

# The Chosen People



Volume XIX, Issue 9 November 2013

SYRIA

ISRAEL



# IS SYRIA A THREAT TO ISRAEL?

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# SYRIA AND SCRIPTURE

Dear friend,

Shalom. My heart breaks for those killed during the Syrian civil war, especially for Syrian Christians who have suffered persecution by fellow Syrians and Muslim fundamentalist soldiers from other countries.<sup>1</sup>

*Yet what concerns me the most is the possibility that chemical weapons will find their way to the borders of Israel.*

Let me explain why this is a threat that has caused even more concern than the previous fear that Syria would unleash missiles with chemical warheads upon Israeli cities.

You might recall that last May Israeli warplanes struck targets in Lebanon for the stated purpose of shutting down efforts by Syrian forces presumed to be transferring chemical weapons to Hezbollah forces. At the time, an Israeli embassy spokesman in Washington said, "Israel is determined to prevent the transfer of chemical weapons or other game-changing

weaponry by the Syrian regime to terrorists, especially to Hezbollah in Lebanon."<sup>2</sup>

Many believe the Assad regime has already moved a large number of their chemical weapons outside of Syria, especially to Hezbollah forces in Lebanon.<sup>3</sup>

If a transfer of some of these weapons to Hezbollah has already taken place, it is possible that these chemical weapons (including blister agents, such as sulfur and mustard gas, and nerve agents like sarin<sup>4</sup>) are presently in the hands of Hamas and

terrorist forces focused on the destruction of Israel. This is the position of the Israeli and United States governments, and so I believe that this is a real threat.

It is my hope that the resolution of the United Nations Security Council to restrain Syria will be upheld. I believe that the enforcement itself will be difficult, but if weapons are already in the hands of Israel's enemies, then it might just be a matter of time before they are used. This concern will keep Israelis on edge and only increases the hair-trigger threat of terrorism that Israelis live with on a daily basis.

## **A Call to Prayer**

This is not intended to be a political commentary, but rather a call to prayer. I find myself praying for the safety of Israelis who are collecting gas masks for their families, and especially for our staff and those we are serving in Israel. I also pray for the elderly Holocaust survivors and Russian Jewish immigrants who cannot easily defend or take care of themselves.

As you will read in this newsletter, there is a great history of Jewish life in Syria that very few people know about. I know you will find learning about the Syrian Jewish



community to be fascinating. A recent book entitled *Aleppo on Flatbush* describes the growth

of the Syrian Jewish community in Brooklyn, New York—a very influential community. The Syrian Jewish community in Israel is also important, as Syria has had great impact on the global Jewish community and continues to play an important role in Jewish life.

## Syria in Prophecy

As Bible believers, we cannot help but view current events in light of what we read in the Bible. So what does the Bible say about the future of Damascus? In Isaiah 17:1-3, the prophet writes,

*“Behold, Damascus will cease from being a city, and it will be a ruinous heap. The cities of Aroer are forsaken; they will be for flocks which lie down, and no one will make them afraid. The fortress also will cease from Ephraim, the kingdom from Damascus, and the remnant of Syria; they will be as the glory of the children of Israel,” says the Lord of hosts.*

The Bible is very clear on the ultimate fate of Damascus! The Hebrew words for *cease* and *ruinous heap* leave us with little doubt that one day Damascus will be destroyed and no longer occupied.

According to Old Testament scholar, Dr. Walter Kaiser,

*Isaiah 17 locates this prophecy “in that day” (17:4, 9), thus a city that has been occupied and served as a capital for all these years is threatened with “no longer being a city” (17:1b) and will be reduced to “a heap of ruins” (17:1c). It will then “be deserted” (17:2a) and a place that is no longer filled with buildings of the city, but a place to pasture flocks and herds! When did this ever happen in history? Even if it is hyperbolic, it surely must point to some major tragedy that is coming. So a major “fortified city*

