

PRAYING FOR ISRAEL

by Peter Eyre

A troubled region

For such a small country (about the size of Wales), Israel is often in the news with troubles in Gaza, the West Bank, and tensions with other countries. The UK is affected because Islamic extremists link their anti-Western policy to America's support for Israel, and given UK support for America in Iraq etc, we too are perceived as targets.

'The Arab Spring' as this year's turbulence in the Middle East is now known, has added to tensions, changes and uncertainties in the region. Also, a recent call from

the United States for an agreement that includes a return by Israel to its pre-1967 borders has given Israel great concern. It is difficult to see how Israel could make such an agreement given the compromise this would be to its security.

From the outset of modern day Israel's establishing in 1948, successive military attempts have been made to overthrow it – each of which has failed – and today there are still those who aspire to Israel's removal.

It's complicated!

The whole situation and its background is complex: historically, politically, humanitarionally, culturally and theologically – and one that continues to see tension, conflict, suffering and uncertainty. Jerusalem is significant for Jews, Muslims and Christians, and today about 6 million Jews and 1.25 million Arabs live in Israel. Of these Arabs, approx 1 million are Muslims, 250,000 are either Greek Orthodox or Roman Catholics, and about 5-7000 are evangelicals. Gaza and the West Bank have about 3 - 3.5 million people.

Is there any hope?

Yes – God's word, which He is watching over to perform and to fulfil (Jeremiah 1:12). For example, Isaiah 19:19-25 says that the Egyptians will turn to the Lord and the Assyrians too will be a blessing in the earth along with Israel. Also, Haggai 2 speaks of a great shaking in which “the desired of all nations will come (Jews and Gentiles)”. And Ezekiel 47:21-23 speaks of land allocation being made for Gentiles (includes Arabs) who have settled among

the tribes of Israel – “consider them as native-born Israelites”. Then there are God's promises a) about Israel and b) the church. Some of these follow:



Annual gathering of Messianic and Arabic believers at a Forest Park near the Sea of Galilee

(A) God hasn't finished yet!

Because of His great mercy and covenant faithfulness, God hasn't finished with Israel / the Jewish people (Romans 9-11) - His gifts and His call are irrevocable (Romans 11:28-31). The apostle Paul declared that the gospel of salvation is “first for the Jew, then for the Gentile”, (Romans 1:16). Paul longed and prayed for the Israelites to be saved (Romans 10:1). He also taught that their transgression has meant gospel riches for the Gentiles, and that their acceptance in Christ will be “life from the dead” (Romans 11:11-15). This has to do with the second coming of Christ, and so affects us all.

Though Israel today is a secular state, in Ezekiel 36:22-28 God promises to reveal Himself as holy through Israel to the nations, despite Israel's unholiness. He also promised to bring Jewish people back to the land and (in due time) put a new heart and spirit in them. This has been and is happening now, during our lifetime. Significantly, Jeremiah 16:14,15 speaks of a

time when the Israelites will no longer say about the LORD who brought them up out of the land of Egypt, but the LORD who brought them up out of the land of the north and out of all the countries where He had banished them. A phenomenon in Israel today is the Russian Jews (about 1 million), and others.

(B) “I will build My church”

Jesus said in Matthew 16:18 that He would build His church and the gates of Hades would not overcome it.

We can take heart that in all the troubles, Jews and Arabs are finding Jesus. They find Him through various means including direct revelation in visions and dreams, and baptisms at Yardenit by the Sea of Galilee are great occasions for preaching the gospel. The number of Jewish believers ('Messianics') living in Israel has grown from 2 congregations in 1969 to 100+ today, representing about 10,000 believers. Arabic and other congregations in Israel represent about 7000+ born-again believers.

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Significantly, valuable relationship-building and prayer is increasing among the believers to help give expression to the “one new man in Christ” of Ephesians 2:15, as a prophetic witness to Jesus and the power of the gospel (Revelation 19:10c). This is key.

(C) What can we do?

1. **Praise the Lord** for what He is doing to work salvation and the honouring of His Name.

2. **Humbly appreciate** our Biblical-Jewish roots (Romans 11:18), and pray for the Jewish people in Israel and throughout the world – and for Arabs & others too – to accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour. A reason why salvation has come to the Gentiles is to make Israel envious, and so desire the Lord (Romans 11:11).

3. **Pray for the ongoing development** of the body of Christ / Messiah, the “one new man in Christ” (Ephesians 2 & 3), as a prophetic witness in and through Israel to the name of Jesus and the power of the gospel.

4. **Pray for the release** of all resources needed for congregations and expressions of ‘one new man in Christ’ to grow. This includes ministries of encouragement, such as Haggai in 1:13 - 2:4. His heart was to bring the Lord to the centre of national life. It includes the raising up, strengthening and support of leaders. It includes prayer support, and material resources.

5. **Be willing** to be part of the answer to prayer.

6. **Pray for the peace** of Jerusalem (Psalm 122:6), for true peace and healing in Jesus (John 16:33; Ephesians 2:14).

7. **Remember the promise of blessing** in Genesis 12:3 and the gracious gift of the Holy Spirit, Who enables prayer: Romans 8:26,27. Pray for a new wave of understanding in the UK about these matters.