



***The Jews -  
Some history, Some  
Encouragement & a  
challenge to the Church***

Written by Rod Boggia

Produced by  
Prayer for Israel.



## **THE JEWS: SOME HISTORY, SOME ENCOURAGEMENT AND A CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH - Written by Rod Boggia**

History can be most informative and constructive, and we often gain a better understanding of the present by going back into the past. In this article, we shall look at a little history of the Jews, some encouraging developments, and a challenge to the Church.

### **The Jews - Some History**

One feature has followed the Jewish people from the earliest days, right back in Egypt; it is, in a word: anti-Semitism. Actually, anti-Semitism is a misnomer, for it is derived from Shem, Noah's eldest son. The Jews claim Abraham as their father through Isaac in the same way that the Arabs claim Abraham as their father through Ishmael; they are both Semitic peoples. A less confusing term for anti-Semitism might be 'anti-Jewishness.'

It comes as rather a surprise to discover that anti-Semitism was rife in the early Church, and it's helpful to understand how this came about. Under the Roman occupation of Israel, Judaism was accepted as a legitimate religion, or 'Religio Licita,' whereas the early Christians were persecuted, because they were part of an illegal religion, or 'Religio Illicita.' However, following Constantine's 'conversion' in the fourth century AD, thousands joined the Roman Church, and the tables were turned; now Christianity became the 'Religio Licita,' and Judaism became the 'Religio Illicita.' It was this factor, fuelled by the early

Church fathers' anti-Jewish invective, which gave rise to a new phenomenon: Christian anti-Semitism. As early as 160 AD, Justin Martyr stated that the Church had appropriated the title "Israel" for itself. In the third century AD Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, stated that the promises of the Hebrew Scriptures were for the Church – not the Jews – and that the Jews were both abandoned by God and unable to receive salvation!

This erroneous thinking was the start of Replacement Theology, which can be summed up like this: "The Jews rejected Jesus and killed Him, so God has finished with the Jews and the Church is now the 'New Israel.' All God's promises to the Jews now belong to the Church." Replacement Theology is widely held in the Church in Britain, Europe and the Middle East, yet the term 'New Israel' appears nowhere in Scripture.

In the first Council of Nicaea in 325 AD, Constantine separated the Christian Feasts from the Jewish Feasts; as a result the date of Easter was uncoupled from the date of the Jewish Passover – hence the variation in dates of Jewish and Christian Feasts today. Thus the Church changed from being almost totally Jewish to becoming almost totally Gentile. The early Church reviled the Jews as 'Christ-killers,' forgetting that Jesus did not die a Jewish death by stoning, but a Gentile death, by crucifixion; and forgetting that we were all responsible for Jesus' death, for "He was pierced for our transgressions" (Isaiah 53:5). The Jews' curse, "His blood be on us and our children" (Matthew 27:25) gave carte blanche to Christians to persecute the Jews.

Christians forgot that later that day another Jew, Jesus, prayed to His heavenly Father, "Forgive them father, for they know not what they do"

(Luke 23:34). During the Crusades, Jews were slaughtered all the way to the Holy Land, and they suffered torture and execution during the Spanish inquisition. In England, Jews arrived in numbers from France with William the conqueror in the 11th century, and became his personal 'Inland Revenue' – yet Jews had no rights of citizenship and no protection, for they were forbidden by law to bear weapons. In 1189, anti-Jewish riots broke out in Colchester, King's Lynn, Bury St Edmunds, Lincoln, Stamford, Thetford and York and thousands of Jews perished. Finally, in 1290, under Edward I, every Jew was expelled from England. Jews returned to England under Oliver Cromwell almost 400 years later in 1656, for the Puritans had a good understanding of God's purposes for the Jews, yet rights of citizenship were still not granted until 1858.

Martin Luther, the famous reformer who proclaimed, "Justification by faith," got it completely wrong over the Jews – as his rabid, anti-Jewish writings confirm.

Hitler picked up on Luther's arguments which became his 'Final Solution:' the Holocaust of 6 million Jews (Holocaust means: 'The whole burnt offering'). Despite Lord Balfour's declaration of 1917, later embedded in the Mandate document for Palestine, that Britain held, we did everything possible to prevent Jewish immigration, and facilitate Arab immigration. As a nation, we reneged on this solemn

undertaking and as a result have come under God's judgment. We once had an empire, but God's judgment seems to have been: "If you can't look after My chosen people the Jews, then you won't look after any people." By the 1940's our empire crumbled. Now, as then, we have an pro-Arab Foreign Office that places Britain's interest in Arab oil above that of God's chosen people. But God's word, regarding Abraham's descendants, the Jews, stands forever: (Genesis 12:3).