*will disappear and a royal power from Damascus” (17:3).<sup>5</sup>*

Well-known author Joel Rosenberg adds,

*Isaiah’s prophecy about the judgment of destruction of Damascus in chapter 17 is eschatological, and yet to be fulfilled. Damascus has never in history been utterly destroyed. To the contrary, it is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. What’s more, the book of Isaiah indicates that he received the prophecies concerning the judgment of the Gentile nations, including the judgment of Damascus in chapter 17 after Tiglath-Pileser, (the Assyrian King) conquered Damascus. (2 Kings 16:7-18)<sup>6</sup>*

I must add that there are also many excellent Bible scholars who believe the prediction in Isaiah 17 refers in one way or another to the destruction of Damascus by the Assyrians in 734 BC. Yet while I believe that the destruction of Damascus by the Assyrians did fulfill previous prophecies, I nonetheless continue to believe it more plausible that the predictions in Isaiah chapter 17 will take place in the future.

## Prayer and Prophecy

All too often we miss the relationship between prayer and prophecy.

Even though we know that one day Damascus will be destroyed, we are still called to pray for the salvation of Syrians and for peace in the Middle East. We must continue to pray for those on both sides of the civil war in Syria. We should pray for a cessation of hostilities and for the Gospel to go out among Syrians, including the hundreds of thousands of refugees entering Jordan and other countries. We should pray that the use of chemical weapons will end as we look forward to a day when weapons of war will be turned into instruments of peace and the wolf will lie down with the lamb.

In that glorious day, our true King will reign from His rightful throne and His kingdom will be established. In that day we will understand the meaning of peace in a way that we have only understood “through a glass darkly.”

The Scriptures tell us in Psalm 122:6 to “pray for the peace of Jerusalem.” By praying for peace in the Middle East, we are praying for the salvation of Israelis and Syrians who are suffering as a result of the conflict and heightened tensions.

Please remember to pray for Chosen People Ministries and our staff serving in Israel, and elsewhere—bringing the message of the Prince of Peace to Jewish people in seventeen countries around the globe!

Thanks for caring, for praying and for supporting our outreach among Jewish people. We do live in very challenging days, and we need to pray fervently for one another.

Your brother,

Mitch



Dr. Mitch Glaser  
President

P.S. For your gift of \$200 or more in support of our ministries, we will send you a beautiful menorah from Israel.

- 1 <http://www.charismanews.com/world/40931-how-god-is-moving-in-syria-despite-heart-breaking-persecution>
- 2 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk>
- 3 <http://www.timesofisrael.com/top-defector-claims-assad-moving-chemical-weapons/>
- 4 Associated Press writer Deb Riechmann contributed from Washington, D.C. ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/09/20/syria-declares-chemical-weapons\\_n\\_3961849.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/09/20/syria-declares-chemical-weapons_n_3961849.html)). Also see <http://www.opcw.org>, <http://www.opcw.org/chemical-weapons-convention/about-the-convention/genesis-and-historical-development/>
- 5 Personal e-mail to the author
- 6 <http://www.joelrosenberg.com/files/2013/09/STUDY-Damascus-prophecies-R.pdf>



# Israel & Syria – Troubled Neighbors in a Troubled Age



Rising from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire and the mandates that administered the region after World War I, Israel and Syria emerged as modern nation-states at roughly the same moment in history. However, their relationship has far more greatly resembled that of Cain and Abel than that of Jonathan and David.

Attempting to throttle Israel in the cradle, Syria joined with Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq in the 1948 invasion that almost ended Jewish statehood. Although various treaties have been in place since then, beginning with the United Nations-brokered 1949 Armistice Agreements, Israel and Syria have had hostile and mutually suspicious relations ever since.

## The Six-Day War

In 1967, tension between Israel and its neighboring countries escalated, with both sides engaging in military incursions. Once again, Israel's enemies were grimly determined to destroy "the Zionist entity"—the preferred phrase with which many Arab states, including Syria, describe the state of Israel, thus seeking to deprive it of its legitimacy.

Egypt, Jordan and Syria coordinated military action, but Israel achieved a stunning military victory within six days. By the time the Arab forces ground to a halt, Israel had plucked the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, and the Golan Heights—a strategically critical element in Israel's security—from Syria.

