms, theological contempt, or the moments when Christians remained silent while Jewish neighbors suffered. We cannot return to previous generations and make different choices for them, but we can make different choices now. We can teach our congregations to recognize antisemitism, refuse conspiracy theories, correct distorted theology, teach the Jewish identity of Yeshua, remember Paul's warning not to boast against the branches, and defend Jewish neighbors when they are threatened. More importantly, we can become their friends before they are threatened.

Perhaps that final step is among the most important. Jewish people should not hear from Christians only when something terrible happens. Friendship should not require a crisis. The Church can walk toward the Jewish community because friendship itself is worthwhile. The pastor can step away from the pulpit, cross the street, introduce himself, listen, learn, and begin a relationship without needing to know exactly where it will lead.

For generations, Christians have spoken about the Jewish people. Perhaps one of the things needed in our generation is much simpler. We need to speak with them, listen to them, stand beside them, and, wherever possible, become their friends. That is how the message moves from the pulpit to the Jewish community.



### Conclusion — We Cannot Remain Silent

At the heart of this book is a question that reaches deeper than politics, history, prophecy, or even the modern State of Israel. It is a question about the character of God. Does God keep His word? When He makes a covenant, does He remain faithful to it? When the people to whom He made promises fail Him, does their failure cause His faithfulness to fail as well? These questions matter because the biblical story of Israel is ultimately not only the story of a people. It is also the story of a God who makes promises and remains faithful to them.

From Abraham onward, Scripture repeatedly returns to this truth. God called Abraham and promised that through him blessing would come to the nations. He confirmed His covenant with Isaac and Jacob. Jacob became Israel, and from Israel came the prophets, the Scriptures, the apostles, and ultimately Yeshua the Messiah. Israel's history contains extraordinary moments of faith as well as rebellion, idolatry, judgment, exile, suffering, and unbelief. Yet throughout that history the faithfulness of God remains the constant thread.

That is why Paul's question in Romans 11 is so important: “Hath God cast away his people?” His answer could hardly be stronger: “God forbid.” Paul does not deny Israel's unbelief, nor does he minimize it. Instead, he places Israel's failure beside God's faithfulness and insists that the latter has not disappeared because of the former. Later in the same chapter he reminds Gentile believers that “the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.” The Christian discussion about Israel must therefore begin not with the perfection of Israel but with the faithfulness of God.

Christians should care deeply about this because our own hope rests upon the same character of God. We trust His promises of forgiveness, salvation, resurrection, eternal life, and the return of Messiah because we believe that God does what He says. If God's promises are dependable only when human beings behave perfectly, none of us has much reason for confidence.

Israel therefore presents the Church with a profound theological question. If God remains faithful to promises made to Israel despite Israel's failures, then His faithfulness reveals something about who He is. Conversely, if we casually conclude that centuries of covenant language can simply disappear because human beings were unfaithful, we should at least recognize the theological implications of that conclusion.

This does not mean every promise should be interpreted simplistically, nor does it resolve every Christian debate concerning covenant, prophecy, the land, or the modern State of Israel. Faithful Christians disagree about some of these matters. But disagreement should drive us deeper into Scripture rather than permit us to ignore what Scripture says. The Church should be willing to wrestle seriously with Abraham, the prophets, Yeshua, Romans 9–11, the olive tree, and Paul's continuing concern for Israel.

One of the burdens pastors sometimes feel when Israel is discussed is that they must become experts on the Middle East before they are qualified to say anything. They imagine they must understand every war, border dispute, political party, coalition agreement, peace proposal, settlement controversy, military strategy, United Nations resolution, and historical claim before addressing Israel from the pulpit. That is neither realistic nor necessary.

Pastors should learn history and current events carefully enough to avoid careless statements. They should verify information before repeating it, distinguish facts from propaganda, and acknowledge when an issue

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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exceeds their expertise. There is nothing wrong with a pastor saying, “I do not know.” Intellectual humility is not weakness. But a pastor does not need to possess a degree in Middle Eastern politics to teach Genesis 12. He does not need to understand every Israeli election to explain Romans 11. He does not need to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict before teaching that antisemitism is wrong. He does not need to become a military strategist before saying that Jewish children and Palestinian children both possess human dignity. The pastor's primary responsibility is not to explain every political development. It is to teach the Word of God faithfully and help the congregation think biblically.

