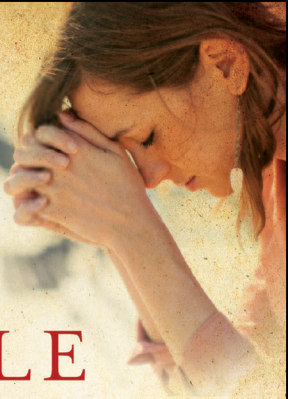


UPDATED &
EXPANDED



YOUR PEOPLE SHALL BE MY PEOPLE

HOW ISRAEL,
THE JEWS AND
THE CHRISTIAN
CHURCH WILL COME
TOGETHER IN
THE LAST DAYS



DON FINTO

FOREWORD BY DEBBIE AND MICHAEL W. SMITH

“This is the best bridge-building book written on the subject of Israel, the Jewish people and the Church! Go on a journey with my friend Don Finto and learn how you, too, can receive God’s heart for His purposes among the Jewish people.”

James W. Goll, founder, Encounters Network, Prayer Storm and GET eSchool; international bestselling author, *The Seer*, *The Lifestyle of a Prophet* and many more

“One cannot read this very timely, truly life-changing book without receiving God’s heart for the Jewish people. Every believer needs to read *Your People Shall Be My People*.”

Cindy Jacobs, co-founder, Generals International

“I am grateful to my friend Don Finto for paying the price to give us this highly significant, informative, prophetic book. This is a message from the mind and heart of God. When Jews and Gentiles alike embrace these powerful truths, a significant advancement of the Kingdom of God will become inevitable.”

Mrs. Joy Dawson, international Bible teacher
and bestselling author

“Controversy surrounds God’s plan for Israel. Don Finto presents a biblical and exciting perspective of God’s heart toward the Holy Land. In doing so, he gives us a valuable and inspiring resource for winning our Jewish friends to Christ.”

Francis Frangipane, Advancing Church Ministries;
founding pastor (retired), River of Life Ministries

“Here is a book of passion with good theology. Don Finto is passionate for the fulfillment of the destiny of the Church, which includes being a key instrument for the salvation of Israel. I look forward to seeing great Kingdom gain through the widespread distribution of this book.”

Daniel Juster, director, Tikkun International

“In the spirit of Ruth, Don Finto has expressed the passion of God for Naomi—the Jewish people rejected yet destined for eternal purposes. In humility and loving identification, Finto has expressed the hearts of Messianic Jews to our beloved non-Jewish brothers around the table of our Lord. Dramatically, Israel has returned from exile. Prophetically, this signals a coming rediscovery of Yeshua (Jesus) as our Messiah. Now is the time for the Jewish-Gentile partnership prophesied in the book of Ruth to be fulfilled. *Your People Shall Be My People* could be your doorway to take part in Israel’s final redemption.”

Eitan Shishkoff, founding director, Tents of Mercy,
Kiryat Yam, Israel

“In this critical hour when the eyes of the world are turned toward Israel through the events unfolding in that nation, it is essential that God’s people understand the key place the Jewish people hold, not only in current affairs, but in the ongoing plan of God down through the centuries. You cannot read Don Finto’s book without having your eyes opened to God’s purposes for His covenantal people. This highly informative book will deeply touch your heart as you glimpse the heart of the Father for His people.”


Jane Hansen Hoyt, president/CEO, Aglow International

“In a world so confused by bad doctrine and teaching regarding Israel and the Church, Pastor Don Finto stands out as a beacon of truth and a breath of very fresh air! I encourage you to carefully and prayerfully read this important work. I am certain you will come to the same conclusion Don has: God loves Israel, and so should those who say they love the God of Israel!”


Paul Wilbur, recording artist

YOUR PEOPLE
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MY
PEOPLE

UPDATED AND EXPANDED EDITION



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HOW ISRAEL, THE JEWS
AND THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH WILL COME
TOGETHER IN THE LAST DAYS

DON FINTO



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Contents

Foreword by Debbie and Michael W. Smith 9

Acknowledgments 11

Introduction 15

1. The Beginning of the End 23
2. The “Greater Riches” World Revival 39
3. Israel—A Nation of Priests 53
4. The Targeted Annihilation 67
5. The Early Jewish “Church” 81
6. The “Gentilizing” of the Church 93
7. Division—The DNA of the Gentile Church 103
8. Return to the Land 113
9. The Awakening 127
10. The Resurrected “Nazarenes” 141
11. Jew and Gentile—“One New Man” 157
12. A Time to Pray 169
13. The Final Exodus 177
14. Blessed to Be a Blessing 185

Contents

Afterword by David Hooper	197
Appendix A: Toward Jerusalem Council II	201
Appendix B: Recommended Reading	205
Appendix C: Statement of Repentance to the Jewish People in America and the Nations of the World	209
Notes	211

Foreword

God has sent a few people into our lives to encourage us, rebuke us, direct us, teach us and above all, to love us and love us well! Don Finto is at the top of our list. And from this man, who not only married us and prayed our children into existence but also guided us on two tours of Israel, comes a work that is a celebration of his passions. Don is passionate for the Word, and he is passionate for God's people, both Jew and Gentile.

In these years since this book was first published in 2001, we have followed Papa Don's example and learned to love God's Chosen People more intentionally. We have visited the Land, given more generously, prayed more fervently for the peace of Jerusalem and taught our five children (and now eleven grandchildren!) to honor their Jewish heritage.