## The Yom Kippur War

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is a solemn day of obligation among Jewish people around the world. Even non-religious Jews often fast on that day out of respect for tradition. It is no mistake then, that

Syria and Egypt launched an unanticipated, two-pronged attack on Yom Kippur in 1973, which fell on October 6 that year, catching Israel's formidable security apparatus off balance for once.

Although the Arab forces demonstrated greater military competence than in the previous two wars, Israel nonetheless consolidated its hold on the Golan Heights by the time the main hostilities had ceased on October 22 and the United Nations brokered an uneasy ceasefire. Syria's Hafez al-Assad had at different times in his thirty-year rule signaled he might be willing to negotiate with Israel, but nothing concrete ever came of it.

## Troubled Times Continue

Today, the Middle East is a far more unstable region than ever. Although peace treaties between Israel and its neighbors, Egypt and Jordan, have been signed and continue to hold, who knows how long this will last—especially with Egypt?

Iran poses an increasing existential threat to Israel, and Syria has continued to behave as a "bad actor," occupying Lebanon, harboring terrorists and joining forces with Israel's sworn enemy Hezbollah. Now that civil war has raged for the last two years and the

regime's use of chemical weapons has been confirmed, Israel must be increasingly alert to see that these weapons do not fall into even worse hands and threaten Israel's civilian population.

For those who turn to the Scriptures for guidance, the increasing destabilization of the Middle East is a

confirmation of prophecy. The question is not if hostilities will intensify, but only when. This is not to say that we ought not to pray and work for peace. We must, however, understand that God's Word foretells dire conflict in the region toward which all eyes seem to be turned at this time.

*The Chosen People*





# The Jews of Syria



Even though only a very small remnant of the Jewish community remains in Syria, Syrian Jews have a vibrant and notable history. The community is comprised of two separate Jewish groups. The first and oldest group consists of

Musta'arabi or Mizrahi Jews, which refers to the Jewish communities with a long history in Arabic-speaking countries.

According to tradition, Syria's Jewish community had its origin during the reign of King David. At that time, David's general, *Yoav*, controlled the region of *Aram-Zobah* when he defeated both the Arameans and the Ammonites (2 Sam. 10).

While rabbinic tradition identifies this area as *Aleppo*, the largest city in modern Syria, the settlement likely existed in the southern part of the country. By the time the Romans established their kingdom in the region, both Aleppo and Damascus had sizeable Jewish communities.

It was during the first century that Paul, who was a young rabbinic student at the time, decided to visit the Jewish community of Damascus (Acts 9:1-2). On his way to the city, Paul unexpectedly encountered Jesus. Struck blind and led to Damascus, Paul was healed and discipled by a Jewish follower named Ananias (Acts 9:3-19). Paul proceeded to teach in the Damascus synagogues about how God had transformed his life through the Messiah, Jesus (Acts 9:20-25).

## The Sephardi Immigration

The second group, known as Sephardi Jews, began immigration into the region of Syria in 1492, following the expulsion of the Jews from Spain during the Inquisition. Although the newly arrived Sephardi Jews eventually began to intermingle with the ancient Jewish population, they initially created two separate communities. Now, intermarriage has made it nearly impossible to distinguish between these groups, although some Sephardi Jewish families from Aleppo light one extra Hanukkah candle to express their gratitude for the way they were welcomed to Syria from Spain. In

addition to these two groups, some Kurdish Jews and Jewish people from Italy settled in Syria. Today, many of their descendents also identify themselves as Syrian Jews.

Over the centuries, the Jewish people established three large communities in Syria. Damascus is home to one of the oldest Syrian Jewish communities. During the Roman Empire, the Jewish population of Damascus reached about 10,000. It remained a significant Jewish center and grew when many Jewish people fled from the land of Israel due to suffocating taxes imposed upon them by the Crusaders.