Nothing in this book requires Christians to pretend that Israel is perfect. The Bible itself refuses to do so. Scripture records Israel's sins with remarkable honesty. Moses confronted Israel, the prophets confronted Israel, Nathan confronted David, Elijah confronted Ahab, and Yeshua confronted religious leaders within His own Jewish world. Biblical love has never required moral blindness.

The modern State of Israel should likewise be understood as a real nation governed by real human beings. Governments make wise decisions and foolish ones. Political leaders can act courageously or selfishly. Military actions can be necessary and still raise serious moral questions about particular decisions. Policies can be defended, questioned, changed, or rejected. Christians therefore do Israel no service by pretending that supporting Israel requires defending everything done by an Israeli government. Our faith is not in an Israeli prime minister, political party, military institution, or parliament. Governments change, coalitions collapse, and leaders come and go. God's faithfulness does not depend upon any of them. There is an important difference between believing that God has not abandoned Israel and believing that Israel can do no wrong. Scripture allows us to affirm the first while firmly rejecting the second.

Paul gives Gentile Christians an image that should remain before the Church whenever Israel is discussed: the olive tree. Some natural branches were broken off, wild branches were grafted in, and Gentile believers were warned not to become arrogant. “Boast not against the branches,” Paul writes. Then he gives the reason: “thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.” Those words should humble the Church.

Christianity did not begin with Gentiles. We did not give Abraham to Israel. We did not give Moses to Israel. We did not give the prophets to Israel. We did not give the Psalms to Israel. Historically speaking, the story moved in the opposite direction. Through Israel came the Scriptures, the apostles, and Yeshua the Messiah. Gentile believers have been brought into a story they did not begin. We have been grafted into an olive tree we did not plant. That should produce gratitude rather than arrogance and humility rather than contempt. The Church does not honor the root by despising the natural branches.

At the center of Christian faith stands a Jewish Messiah. Yeshua was born into a Jewish family, circumcised according to Jewish law, brought to the Temple, raised within Israel's Scriptures, attended synagogue, observed Jewish festivals, taught from the Torah and the Prophets, entered Jerusalem, and was called the King of the Jews. His Jewish identity is not an incidental historical detail that Christians should acknowledge once and then forget. It places the Gospel within the story of Israel.

The apostles who first proclaimed Him were Jewish. The earliest believers were Jewish. The great controversy of the early Church was not whether Jews could become Christians but whether Gentiles could enter the people of God without first becoming Jews. The Gospel moved outward from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and the nations. Remembering this should make Christian antisemitism unthinkable. There is something profoundly contradictory about worshiping the Jewish Messiah while despising Jewish people. Christians may disagree deeply with Judaism concerning Yeshua, but theological disagreement can never justify hatred.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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The Church must therefore reject antisemitism clearly and without qualification. That includes obvious hatred, but it also includes the older prejudices that continually reappear in new language: accusations that Jews secretly control governments, banks, media, or world events; collective blame of Jewish people for actions of the Israeli government; Holocaust denial or deliberate distortion; intimidation of Jewish students; attacks against synagogues; and the assumption that Jewish neighbors must answer for political decisions made thousands of kilometers away.

A synagogue is not an Israeli embassy. A Jewish school is not an office of the Israeli government. A Jewish student is not the representative of an Israeli prime minister. A Jewish family living in Canada, the United States, Britain, France, or anywhere else should not become a target because someone is angry about events in the Middle East. Pastors should teach this before a crisis occurs. Congregations should know how to recognize antisemitism before hatred becomes violence. They should also understand that criticism of Israel is not automatically antisemitic. Political criticism and ethnic hatred are not the same thing, and preserving that distinction makes our opposition to genuine antisemitism stronger rather than weaker.

The Church must also resist the temptation to allow concern for Israel to extinguish compassion for Palestinians. Palestinian suffering is not an inconvenience to Christian theology. Palestinians are human beings created in the image of God. Their children matter, their families matter, their fears matter, and their suffering matters.

