

CHAPTER

1

*You will arise and have mercy on Jerusalem—
and now is the time to pity her,
now is the time you promised to help.
For your people love every stone in her walls
and cherish even the dust in her streets.*

PSALM 102:13–14 NLT

When standing on the Mount of Olives, the sweeping panorama of Jerusalem is breathtaking. The multi-towered landscape is a splendid drama written in stone, one that has received rave reviews from countless pilgrims to the Holy Land.

Seen from atop the mount are landmarks such as the ancient ruins of the City of David, the gilded cupola on the *Haram esh-Sharif*, the Dome of the Rock, and the Kidron Valley where tombstones dot the hillside beneath the crenellated walls of the ancient city. These massive stone walls with their battlements intact have proudly surveyed the sieges of countless invading armies. The parapets of these walls once sheltered archers; today, soldiers patrol them with automatic rifles.

The Olivet view entices pilgrims to descend into Jerusalem, a city of stones, and to visit the Old City with its Jewish Quarter. Stones and more stones. The building blocks are also known as Jerusalem stone—usually meaning sedimentary limestone, dolomite, and dolomitic limestone quarried from beneath the hills and mountains of Israel. As the traveler wanders through the tangled labyrinth of narrow alleyways, one can almost touch the stone walls on either side. There are stone arches above and paving stones beneath. From ancient ruins to the medieval ramparts, these streets and walls that have baked in the warmth of a million sunrises each have a story to tell.

Those most beloved by the people of Israel are the stones that rise to form the Western Wall, the holiest shrine of the Jewish faith. The fifty-foot-high wall is all that remains of the Temple Mount as it existed in the first century. The stones stacked one upon another to build this wall are so massive that it's hard to imagine how they were chiseled out and transported up the hills of Jerusalem to the sacred site.

To grasp the perspective, it is helpful to look backward across the centuries and then follow the events that have led to today's impasse in the City of David. Consider the view from the temple when the stones were newly hewn and the city of Jerusalem shone like alabaster in the morning sun. Herod the Great began rebuilding Solomon's temple in 20 BC; the project occupied the remainder of his reign.

While the fifteen-story-high temple was constructed during Herod's administration, the outer courts and walls were not fully completed until AD 64, some sixty-eight years after his death.

One day, after Jesus had been teaching in the temple precincts, He called His disciples' attention to the buildings:

“Do you see all these things?” he asked. “Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.” (Matthew 24:2)

The words of Jesus were precisely fulfilled in AD 70 when Roman armies swept through Jerusalem and reduced Herod's magnificent temple to a pile of blackened rubble. The stones of the temple are buried in antiquity, somewhere deep beneath the Old City.

The remaining stones of the Western Wall have become a symbol of the enduring hope of the Jewish people. Even nonpracticing Jews venerate the Wall as a national monument. The plaza in front of the Western Wall can accommodate 100,000 congregants. It is the gathering place of the people of Israel, the scene of both joyous celebration and solemn memorial. For a city that has been completely destroyed twice, occupied by enemies twenty-three times, surrounded fifty-two times, and liberated forty-four times, the Wall remains a testimony of God's all-encompassing providence.

The walls of Jerusalem summon pilgrims to return again and again to that eternal city. They speak to the soul and hum with the

sound of ancient songs in a minor key—songs of anguish and suffering—songs of “Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.” (Jeremiah 31:15)

The Western Wall is also known by some as the Wailing Wall. Worshipers who have gone there to pray over the centuries have washed those stones with rivers of tears—tears of mourning, tears of joy, tears of intercession. Visible in the cracks and crevices between the huge stones are tiny pieces of paper, crinkled and wedged in the nooks and crannies of the Wall. It is tradition to write a prayer on a slip of paper and place it among the stones. It has become a place of prayer for peoples of all nations. Once each month, caretakers of the Western Wall carefully remove the scraps of paper and ceremonially bury them.

Stand in front of those hulking stones and a spiritual connection is made with the other worshipers offering their prayers and praises to God. Reach out and touch the ancient weathered boulders. Listen to the distant sounds of the *muezzin*, the Muslim crier that heralds the Islamic call to prayer from atop Mount Moriah; it is also a reminder of the many Jews killed for daring to stand beside the Western Wall to pray to *Yahweh*. It has long been a silent witness to the sufferings of God’s chosen people. If only those ancient weathered rocks could speak!

Tellingly, the very fact that the Jewish people and the nation of Israel exist today is a miracle. No other group of people has been so

systematically targeted for destruction. In earlier times most Jews were exiled from their homeland, and even then were hunted and humiliated, menaced and massacred by the millions. The Jews as a people would surely not have survived were it not that the sovereign Lord of the universe had ordained their preservation.