By the fifth century, Aleppo also had a large, thriving Jewish community, including a congregation of Jewish followers of Jesus, known as *Nazarenes*. The Nazarenes were believers who maintained their Jewish identity and continued to adhere to the Torah. For over five centuries, the Central Synagogue of Aleppo was the home of one of the oldest and most authoritative manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible, known as the Aleppo Codex. This biblical manuscript is over 1,000 years old and survived a fire during the anti-Jewish riots of 1947. Today, the Aleppo Codex finds its home at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

Qamishli, a small city in the north near the Turkish border, contained the third notable Jewish community in Syria. The population reached its height in 1930 with 3,000 Jewish residents. Today, the Jewish population is virtually nonexistent as a result of heavy persecution, which began in 1947.

Surprisingly, the Jewish communities of Syria flourished for over a thousand years under Islamic control of the area. They built magnificent synagogues and established prominent rabbinic schools. Unfortunately, the Jewish people in Syria began to face significant persecution in the 1930s. Although Syria still had 30,000 Jewish residents in 1948, when Israel declared its independence, today only about twenty elderly Jewish people remain in Damascus. The severe persecution forced the entire Jewish population out of the country.

Despite being forced from their homeland, the worldwide Syrian Jewish population has reached 200,000. The United States and Israel have the largest communities. Brooklyn, New York alone has approximately 75,000 residents, and about 80,000 Syrian Jews live in Israel.

# SEE THE BIBLE THROUGH JEWISH EYES

BY DANIEL GOLDBERG, TH.D., D.D.



Dr. Goldberg serves as International Ministries Representative for Chosen People Ministries and lives in Pineville, North Carolina with his wife, Madeline.

## AN INTRODUCTION TO MESSIAH'S MILLENNIAL RULE ISAIAH 8-12

### THE FUTILITY OF FALSE RELIGION (Isaiah 8:19-22)

The Hebrew prophets repeatedly warn Israel about the perils of idolatry, and now we find Isaiah confronting this dangerous temptation. Seeking guidance from mediums and spirits leads Israel into anguish and hopeless gloom (8:21-22). Isaiah presents this desperate situation in order to illustrate the remarkable light that Messiah brings through His kingdom.

Isaiah addresses the distorted religious system, which consisted of seeking counsel from “familiar spirits” or the disembodied dead. The mediums made strange noises or incantations to invoke messages from beyond the grave. Isaiah presents the nation’s dreadful condition when Israel chooses to abandon the true worship of the Lord for this false form of religion (Isa. 8:21-22).

### THE TWOFOLD NATURE AND MINISTRY OF ISRAEL'S MESSIAH (Isaiah 9:1-7)

In the same way a person sees two majestic mountain peaks on the horizon, Isaiah anticipates both the first and second appearances of the Messiah. In His first advent (Isa. 9:1-2), Messiah displays His glory to Jews and Gentiles, who witness His life. By contrast, Messiah’s second coming

(Isa. 9:3-5, 7) ushers in a period of universal peace and righteousness.

The twofold nature of Jesus the Messiah is stated in Isaiah 9:6, “*For a child is born to us, a son is given.*” Fulfilled in Jesus, the Messiah was born as a human baby (Isa. 9:6a), and given as a gift from heaven (Isa. 9:6b).

### THE ANCESTRY AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE COMING MESSIANIC KINGDOM (Isaiah 11-12)

Isaiah predicts that the Messiah will accomplish what no other historic ruler has achieved—namely, to usher in universal peace. The entire earth will dwell in harmony, because all nations will worship the “king of kings” (Isa. 11:6-16).

Since Messiah will rule from Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-4), He will gather the outcasts of Israel from the entire globe, and restore them to their ancient land (Isa. 11:11-12).

God will create a new “highway of peace,” which stretches from the Red Sea to the Euphrates River, to welcome the exiles back to Israel (Isa. 11:15-16).

Before the Messiah can establish peace, He must first “*strike the earth with the rod of His mouth and, with the breath of His lips, He shall slay the wicked*” (Isa. 11:4). John alludes to this

passage in Revelation 19:11-21, when he says the Messiah will return to earth to conquer the forces of evil, including the nations attempting to prevent His return to Jerusalem when they gather at Armageddon.