One of the joys of being parents is seeing our children walk into their destiny with God's call burning in their hearts, using their gifts and talents to honor Him. (As a spiritual father to many, Don knows all about that!) A couple of years ago, our eldest son, Ryan, co-wrote the lyrics of a song, "The Promise," that has been and is being fulfilled in our day:

Your People Shall Be My People

Fear not, O Israel, for there is peace still to come
A Word to break the silence, a promise yet to bloom.
The promise to redeem us, One to free us
Break the silence, end the violence in our hearts.

Emmanuel is sure to find us soon,
the mighty Root of Jesse, Star of Truth,
And bring our sons to glory, tell His story,
Heal the broken and restore thee to His name.

The star will guide us to the humble place,
where Christ the King reveals His earthly face
And we will see, Emmanuel,
God is with us, God is for us, God is in us!
We will sing, Alleluia!

We pray that the revised version of this book will be used by the Lord to bring Jewish “pre-believers” to Himself and remove the scales from believers’ eyes concerning the ongoing role of Israel in God’s affairs. He opened *our* eyes through Don’s teaching, and now we—and our children and grandchildren—pray with new vision and clarity for God’s purposes to be fulfilled for Israel and for the nations. Together—Messianic Jew and Gentile believer—we will sing, “Alleluia!”

Debbie and Michael W. Smith,
singer/songwriter, Franklin, Tennessee

Acknowledgments

I owe a great debt of gratitude to my Jesus-believing Jewish brothers and sisters who have challenged, encouraged and often led me. It all started during the Jesus Movement of the '70s. I was pastoring a church in Nashville, and some of these hippies-turned-“Jesus freaks” were Jewish and members of “my flock.” As they opened up Scripture, they began to realize that they were a fulfillment of the Prophets, that they were actually returning to the roots of their faith, that this Jesus whom they had so recently come to know was Yeshua, their longed-for Messiah, and that even the “New Testament” is a Jewish handbook about the arrival of their Messiah, who is also the Redeemer of all the nations. I was compelled to reread the Prophets, and to get acquainted with other Jewish believing leaders involved in the restoration of “synagogues” of Jewish believers and their Gentile covenant partners.

That's when I met Eitan Shishkoff, Dan Juster and Asher Intrater. They became my early “mentors in the movement.” If some Jewish ministry wanted to visit Belmont, I would call to be sure that this was a trustworthy ministry. A few years later, David Rudolph joined their leadership team and *Tikkun* (the Hebrew word for

“restoration”) Ministries was born. I was asked to serve on their governing council.

About the same time, I joined Dan, David, Marty Waldman, John Dawson, Peter Hocken and others on the steering committee of Toward Jerusalem Council II, calling the Church to repent for their centuries of anti-Semitism and to embrace and encourage the return of Jewish believers in Jesus. I started frequenting the annual meetings of the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America (MJAA) and the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC), and met many of these “born-again Jews” from around this nation and even the nations. Yohanna Chernoff’s *Born a Jew, Die a Jew* helped me to understand the birth pains of the movement. To all of these I am forever grateful.

In late 1996, I started the Caleb Company, named after the biblical Caleb, who was still taking his mountains into old age, was raising up generations behind him and was wholeheartedly devoted to the Lord all of his life. To all those early board members and supporters, thank you.

By the year 2000, I carried a message that had to be written. I was a communicator, but not a writer, but I knew a writer/editor—Anne Severance. She helped me put my passion into words, and *Your People Shall Be My People* was born.

My initial encouragers from the publishing field were Bill Greig II and Kyle Duncan with Regal Books / Gospel Light. I am very grateful that they took a risk on an unknown author.

The *Your People* book struck a nerve and began to be read by Jewish believers and Gentiles who were coming alive with their love for the Jewish people as I was. Marty Waldman, who was serving on the Promise Keepers board, was asked how to help Gentile leaders understand the need to partner with Jewish believers. He recommended that *Your People* should be given to pastors and leaders of ministries. Regal allowed us to publish 55,500 giveaway copies. Promise Keepers founder, Coach Bill McCartney, wrote a foreword, and these books have moved around the world.

Acknowledgments

Chosen Books / Baker Publishing Group, seeing the value of the message of the book, has now asked for a revised and expanded edition. I could not be happier to work with this highly esteemed publishing company.

I met Chosen's acquisitions editor, Jane Campbell, years ago, and have never ceased to see the Spirit of God at work in her. She is a woman of prayer and integrity, and wants only God's heart to be communicated.

I've had some strong intercessors through the years, praying me into deeper revelation. Martha, my bride of now 64-plus years, is among them. She attends a weekly prayer meeting with a group of "good sisters" who have been meeting together for over 25 years! They know how to love, and they know how to pray. For them, I am perpetually grateful.

What more can I say? I am loved by the Eternal One. I am continually overwhelmed at His goodness, His forgiveness, His love, His Holy Spirit guidance. Jesus is my Forever Strength.

Introduction

The biblical story of Ruth is much more than the beautiful love story of King David's great-grandparents. Ruth is the symbol of every Gentile who has ever come to faith through Israel's God. The words of this Moabitess to her Jewish mother-in-law, Naomi—"Your people shall be my people and your God my God"—are a challenge to every non-Jew who believes in Boaz and Ruth's promised Son, Messiah, who would come down through their lineage. Every Gentile believer has come from the land of famine to the spiritual realm of abundance in that Name. Even Jesus' reference to Himself as the Bread of Life hearkens back to this ancient love story—to say nothing of the fact that He was born in the shadow of the very fields where Ruth was gleaning, just outside Beth-Lehem ("House of Bread").