The nations that ransacked, burned, and leveled Jerusalem while trying to annihilate the Jewish people are rife with devastation. We have only to examine history to ascertain that the remnants of those once-great empires are now only dust and ashes. Numerous nations have come against Israel from the beginning of her existence. Yet, like the Phoenix, she has risen from the ashes each time. Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem in 586 BC and was doomed to live as a beast of the field for seven terrifying years. He was restored to sanity only after he had recognized the God of the Israelites.³ His kingdom of Babylon was conquered by Cyrus the Great.

In 332 BC, Alexander the Great captured Jerusalem. His empire fragmented after his death; the followers of Ptolemy in Egypt and then the Seleucids of Syria later ruled over Jerusalem. The Jews, horrified by the desecration of the temple under the Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV staged a revolt and regained independence under the Hasmonean dynasty. The dynasty flourished for one hundred years until Pompey established Roman rule in the city. The Holy Roman Empire collapsed after destroying the temple and leveling Jerusalem.

The British, who ruled over Palestine and Jerusalem following World War I, then boasted that the sun never set on the British Empire. Indeed, one-fifth of the world's population was under its rule. However, after turning away Jews seeking asylum in both Britain and Palestine as they fled Hitler's gas chambers, and after arming Arabs to fight against Jews in the Holy Land, the empire quickly began to disintegrate. Great Britain today is comprised of just fourteen territories, consisting of a number of islands. Gone are the days when the empire stretched from India to Canada and from Australia to Africa.

Jerusalem, however, continues to stand as a testimony to the determination and courage of the Jewish people. That God has ordained the preservation of his chosen people is written throughout the pages of the Scripture.

It was first noted in His covenant with Abraham:

The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. 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 12:1-3)

In addition to the covenant, the Lord gave Abraham and his descendants, Isaac and Jacob, the title deed to the land of Israel.

He declared that it would perpetually be in their possession. In Genesis God again spoke:

On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: “To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates—the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.”

(Genesis 15:18–21 NKJV)

In secular terms, this would be called a royal land grant. This type of grant, common in antiquity, was always perpetual and unconditional. The king or sovereign granted parcels of his land to loyal subjects as reward for faithful service. In biblical terms, however, God is sovereign over all the earth—He created it, and there is no greater right of ownership than that—so the land is inarguably His to bequeath as He wishes.

Years after He made his original covenant with Abraham, God confirmed it. Abraham accepted the terms of the covenant by the right of circumcision:

“As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham;

for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.” And God said to Abraham: “As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised.”
(Genesis 17:4–10 NKJV)

As we have seen, this covenant with Abraham has no pre-conditions or expiration date. It was given as an everlasting possession to Abraham and his descendants. Only mankind is capable of impeding the fulfillment of the contract through disobedience, but the pact can never be rescinded. Moses declared:

God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak

and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?

(Numbers 23:19)

To avoid any confusion or equivocation, God reconfirmed the covenant with Abraham's son, Isaac:

For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed. (Genesis 26:3–4)

Neither did God leave out Abraham's grandson Jacob nor the generations that followed. He declared:

I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you. (Genesis 28:13–16)

Of what value is this ancient covenant between God and Abraham today? God remains sovereign over the land He bestowed upon Abraham and his offspring. He has never vacated the title deed nor, as some mistakenly believe, has He rescinded His covenant declaration. The land still belongs to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants—as numerous as the sands of the sea.

Today, the place where God made and confirmed this covenant lies in an area north of Jerusalem between Bethel and Ai. It is in the heart of the West Bank (actually Judea and Samaria) on land the United Nations has inaccurately decreed Israel occupies illegally. World leaders continue to demand that Israel forego this area for the sake of an ever-elusive peace.

In summation, the Jewish people have a God-given inalienable right to possess the land of Israel. Many have the mistaken idea that an inalienable right is one that cannot be taken from you. In reality, it means just the opposite: It is one that cannot be given away, sold, surrendered, or legally transferred to another.

The all-time bestselling book—the Bible—confirms it. Since it is an inalienable right, this means Israel's leaders do not have the authority to give away her land or convey the property to another party. The children of Israel were forbidden to sell the land permanently, even to another Jew. God instructed, “The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers.” (Leviticus 25:23)

Giving away any of the land violates the covenant God made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and places the nation of Israel outside God's covenant blessings. Likewise, the nations that are coercing Israel into giving up the land come under the curse of God.

God's sovereignty over the land of Israel extends in a special way to the city of Jerusalem. It is the only city He has ever claimed as His own. In the Scriptures it is called "the City of God" and the "Holy City." For that reason alone, Christians should be concerned about the fate of Jerusalem. If Jerusalem is dear to God's heart, it should be dear to the hearts of every Bible believer.