We should be able to look at an Israeli mother running with her children toward a shelter and feel compassion. We should also be able to look at a Palestinian mother trying to protect her children amid war and feel compassion. Recognizing the humanity of both does not require us to pretend every action in a conflict is morally equivalent. Compassion and moral discernment are not enemies. We can condemn terrorism without condemning every Palestinian. We can recognize Israel's legitimate security concerns without assuming every military action is beyond examination. We can reject antisemitism without becoming hostile toward Arabs or Muslims. We can grieve Jewish suffering without ignoring Palestinian suffering. Christian compassion should never be a limited resource distributed according to political allegiance.

If the message of this book remains entirely theological, something important has been missed. Jewish people are not merely characters in our Bible studies. They are our neighbors. Perhaps there is a synagogue near the church. Perhaps there is a rabbi the pastor has never met. Perhaps Jewish families live in the community. Perhaps Holocaust survivors or their descendants live nearby. Perhaps Jewish students attend the same schools as the children in the congregation. The question then becomes practical: do we know them?

The Church has spent centuries speaking about the Jewish people. Perhaps this generation should spend more time speaking with them. A pastor can telephone a rabbi and introduce himself. A congregation can attend an appropriate Holocaust remembrance event. Christians can listen when Jewish people describe their experiences of antisemitism. If a synagogue is vandalized or threatened, nearby churches can make contact before being asked. Friendship should not begin only when a crisis occurs.

None of this requires Christians to hide their faith in Yeshua. Genuine friendship does not require theological dishonesty. Christians can believe passionately that Yeshua is the Messiah while treating Jewish friends with dignity, patience, and respect. Friendship should never become a concealed conversion strategy in which kindness disappears if the other person refuses our theological conclusions. We should love people because they are people.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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This brings us again to the pastor. The shepherd has a particular responsibility because congregations learn not only from what their pastors say but also from what they ignore. The pastor teaches through the subjects he addresses, the prejudices he corrects, the people he defends, the rumors he refuses to repeat, and the courage he demonstrates when speaking carries a cost.

Not every political controversy requires a sermon. Not every social-media outrage deserves a pastoral statement. Sometimes wisdom means waiting until facts are known. Sometimes the most responsible sentence a pastor can speak is, “We do not yet know enough to reach a conclusion.” But there are other moments when the facts are sufficiently clear and the moral question sufficiently serious that silence becomes difficult to defend.

When Jewish people are threatened because they are Jewish, the shepherd should speak. When a synagogue is attacked, the shepherd should care. When Holocaust denial appears, the shepherd should correct it. When conspiracy theories circulate within the church, the shepherd should confront them. When Scripture is twisted to justify contempt for Jewish people, the shepherd should teach Scripture more faithfully. The pastor does not need to speak angrily. He needs to speak truthfully.

Silence is often attractive because silence can feel safe. It avoids arguments, protects relationships, prevents misunderstanding, and may preserve attendance, donations, reputation, or influence. A pastor may persuade himself that he is remaining neutral when, in reality, he is simply trying to avoid the consequences of taking a stand. This is where spiritual discernment becomes essential. There are times when silence is wise, but there are also times when silence becomes fear wearing the clothing of wisdom.

History should make Christians especially sensitive to that possibility. We should not simplistically compare every contemporary incident to the darkest chapters of the twentieth century, nor should we assume that every expression of prejudice inevitably leads to catastrophe. Yet history teaches us something important: hatred rarely begins at its final stage. It begins with words, stereotypes, conspiracy theories, people becoming accustomed to contempt, neighbors being treated as outsiders, and responsible voices deciding that confronting prejudice is too controversial. The shepherd should not wait for the wolf to enter the fold before deciding that wolves are dangerous.

The courage this book calls for is not aggressive. It is not the courage of the person who enjoys confrontation or searches constantly for enemies. It is not the courage of political outrage. It is pastoral courage. Pastoral courage is willing to listen before speaking. It verifies facts, distinguishes criticism from hatred, refuses collective guilt, corrects its own side as readily as its opponents, admits uncertainty when necessary, speaks firmly when necessary, and does not exaggerate in order to gain attention.