But the Church through the centuries has not responded to her Boaz as Ruth responded to hers. The Church did not leave her Moabitish ways behind when she came into the house. Although she may have taken the "Bread" of Boaz, which represents Jesus to us, she turned her back on all His relatives, the Jewish people.

For eighteen centuries we rejected Boaz's (Jesus') near of kin. We forbade their godly heritage. They could no longer circumcise and Bar Mitzvah their sons, celebrate their God-ordained feasts or observe their Sabbaths. Those who insisted on remaining Jewish (sons and daughters of "Boaz") were ostracized, castigated, excommunicated or even killed.

Praise God, things are changing in our generation! Believers from the nations are reclaiming the biblical Jewish roots of their faith. Those from the nations are welcoming Jewish people back into the family of Jesus-followers. Ruth never claimed to be a Jew by ancestry, just as most of those from the nations are not trying to be Jewish, but they understand that the heritage of the Jewish people is the heritage of all believers. The feasts are not just Jewish feasts, they are "feasts of the Lord"—feasts that still have meaning for all of us who recognize the Jewish Messiah as our Redeemer.

Until I began to get this message, I had no desire to write a book. During the revival of the Jesus Movement when our congregation was flourishing, I was repeatedly asked to write, but I saw no reason to write. Better scribes were saying the same things I would say.

That changed in the late '90s when I "entered the world" of the Jewish believers in Jesus, reread the Prophets and the apostolic writings and began to see something that I did not find in print. Three core messages were pulsating within me and became the dominant message of the book: (1) According to the Prophets, our day is the day for Jewish eyes to open to their Messiah; (2) their return to the Land and to the Lord is triggering a world revival of mammoth proportions and (3) the Church is beginning to understand God's heart for His firstborn son, Israel, and is coming under the blessing of this united "one new man"—Jew and Gentile together.

During the writing, I was visiting with a pastor who, though passionately pursuing the Lord and desiring to know His Word, knew nothing of God's purposes for Israel. The Prophets had

been like closed books for him, telling only the story of what had already been fulfilled. Until recently my friend had never considered reading the Prophets to find events now happening or yet to come.

He, as I did in earlier years, had taken clear words of Scripture about Israel's future and applied them to the Church, or had assigned these rich storehouses of prophetic treasure to the dusty bins of already fulfilled history. After our conversation, this young pastor began a fresh reading of biblical prophecy. He wants to know what he has missed! It is for such men and women that I have written.

About the same time, I received a letter from a pastor friend of mine who had no understanding of what I now believed to have discovered. We were reading the same Book, but had come up with completely different conclusions. "Jesus of Nazareth was the fulfillment of the Old Covenant and the end of God's preparatory people, the children of Israel," he wrote. "There is no such thing as a Messianic Jewish community. . . . The Kingdom of God is not fulfilled in an apostate people who are descendants by blood instead of by the seed which is only through faith. . . . The Christian church today is awash in this type of teaching, and you will rarely meet someone as old-fashioned as I who believes it to be false teaching and a corruption of Scripture."

I love this man even though I strongly disagree with him and even believe that people who hold such a view will be deceived as we move more and more into the final generation.

I am grateful to men and women of God through the centuries who have carved a path for people like me. As they read the Prophets, they began to believe that Israel would one day be a nation again, and that when they began coming to faith in Jesus, a great revival would be birthed throughout the world. As Peter so aptly put it in the first century, these men and women of God "searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing" (1 Peter 1:10–11), as they pondered the Prophets.

My experience in the Messianic movement has brought me to a clearer understanding of Jewish hearts, an awareness I do not find among many Christian pastors. I am passionate about seeing that my Jewish brothers and sisters are accepted as Jewish and encouraged to express their faith within a Jewish framework. I want to see the Gentile Church appreciating her own Jewish foundation stones. I want her to understand why Israel and the Jewish people are center stage in world history again, and I want her to be grateful for a returning Jewish leadership in the Body of Messiah.

As the Church understands the prophetic times in which we live, we will become better partners with God in hastening the fulfillment. We will confess personally and on behalf of the Church for the centuries of persecution of Jewish people and will become ardent intercessors on their behalf, looking for every opportunity to bless and not curse them.

In order to make this book more accurate in the context of our Jewish roots, I have chosen to use terms that are meaningful to both Jew and Gentile. For example, I will not use the word *church* in reference to congregations of Jewish believers: first of all, because the word *church* is not the best translation of the Greek word *ekklesia*, often carrying with it the idea of a building rather than a group of people, and second of all, because Jewish assemblies will more often use the word *congregation* (an equally good translation of the Greek *ekklesia*, literally “the called-out ones”). In this book you will find “Church” capitalized when the meaning is the Gentile Church at large.

Most of the time I will refer to *the Messiah* rather than to the Christ. That is because I have chosen to use the translation from the Hebrew rather than the Greek. *Christ*, for many Jewish people, has become a hated word, since many of the atrocities leveled against them have been perpetrated in that name. And even for those in the Church, the word *Christ* has become almost like Jesus’ last name, with no particular meaning.