### Some Encouragement

It seems to me remarkable that we should be alive now to see the fulfilment of Scriptures regarding God's purposes for His Jewish people. There are three calls, in over 100 Bible references, that God has made to His Jewish people:

- To return to the land of Israel (Isaiah 11:11-12)
- To return to God for salvation (Ezekiel 36:24-26)
- To be a light to the Gentiles (Revelation 7:4-14)

Paul tells us that, "*The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable*" (Romans 11:29) they cannot be taken back; they must be fulfilled, and we are seeing them being worked out right now!

### Firstly

Jews started to trickle back to Israel in the 1600's and, by the 1800's, this had become a torrent. In the 1990's alone one million Russian Jews made aliyah to Israel and 140 nations are now represented there; every Jew from Albania is back in Israel; every Jew from

the Yemen is back in Israel! Isaiah 11 v 12 tells us that this return is God's "Banner to the Nations!"

### **Secondly**

the return back to God is also under way. In 1969, when Ken Burnett founded Prayer for Israel, there were 2 Messianic Fellowships in the land of Israel, and around 100 Jewish believers in Messiah Jesus. Today, no one quite knows, because the numbers have increased so rapidly: over 100 Messianic fellowships now exist, and somewhere between 15,000-20,000 believers in Jesus! – and that's just Israel, because Messianic Fellowships abound in the USA and also exist in other countries.

### **Thirdly**

The Jews are becoming a light to the Gentiles again! Believing Jews from Israel travel periodically to Africa to share the gospel and among other places, to India, which is a magnet for young Israelis who have completed their time in the IDF. They get caught up in the mysticism of the east and New Age, yet many are being witnessed to by believing Jews from Israel and coming to faith. Of course we are all looking forward to that wonderful day when "All Israel will be saved" and the born-again Jews will go out and bring in a fantastic end-time harvest of Gentile souls – a global Pentecost!

There seems to be an increasing interest by Christians in Israel, and it is encouraging to see how God is moving; I'll provide just a couple of examples. In my own fellowship (Evangel church, Sidmouth) our church directory states

our position on Israel like this:

***"We believe that God has made covenant with His people Israel through Abraham and that the terms of this covenant are irrevocable. We believe we the Church, God's family are recipients of God's promise to bless all the nations of the Earth through Israel. We now share in the commonwealth of Israel, inasmuch that having been as a wild olive branch we are now grafted into the rich-root olive tree that is Israel. We therefore bless, pray for and support God's people Israel. We believe that we are called to support the Jewish nation, his chosen people, Israel."***

### **So here's the challenge to the Church**

Paul lays out a number of challenges to the Gentile Church regarding Jesus' brothers and sisters in the flesh, the Jews:

"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the gentile" (Romans 1:16)

"Again I ask, did they (the Jews) stumble as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the gentiles to make Israel Jealous" (Romans 11:11)

They (the macedonian and archaiaian Gentiles) were pleased to do it & they indeed owe it to them (The Jews). For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings" (Romans 15:27)

The King will reply, ***"I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me"*** (Matthew 25:40)

What are we doing, individually and corporately about sharing the gospel with the Jew first? What are we doing about making Jews jealous for the gospel? What are we doing about sharing our material blessings with the Jews? Jesus specifically stated that whatever we do for one of the least of His brothers or sisters, we do it unto Him. One of the best and simplest ways to fulfil Jesus' challenge is to join one or more of the 30 or so ministries to the Jews, such as PFI, CFI, etc; that way, by supporting that ministry in prayer and giving we fulfil Paul's challenges.

Some PFI groups I visit have adopted a Messianic Ministry in Israel for prayer and giving and are in regular email contact with them. As an individual, perhaps in a remote or rural area, you could do the same; however, it is always more encouraging being part of a PFI group and the Telford office will be able to let you know if there is a group in your area. He or she who blesses Israel will be blessed by God! (Genesis 12:3). In a recent letter from an Israeli congregation three main points were made: (1) Israel itself is on a war-footing and needs the grace of God for its survival (2) we are invited to join the Israeli believers to pray for the salvation of Israel & the Jewish people and (3) the Messianic body in Israel needs more boldness in its witness. I think we could all say amen to all those things.