Most importantly, pastoral courage grows from love. The shepherd confronts the wolf because he cares about the sheep, not because he enjoys fighting wolves. Christians confront antisemitism because Jewish people matter. We challenge hatred toward Palestinians because Palestinians matter. We correct falsehood because truth matters. We defend human dignity because people are created in the image of God. Courage without love becomes aggression, while love without courage becomes sentimentality. The shepherd needs both.

The Church does not belong to a political party, government, nation, or ideological movement. It belongs to Yeshua. That identity must remain greater than every political loyalty. This means the Church must sometimes disappoint those on the political right and sometimes disappoint those on the political left. It must sometimes challenge passionate supporters of Israel and sometimes challenge passionate critics of Israel. It must refuse to allow any political movement to determine which biblical truths may be spoken.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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The Church must be biblical before it is political. That does not mean Christians withdraw from public life. It means that our political thinking must remain accountable to something higher than politics. Scripture must be allowed to challenge our own side, not merely provide ammunition against the other. A congregation shaped by Scripture should be able to affirm God's faithfulness to Israel while caring about Palestinians. It should be able to reject antisemitism while permitting legitimate criticism of Israeli governments. It should be able to proclaim Yeshua as Messiah while treating Jewish neighbors with respect. It should be able to disagree without hatred and speak conviction without contempt. That kind of Church would offer something desperately needed in a polarized world.

There is much in Christian history that cannot be changed. We cannot return to the Crusades, medieval expulsions, forced conversions, pogroms, or the years leading to the Holocaust and make different decisions. We cannot place ourselves in the pulpits where something should have been said and say it now. We cannot open doors that remained closed or speak words that were never spoken. Yesterday is beyond our reach, but today is not.

We can learn from yesterday without living permanently under its guilt. We can honor Christians who demonstrated courage and learn from those who remained silent. We can examine our theology, correct inherited errors, teach our congregations, build friendships with Jewish neighbors, challenge antisemitism, show compassion toward Palestinians, and refuse to allow political fear to determine our obedience. The question is no longer what Christians should have done then. The question is what Christians will do now.

There will always be reasons to remain silent. The issue is complicated. People will misunderstand. Someone may become angry. The congregation is divided. The political climate is tense. We may not have every answer. But we do not need every answer. We need enough humility to admit what we do not know, enough wisdom to distinguish politics from prejudice, enough compassion to see the humanity of people on every side of conflict, enough biblical understanding to remember God's covenant and the olive tree, and enough courage to speak when silence becomes the easier choice.

Pastors do not need to become Middle East political experts. They do not need to defend every action of Israel. They do not need to transform their churches into political organizations. They need to know Scripture, teach it faithfully, reject antisemitism, remember the Jewish roots of the Christian faith, love Jewish people as people, demonstrate compassion toward Palestinians and all who suffer, refuse falsehood and collective blame, and teach their congregations to do the same.

Above all, they must remember the character of the God they proclaim. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is the God who remembers His covenant. He is the God whose faithfulness does not depend upon human perfection. He is the God whose promises give us hope precisely because He remains faithful when human beings fail.

If we believe that, then Israel's story should matter to us. If we believe that, the Jewish people should not be strangers to us. If we believe that, antisemitism should never find a comfortable place among us. If we believe that, compassion should not stop at political borders. If we believe that, pastors should not allow fear to determine when truth may be spoken.

The generation before us faced its moments of decision, and future generations will face theirs. This moment belongs to us. We cannot change yesterday's silence, but with God's help, we can refuse to repeat it. We can remember the covenant, remember the olive tree, remember the Jewish Messiah, remember the Jewish people, remember those who suffer, and remember that truth and compassion belong together.

## Standing with Israel without Fear

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When the moment comes to choose between comfortable silence and faithful witness, may the Church remember whom it serves. May its shepherds speak with wisdom rather than anger, courage rather than arrogance, compassion rather than hatred, and truth rather than fear.

**We cannot change yesterday's silence, but with God's help, we can refuse to be silent today.**