Conversion is not a word you will find me using as it relates to Jewish people. We from the nations are the ones who converted to Israel's God, the God of creation, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I want my Jewish brothers and sisters to be restored to their own God and their Promised Messiah. Yes, in the sense of turning, they "convert," but that word carries such a weight of persecution because of the forced "conversions" of the past.

Nor will you often see me referring to Jesus-followers as "Christians," since that word no longer carries the original idea of Christ-followers. There are "Christians" who do not believe Jesus rose from the dead. There are "Christians" who do not accept the Prophets and apostolic writings as the Word of God. "Christians" have been the greatest persecutors of the Jewish people, and the early believers did not use that word to describe themselves.¹ They referred to themselves as followers of "the Way" (Acts 24:14).

I personally enjoy using Jesus' Hebrew name, Yeshua, because that would be the name by which Miriam (Mary), His Jewish mother, referred to Him. Realizing that this term may seem strange to many readers, I have used these two names almost interchangeably.

Sometimes I refer to the Jews, but even this name—a derivative of Judah, Israel's dominant tribe in the southern Kingdom and Jesus' own tribe—has taken on negative connotations for the Jewish people. I have rarely heard a Jewish person introduce himself or herself with the words "I am a Jew." Rather, they say, "I am Jewish." Therefore, in this book, I speak often of the Jewish people rather than the Jews. I love the Jewish people and will do whatever is necessary to make my speech more acceptable to this persecuted, closest blood family of our Lord.

These are some of the thoughts that have motivated me to share my heart. I have never considered myself a writer, and yet I believe I am seeing things that have not been written or widely circulated. I invite you to hear me out prayerfully and, like the Bereans mentioned by Luke in Acts 17:11, search the Scriptures to see if I am correct.

Listen to Ruth, our non-Jewish covenant partner, as she speaks to her Jewish mother-in-law: “Wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God” (1:16 NKJV).

Could this be the covenant pledge we must make with the Jewish people? If you agree, may your life never be the same! May you become a zealous advocate of Israel and Israel’s children, fervently pleading their case before the Father’s throne . . . just as my colleague, Tod McDowell, now pleads in their behalf. . . .



Remarks from Tod McDowell,
director, Caleb Company

I met Don Finto on February 4, 2005. He was sitting in the courtyard of the Visitors’ Center of Youth With A Mission’s (YWAM) largest training campus in Kona, Hawaii. He wasn’t what I expected. He had a smile that made me feel accepted and comfortable immediately. His youthful exuberance and childlike humility drew me in. What made this man tick? What was it that caused such life and love to emanate from him?

As I sat down on the plastic chair, my mind flashed back to three days earlier. My phone had rung with a call from Australia, a number I didn’t recognize. I was on the 33rd day of a 40-day fast, seeking keys to global revival. I had been in YWAM, the world’s largest mission organization, for thirteen years, serving on the president’s council, teaching in their School of Biblical Studies, leading outreach teams all over the world, and had recently begun a worship and intercession team called IGNITE.

But I was yearning for more of God’s heart. I had withdrawn from ministry for a season so that I could spend my

days in fasting and prayer. I met with my IGNITE team once a week, but had asked not to be called unless there was some unusual need. The phone call was, therefore, unexpected.

“Hello, Tod!” came the voice on the other end of the line as I reluctantly took the call. “Tod, I love what you are doing, and totally agree with the revelation the Lord is giving you. Worship and intercession are indeed core essentials for world revival, but I believe you are missing a piece. You need to get the ‘Israel piece.’”

Stunned, I pressed my caller for more.

“You need to read this book by Don Finto, *Your People Shall Be My People*,” she said.

“Interesting,” I responded. “I actually have that book. It was given to me, but I have yet to read it.” I thanked my friend for the call and hung up the phone, pondering, praying.

What is this all about, Lord? Why would she feel the necessity to call? Don't I know more about world revival than she? Yet I trust her as an intercessor. (Her two children were a part of our IGNITE team.) *Lord, what's going on?*

Still a bit shaken by the whole encounter, I received another phone call about an hour later, this time from one of the school leaders over which I had oversight. “Tod, please excuse me for calling,” she said, “but I really believe the Lord wanted me to call. We have a guest speaker on campus this week, and I felt that you may want to get with him. He has a free day on Friday. His name is Don Finto.”

Now I am doubly stunned.

And so, on this Friday morning at eleven o'clock, I am sitting with Don as he is giving me his best PowerPoint for believing that our relationship with Israel and the Jewish people is a key for world revival. What he was saying was interesting, but not necessarily life-changing until he hit Romans 11:12.

“If their [Jewish] transgression means riches for the world, and their [Jewish] loss means riches for the Gentiles

[the nations], how much greater riches will their fullness bring?”

“Wait a minute!” I said, as that verse sprang alive within me. “I believe there is something here that I need. Would you pray for me?”

Tears welled up in my eyes as I knelt, Don kneeling beside me. Soon I was facedown, weeping, asking God to speak to me and tell me what was happening. All I heard in my spirit was, “You are married to the Jewish people.”

Married to the Jewish people? Is Rachel Jewish? Lord, what are You trying to tell me?

Then I realized that if God is in covenant with the Jewish people, then I also am in covenant with the Jewish people.

Later on that Friday evening, we were in a campus dinner where Don was present before returning to Nashville the next day. I introduced him to Rachel and the children, and we spent perhaps fifteen minutes together. We were both impacted by the time together, but neither of us had any expectancy of ever being together again. . . .