### ISRAEL'S THANKSGIVING AND TESTIMONY RESTORED (Isaiah 12:1-6)

Isaiah consistently reminds the nation of Israel that they are both God’s “witnesses” and His “chosen servant” (Isa. 43:10).

In addition to the 144,000 Jewish witnesses anticipated by John (Rev. 7:4-9), Isaiah looks forward to the time during Messiah’s Messianic Kingdom when the whole nation of Israel will be a testimony to the entire earth (Isa. 12:4-6).

### CONCLUSION

God will restore Israel as a witness to the entire world when Jesus returns to Jerusalem. While the enemy may attempt to disrupt God’s plan, nothing can eliminate Israel’s function as God’s witness to all the nations of His goodness and grace.

Jesus invites His followers to join in God’s mission to the world. Before ascending into heaven, He said, “*you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem... and to the end of the earth*” (Acts 1:8).

Are you a witness of God’s grace?



# NEWS BRIEFS



## DEDICATION CEREMONY AND NEW CONGREGATION IN BROOKLYN

On September 22, about 100 guests and staff attended the dedication of the Charles L. Feinberg Messianic Jewish Center in Brooklyn. Dr. John Feinberg, the son of Dr. Charles Feinberg, gave a brief but moving address about his father, who was a renowned Messianic believer and scholar, as well as the first Dean of the Talbot School of Theology. In other Brooklyn news, this month will be the official start of our English-speaking Messianic congregation in Brooklyn. Please pray that this community will grow together and provide a witness in one of the most important and populous Jewish communities in the world.

## SHALOM BROOKLYN FINAL TALLY

During Shalom Brooklyn this past August, over 100 participants from across the globe joined Chosen People Ministries' staff in bringing the Gospel to the Jewish people of New York City. The team shared thousands of Gospel tracts, testimonies, and evangelistic books like *Isaiah 53 Explained*. Thanks to the Lord's presence and power, we made 368 contacts to be followed up with—and fifty Jewish and ten non-Jewish people prayed to receive Messiah!

## SEEDS OF GOSPEL BEAR FRUIT FOR JEWISH WOMAN IN ILLINOIS

Igor and Vita Swiderski, who minister in the Chicago area, had a chance to visit with an older Jewish woman with whom they have enjoyed a warm friendship for a long time. Over the years, they have had many opportunities to share the Good News with her. Although the woman had listened politely, there was no visible result. This latest visit was different, however, as the woman told the Swiderskis in no uncertain terms,

“I want to invite Yeshua (Jesus) into my heart.” Igor writes, “We prayed with her to do exactly that!”

## THE POWER OF ISAIAH 53

Penny Abrahamson, who ministers with her husband, Allen, in Portland, Oregon, led a Jewish woman to faith on the Brighton Beach boardwalk during Shalom Brooklyn. Penny approached the woman and began a conversation about Jesus' identity. She read her Isaiah 53, then asked the woman who she thought it was describing. The woman exclaimed, “It sounds like Jesus. This was prophecy!” She then prayed with Penny to put her trust in Messiah. She gave Penny her mailing address, so Penny could send her a Bible—and later called Penny, wanting to continue the spiritual conversation.

## SPOTLIGHT ON NEW MESSIANIC CONGREGATIONS

- Scott and Dana Nassau are now seeing the fruit of their patient labors in Messiah, with worship services starting in West Los Angeles. For two months, the Nassaus hosted small gatherings in their home. Encouraged by the turnout, they sought a new location, where they could grow and reach more people. They recently held their first worship service in the new space, located in the heart of Culver City, an area of West Los Angeles that serves as a center for both the film and television industries.
- Rich Freeman, Chosen People Ministries' Vice-President of Church Ministries and Conferences, reports that we are preparing to launch our second South Florida Messianic congregation, Light of Israel Fellowship, in West Palm Beach. Rich writes, “Our vision for the congregation is to reach the very substantial Jewish community of Palm Beach County, primarily through small group home Bible studies that will be started from the congregation. We have now begun a regular weekly schedule of activities.”