And so it was that over ten years ago, we began a spiritual father/son relationship. The reading of this book helped my mind catch up with the revelation the Spirit had given regarding our covenant relationship with Israel and the Jewish people. Over eight years ago, my family and I moved to Nashville. I am now the director of the Caleb Company, which Don started in 1996. Don and I talk or see each other almost daily: praying, ministering, traveling and strategizing together. It is a great privilege to partner with him in building the kingdom through “equipping God’s people with His heart and purpose for Israel and the nations.”



The Beginning of the End

When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.

Luke 21:28

God promised Abraham, “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:2–3). If this ancient promise is still true, and it is, then no person, no congregation, no nation or people group will ever receive their fullest blessing until they learn to love the Jewish people.

I have not always been so passionate about this truth. Let me tell you why I believe these are prophecy-fulfilling times in which we live and how I, a West Texas farm boy, became involved in the Messianic Jewish community and came to love this covenant people.

In the early '50s, my wife, Martha, and I were fresh out of college, newlyweds and ministering in postwar Germany. The

nation was disgraced and divided; homes and neighborhoods were emotionally and physically destroyed. We were young and idealistic and wanted to be a part of directing this humbled people back to God.

As a Bible major in a Christian college, I graduated confident of what I believed. I knew how to read the Bible to overlook certain passages and to interpret others so that they always said what I had been taught. We knew that any other understanding of Scripture would separate us from close friends and family. Occasionally this would make me uncomfortable. I would read Scripture that did not quite fit what I had been taught. But after all, my professors, who were godly men, knew better than I. They read Hebrew and Greek, and they could not be wrong.

Then the postcard arrived. I remember it as if it were yesterday.

I hated that card! It embarrassed me. It challenged me. It rattled me. I thought the young man who had sent it, a freshman student at the University of Hamburg, to be extremely arrogant. I showed the card to no one, not even to Martha. I tore it up and discarded the pieces almost immediately.

And yet I could not forget it. I can still quote it almost verbatim: *“Lieber Don Finto, liest Du die Bibel, um zu sehen, was die Bibel sagt, oder liest Du sie nur, um eine Predigt vorzubereiten?”* “Dear Don Finto, do you ever read the Bible to find out what it says, or do you just read it to prepare a sermon?” The card was signed “Helmut.”

I read the Bible regularly, but I knew at the core of my being that I often studied the Bible to defend positions already held rather than studying to see if these positions were biblically accurate. Did I really want to know God’s heart on every issue? Would I be willing to change my belief even if it meant estrangement from those who were closest to me? I desired that of others. What about myself? For the next several years, Helmut’s card held me accountable and was a constant reminder to ask the Lord for understanding.

Meeting the Author

After eight years in Germany, Martha and I returned to the United States, where I continued with educational pursuits that enabled me to begin teaching German and some Bible courses in a Christian college. The charismatic movement was sweeping the nation, and many people were rethinking long-held beliefs. This was also the beginning of the hippie years that resulted in the Jesus Movement of the late '60s and early '70s. I was not interested in becoming a part of a new movement, but I did have a growing hunger to know God, to know Jesus, to know the Holy Spirit. I knew the Book rather well, but I did not know the Author intimately.

Almost two decades after receiving Helmut's card, while teaching in that college in Nashville, Tennessee, I was also preaching for one of the local congregations where a retired dentist often attended. Dr. Hall was a student of prophecy. He delved into the biblical prophets, Isaiah to Malachi, as well as the prophecy of the New Covenant Scriptures. Dr. Hall began inviting me to lunch so that we could discuss Scripture. After a few lunches together, he began probing me about my understanding of biblical prophecy: How much did I read the Prophets? Did I ever let the Old Testament prophets speak for themselves, or had I just presumed that everything they had written had already been fulfilled at the first coming of Jesus?

Flashes of Helmut's card!

I felt temporarily trapped by Dr. Hall's probing questions.

I had read the Bible for years, but I had read the Hebrew Scriptures primarily as history. In my annual reading through the Bible, I was always relieved to get to the New Testament. The ancient prophets spoke so often of Moab and Babylon, of Ephraim and Edom, and I, not being an astute student of history, understood very little of it. Except for those occasional clear words that foretold Jesus' coming, I would almost speed-read the Prophets in order to get through them.

If I did run across something about Israel's return to the Land, I assumed that this was speaking of her return from Babylon. (Somehow I overlooked the fact that these passages mentioned returning not only from the East [Babylon] but also from the West [the Americas] and from the North [Turkey, Ukraine, Russia] and South [Ethiopia and all of Africa]—from the nations.) In those verses that told of the Messiah reigning over all the earth, I assumed the Prophets were speaking symbolically and meant the advance of the Gospel. If I did not understand a passage, I either ignored it or spiritualized it. "Israel" was the Church. "Israel's sins" were the sins of the Church. "Jerusalem" was a figure of heaven. "Zion" was another name for the people of God.

Stirred by Dr. Hall's challenge, I began to reread the Prophets. This resulted in more questions than answers. There was no place in my theology for a regathering of Israel. I had never even considered that there might be a time when most or all of the Jewish people would recognize their Messiah. I had been taught that Jesus would never again return to the earth. It never occurred to me that some of the prophecies might literally be fulfilled—that the Lord would again stand on the Mount of Olives and that the mountain would split in two, exactly as Zechariah saw it (see Zechariah 14:4).

The Great Debate

I was faced with a dilemma. What is to be taken literally in the Scriptures and what is mere symbolism?

I decided that I would rather assume that the Bible is literally true and then be proven wrong in that assumption than to assume it is symbolism and be wrong. I prefer to meet the Lord one day and say, "I took You at Your Word" than to meet Him and have to admit that I didn't think He meant what He said.

It seemed best to take the Scriptures literally unless the Scriptures themselves suggested otherwise. There were times when Jesus

would expressly say, “The kingdom of heaven is *like* . . .” That’s figurative language. Even in the book of Revelation, John often speaks of a “sign” appearing in the heavens (12:1), while at other times he speaks of seeing an actual new heaven and a new earth or a Holy City coming down from God out of heaven (see 21:1–2).

This literal approach to the reading of prophecy began to change my understanding of the Jewish situation. Passages that I had long allegorized now had to be more carefully discerned. For example, Ezekiel’s “valley of dry bones” (Ezekiel 37) is not just a good sermon to preach to a dead church, but it is exactly what the prophet said it was—a picture of Israel coming back to life (verses 12–13). To accept the Scripture allegorically without accepting the actual prophecy is to thwart the full purpose of God’s Word, to twist it to suit one’s own agenda.

Once we have accepted the prophet Ezekiel’s literal meaning—that Israel will live again—then we can apply that passage to other situations. This kind of openness to the Word of God keeps the Scriptures alive. The Lord, through His Spirit, continually brings fresh revelation, both the literal meaning and the spiritual applications.

We do not have the right to take words spoken to Israel and appropriate them to the Church until we have recognized their intended meaning to the people originally addressed. Even then, these promises belong to us, the Gentile Church, only because we are grafted in to Israel’s roots and, along with her, inherit the promises made to her. Paul says that we have become a part of Israel’s olive tree “among the others” and “share in the nourishing sap from the olive root” (Romans 11:17). We do not replace the originally intended recipients. The promise of salvation is extended “to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham” (Romans 4:16). Not only, but also! We join the family of Abraham and are “fellow citizens with God’s people” (Ephesians 2:19). The Jewish Messiah has become our Messiah. His blood has also redeemed us. We come alongside Israel in receiving the promises, but we do not *replace* her!

I was having difficulty in discerning the meaning of prophecy, not unlike most of the people in Jesus' day. The keepers of the scrolls did not understand their meaning. Those who were looking for the Messiah did not recognize Him. They were too preoccupied with preconceived perceptions of what the Messiah would do, of what He would be like. He stood before them in the flesh, but their eyes were closed. I was, in truth, no different.

The Scriptures were clear enough. Micah called Bethlehem the place of His origin (see Micah 5:2). Zebulun and Naphtali in Galilee were singled out by Isaiah as a place that would see "a great light" (Isaiah 9:1–2). Zechariah knew the price for which Jesus would be betrayed (see Zechariah 11:12–13). Isaiah foretold that Jesus would be a suffering servant (see Isaiah 53). Zechariah wrote of a donkey that would be involved in His arrival (see Zechariah 9:9). Daniel even predicted the exact season when the "Anointed One, the ruler" would come (9:25). These predictions may be clear to us today, but the religious leaders of Jesus' day missed them, because He did not live up to their preconceived expectations.

"You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me," Jesus told His hearers (John 5:39). His implication is that they would have recognized Him if they had believed their own Scriptures. These were Bible teachers who were obviously reading not to learn what Scripture taught, but to prove what they believed to be true!

The Revelation That Comes from the Spirit

Intellectual honesty alone is not sufficient when we are seeking to know God. We must pray that our eyes will be open, that our hearts will be perceptive. We must yearn for insight and revelation. He not only speaks to the mind, but He also reveals Himself to the spirit. That revelation comes in His timing. We must be willing,

but He is the One who reveals. We may read through Scripture again and again and miss the truth if our hearts and our spiritual eyes have not been opened.

Cleopas and his friend had a problem on the Emmaus Road on resurrection morning. They were looking into the face of Jesus, but they did not recognize Him (see Luke 24:16). Not until the veil was removed from their eyes did they know with whom they were speaking. We need our veils removed!

Lydia had a similar experience at the riverbank prayer meeting just outside Philippi. As Paul began to speak, “the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message” (Acts 16:14). Lydia had to be willing, but without that opening of her heart, she would not have been able to receive.

Do you see why Paul cried out to the Ephesians that “the eyes of your heart may be enlightened” (1:18) and that God “may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better” (verse 17)? “The mind controlled by the Spirit” is that which brings “life and peace,” Paul told the Romans (8:6).

God does not speak English or German or Japanese, not even Hebrew. He speaks “spirit.” Rarely does He speak audibly through our outside ears, but inwardly where He dwells. He speaks to us in our spirits through His Spirit. We do not translate His messages; rather we interpret them (see 1 Corinthians 14:13). Revelation goes deeper than the mind. It impacts the entire being—mind, heart, intention, passions. This is why Paul told the Romans that their salvation had come by believing “in your heart” that God had raised Jesus from the dead (Romans 10:9), that “it is with your heart that you believe and are justified” (verse 10).