## A NOTE OF THANKS

We are grateful for the service of David Schiller for his time on the Chosen People Ministries Board of Directors. All of our Board Members rotate off for a year after two consecutive four-year terms, but we would not want this event to take place before we gave a very public thank you to David for his dedicated and effective service for the past eight years.



# Special Holiday Gifts

# 10% OFF

**Israel's Holy Days** A Jewish believer in Jesus, Daniel Fuchs, examines the seven annual sacred feasts of Israel presented in Leviticus 23—their history, their present celebration in the synagogue and home, and their prophetic fulfillment. This passage is more than just a list of holy days; it is actually an outline of God's calendar from eternity to eternity. **3013 • \$8.95<sup>us</sup>**

**Out of the Fury** Driven from his homeland and orphaned by the forces of Nazi evil, Polish-born Eliezer Urbach began an incredible odyssey that spanned three continents and many countries. In *Out of the Fury*, we read how, dogged by hunger, persecution, despair, and the failure to find peace, Eliezer finally found what he was looking for in an unexpected place. **3017 • \$9.95<sup>us</sup>**

**From Bondage to Freedom** This book by Daniel Fuchs and Harold Sevenser explores the three subdivisions of Jewish history; the era of promise—from Abraham to David; the era of failure—from David to the Babylonian exile; and the preparation for the Messiah—from the exile to the Messiah. **3034 • \$9.95<sup>us</sup>**

**Remnant and Renewal** *Remnant and Renewal: The New Russian Messianic Movement* tells the story of the Russian-speaking Jewish people, and the sometimes heartbreaking, often heroic tales of those who have sought to bring the Gospel to them throughout their troubled history. These testimonies were compiled by Dr. Mitch Glaser and Alan Shore. **3115 • \$13.95<sup>us</sup>**

**Sharing Jesus in a Jewish Way** *Sharing Jesus in a Jewish Way* is an indispensable tool to learn all about the Messianic prophecies that point to Jesus. You'll read what the rabbis had to say about the coming Messiah and get answers to possible questions or objections your Jewish friend might raise. The author offers all the advice you need to share your testimony with your Jewish friends. You'll learn how to break the ice, how to talk about spiritual things, and know what to say without being offensive. **3129 • \$12.95<sup>us</sup>**

**Isaiah 53 Explained** Many people have questions about the meaning of life and spirituality. *Isaiah 53 Explained* introduces us to a chapter that has the potential to revolutionize one's life! This book by Mitch Glaser, President of Chosen People Ministries, makes the story of the Bible understandable while practically and simply explaining how one can have a soul-satisfying relationship with God and revealing the surprising key that makes this relationship possible. **3135 English • \$12.95<sup>us</sup> / 3148 Spanish • \$12.95<sup>us</sup>**

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Chosen People Ministries has been taking the love of the Messiah to Jewish people worldwide since 1894.

The Chosen People newsletter is published monthly by Chosen People Ministries. For more information or to receive *The Chosen People* newsletter, write to: Chosen People Ministries, International Headquarters, 241 East 51st Street, New York, NY 10022. In Canada, write to: Dufferin-Lawrence PO, Box 58103, Toronto, ON M6A 3C8 ([www.chosenpeople.ca](http://www.chosenpeople.ca)). In Great Britain, write to: P.O. Box 47871, Golders Green, London, NW11 1AL ([www.chosenpeople.org.uk](http://www.chosenpeople.org.uk)). In Australia, write to: Celebrate Messiah Australia, P.O. Box 304, Caulfield, South Vic 3162, Australia ([www.celebratemesiah.com.au](http://www.celebratemesiah.com.au)). Contributing Editors: R. Goldstein, S. McHugh, O. Melnick, S. Nassau, N. Parramore, A. Shore; Designer: Lois Gable Ruedinger.



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Printed in the USA

Please remember Chosen People Ministries in your will. "I will bless those who bless you." (Genesis 12:3)