Luke 21 and the Present-Day Move of God

It was this kind of searching that caused me to hear God’s heart for Israel. The beginning of the revelation happened in the early

'70s, when I was studying the gospel of Luke with a group of young people. Students were packed into a storefront classroom. They were sitting on the floor, Bibles open on their laps, hungry to know more of this Jesus whom they had so recently met. They had few preconceived ideas. They were reading the Bible afresh and asking the Lord for revelation.

For weeks we had been reading together through Luke's account of the life of Jesus, wanting to know more of Him so that we could become more like Him. The Lord was revealing Himself to us—both to me, the teacher, and to these radical young believers.

Everything was going along well until the week we came to Luke 21. I began to dread this particular class session because I did not know how to understand this chapter, much less interpret it for others. In this passage, and the corresponding chapters in Matthew 24 and Mark 13, the Lord had been talking to the disciples about the future—His future and the future of Israel. According to Matthew's account of the same conversation, Jesus was answering three questions from the disciples: (1) When will the destruction of Jerusalem come? (2) What will be the sign of Your coming? and (3) What will be the sign of the end of the age? (see Matthew 24:3). Jesus seems to be answering all three questions, but I could not comprehend which answer belonged to which question.

I was rereading the chapter one last time in front of my eager students when I began to see—on the spot—something pertinent to our day. The Lord was giving me a revelation that has been foundational to my understanding of the times ever since.

Suddenly four verses seemed strikingly clear. Luke 21:20 surely speaks of the armies of Titus: "When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near." The Roman armies began their assault of Jerusalem in AD 68 and continued until its fall and the destruction of the Temple in AD 70. Jesus had wept over the city and the leaders' lack of receptivity.

Verse 24 speaks of the dispersion of the Jews: "They [the Jewish people] will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to

all the nations” (italics added). This happened just as Jesus said it would. Many thousands died in the siege. Others fled the city, never to return. They would soon be found in every nation of the world. Some returned to Jerusalem a few years later but were driven out again during the Bar Kokhba revolt of the 130s.¹

After the Romans successfully crushed the Bar Kokhba campaign, Jewish people were banned from Jerusalem and from Judea. Although there were times in the ensuing years when Jews were allowed to live in the city and in the Land, there was no further serious Jewish occupation until the beginning of immigration in the nineteenth century. There was no Jewish State until the United Nations’ vote of November 1947 led to the establishment of the modern State of Israel in May 1948!²

“Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles,” Jesus went on to say in verse 24. And what trampling! Romans, Byzantines, Muslims, Crusaders, Turks, the British—all have claimed time and territory in the City of David, in this Land promised to Abraham and his descendants.

“Until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled!” I paused in the reading, deep in thought. What a strange thing for the Jewish Messiah to say. What could this possibly have meant to Jesus’ hearers that day? The Land had been in Israel’s possession, more or less, since the days of Joshua. Yes, some had been taken to Assyria in 721 BC and had never returned. Others were held captive in Babylon for seventy years in the sixth century BC. But even in those times, Jews still lived in the Land.

Whatever Jesus meant by “times of the Gentiles,” one thing was clear: Israel’s reentry into Jerusalem was strangely connected to these words in Luke 21. As I read, the modern history of Israel was merging with Scripture. The people now returning to the Land were descendants of those who had heard the words I was now reading!

Jesus had said “until.” I was suddenly confident that the “until” referred to the recent past when, in the Six-Day War of June 1967,

the State of Israel held off six invading Arab nations and recaptured the city of Jerusalem. This was the first sovereign possession of the city of Jerusalem since 586 BC, when the last Jewish king in David's lineage was driven from the city.³

In the margin of my Bible, I wrote "1967." If this Scripture had found its fulfillment in Israel's retaking of Jerusalem, then "the times of the Gentiles" also had meaning for our generation.

Sitting on the floor in front of me that day were not only Gentile believers in Jesus but also young Jewish believers who had accepted Yeshua (Jesus), the One whom Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah and the other prophets had promised. I had been hearing of an influx of Jewish believers like no other since the first century. Somehow I knew this was significant for our day.

I read on.

In verse 28, Jesus said to His listeners, "When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

I was having a "this is that!" experience—the kind of surreal moment that occurred when Jesus read from the Isaiah text in the synagogue at Nazareth. "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing," He had said (Luke 4:21). I wanted to tell my young floor-sitting friends and all others who would listen to me since that time, "This Scripture is being fulfilled in our day!" I wanted to shout like Peter did on Pentecost morning, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel"! (Acts 2:16 KJV). I was experiencing what Jesus had declared!

The fulfillment of Luke 21 had begun. I was seeing the beginning of the end. I was to stand up and lift up my head; our redemption was near.

But what is "near"? I don't know. The Lord does not reckon time as we do. "Near" may be many years, or it may be tomorrow.

The last verse to catch my attention was verse 32: "This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened." What generation? The generation at the time of Jesus?

No, that cannot be, since that generation is long since gone. The generation that begins to see these things being fulfilled? I think so.

But how long is a generation? I don't have a definitive answer to that question, either. The Lord led Israel through the wilderness for forty years and called it a generation. Yet He told Moses that the Israelites would come back to the Promised Land "in the fourth generation" (Genesis 15:16). That return took 400 years. So a generation could be 100 years. If my understanding of "this generation" is correct, then some of us who were alive when Israel took control of Jerusalem will still be alive when Jesus returns.

One thing is certain: He promised that all these things will occur, and I believe Him.

Signs of His Coming

But wait, you may be saying, we are not supposed to be involved in date-setting for the Second Coming, are we? Didn't Jesus Himself say, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Matthew 24:36)? Have there not been hundreds of prognosticators, all of whom have been proven wrong? Didn't Jesus say that His coming would be like a thief in the night? Does He really want us to know the season of His return?

Yes and no.

No, we are not to know the day or the hour.

Yes, hundreds of prognosticators have been proven wrong.

But yes, we are to know the season of His return. Jesus chided the leaders of His day for being able to discern weather signs, but not "the signs of the times" (Matthew 16:3).

Yes, Jesus is coming like a thief in the night for those who are not expecting His return. "You know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night," Paul told the

Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 5:2). “While people are saying, ‘Peace and safety,’ destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman” (verse 3). While people are saying, “Peace and safety!” destruction will come on them!

No, Jesus will not come like a thief in the night for believers. “You . . . are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief,” Paul continued (verse 4). “If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you,” Jesus told the community in Sardis (Revelation 3:3).

“As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man” (Matthew 24:37), were Jesus’ words. How was it in the days of Noah?

Noah, warned of God, was not surprised when the rains came. He and his family knew that they were living in the season of the coming judgment. Though they had never experienced a flood, the ark was built and ready. The animals “came to Noah and entered the ark” (Genesis 7:9). Noah might not have known exactly when the floodwaters would come, but he knew the season.

And what was that about the coming of Jesus compared to the labor pains of a pregnant woman?

Labor pains come as no surprise to a pregnant woman. She has been expecting them for nine months. She still does not know the hour or the day of her child’s arrival, not even when the pains begin. But she knows that her time is near. This, according to Paul, is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. We will know the season, though not the day nor the hour.

Jesus spoke of many signs that would occur through the centuries before the time of the end. Most of these have happened in every generation—floods, famines, plagues. They may be coming with greater frequency, but they are not new. They alone are insufficient clues regarding the season in which we are living.


Paul told Timothy that the end times would usher in a period of intense brutality, of civil and family unrest, of increased addictions (lack of self-control), a time when the whole world

would be seeking after pleasure. Even the Body of Christ would have “a form of godliness but denying its power” (see 2 Timothy 3:1–5). These signs, too, have been present in former generations.

But since my encounter with Luke 21 that day in front of my floor-sitting, “Jesus freak” friends, I am convinced that one sign is unique to our day: Israel is back in the Land of her inheritance, and Jerusalem is once again under the rule of the nation of Israel, just as the prophets and Jesus foretold.

When Jesus was predicting the fall of Jerusalem, He wept over the city:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. . . . I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”



Jesus spoke of many signs that would occur before the end times.

One sign is unique to our day—Israel is back in the Land and Jerusalem is once again under the rule of the nation of Israel.

Matthew 23:37, 39

This word was not spoken to the Gentiles. It was spoken to Jesus’ blood family, Israel. He would not return until the Jewish people, perhaps Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, were ready to receive Him. With the eyes of faith, we can see that time approaching.

I have been to Israel many times in the past twenty years. I have stood on the Mount of Olives with Jewish believers, gazing into the sky and praying, anticipating the Lord’s return, crying out to the heavens, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”

No generation since the first century has seen such a rapidly increasing body of Jewish believers, both in the Land and in the nations. The “until” Jesus spoke when overlooking Jerusalem that

day shortly before His death is drawing nearer. We are seeing Jewish people who are ready to embrace their Messiah—Jewish people who are ready to say, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.”



Walk with me through some of the truths I have learned since that day with my hippie/Jesus Movement class of young Jewish and Gentile believers. Let me tell you about other prophecies that are unfolding before us—recorded words of the Prophets that looked forward to our day.

If you question what I am saying, take “my” Scriptures and test them for yourself. Open your Bible and read. Ask the Lord to open your heart and mind and spirit. Leave behind preconceptions of the biblical record. Let the Lord speak to you. Ask for revelation. Seek wisdom. Be willing to be changed!

My own focus is sharpening. God’s heart for the Jewish people must be my heart for them. As our hearts turn with the longing He has for this specially called family, you and I will find ourselves under that age-old blessing spoken to Abraham, and our spirits will be quickened to read the global signs of the Messiah’s imminent return to claim all of His children—Jew and Gentile alike.



Remarks from Skyler Fox,
former student, Caleb Training School

I grew up in a family that believed we are living in the last days before the Lord’s return. This was always something that resonated in my heart, even though I had no absolute confirmation that this was true—not until my time in the Caleb Company Training School.

As “Papa Don” began to refer to Jesus’ prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem—that the Jewish people would

be “taken as prisoners to all the nations” and that Jerusalem would be “trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:24), I began to pay attention. All my life I had heard of the Jewish return to Israel, and Israel’s retaking of their capital city in 1967. Suddenly I realized that Jesus’ prediction had been fulfilled in our day.

Then Papa Don moved to verse 28 of Jesus’ discourse: “When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

Now my attention was riveted on what I was hearing. Yes, these things have begun to take place. Yes, this means that our redemption is near. Yes, we are living in the season of Jesus’ return.

But what exactly does that mean? How long is the season? What is near? That’s when I saw Jesus’ further explanation: “When you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. . . . This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened” (verses 31–32).

I now walk confidently in the truth of the hour I live in. May His kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven!

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