

When the Christian church lost its connection with its Hebrew moorings, God ensured that the people dedicated to preserving His Word were never completely destroyed, nor their sacred writings lost. These dispersed Jews ensured the knowledge of Hebrew was not lost.

Apart from the history of Israel preserved in the pages of the Bible and a living experience with the promised one reveal in the Hebrew heritage of the Scripture, both New and Old Testament, no one of any nation would experience the blessing of salvation.

We owe a great debt to these who have suffered so much hatred and persecution. Should we not lay aside anti-semitism? Should we not reflect the attitude of the Messiah? Shall we not by our desire to walk in harmony with our God live in such a way that the Israel of today will feel the call to be part of God's eternal Israel?



Beit Shalom Balevav

בית שלום בלבב
House of Peace in the Heart

Sponsored by:

Oregon Conference of SDAs
Seventh-day Adventist Community Church of Vancouver

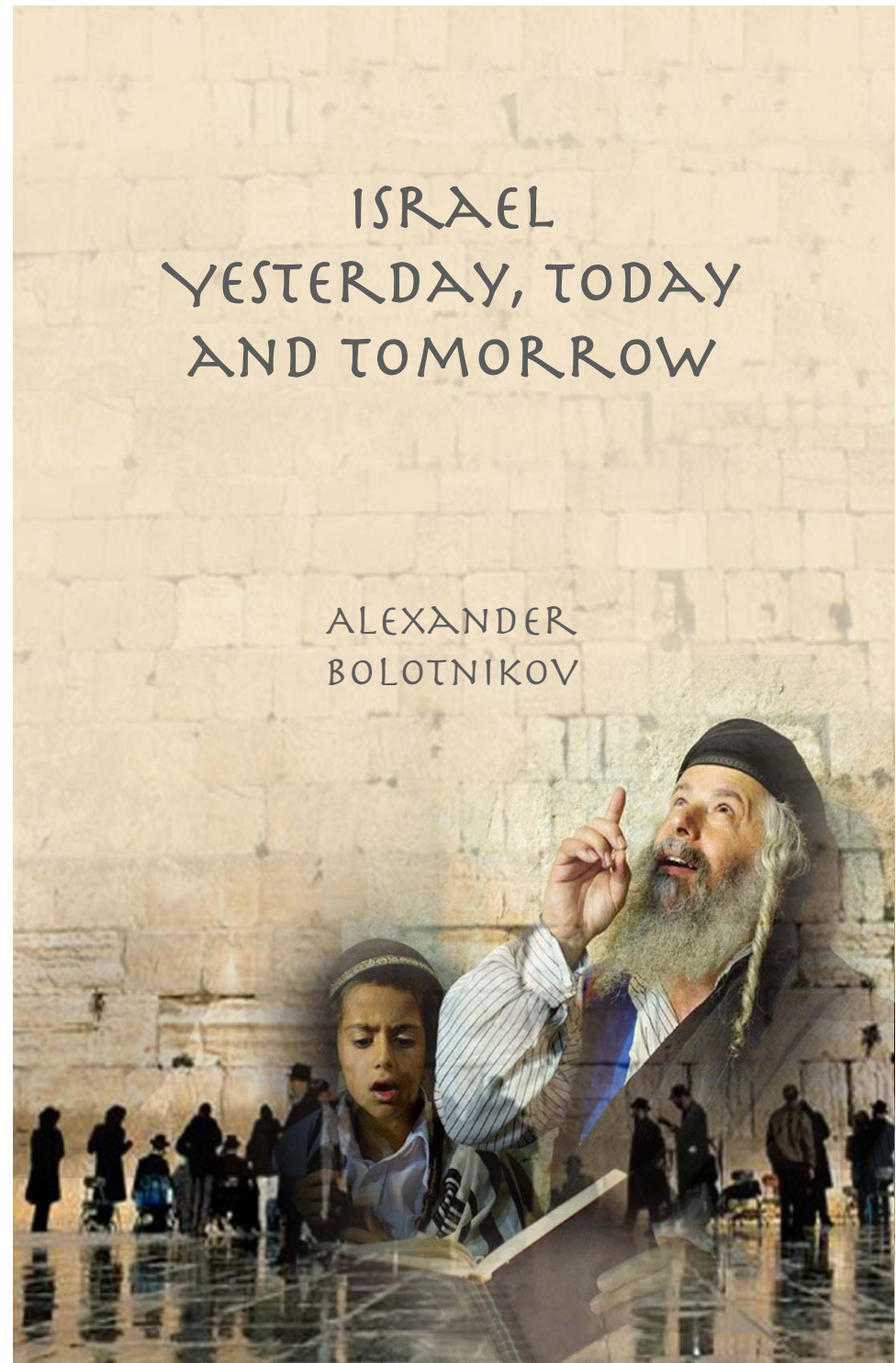
Meeting at:

Fellowship Hall & Fireside Room
9711 NE St. John's Road
Vancouver, WA 98665

Kabbalat Shabbat – 7:00 PM preceded by Oneg at 6:00 PM

www.vancouver-jewish.com

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alexander “Sasha” Bolotnikov is the Director of Shalom Learning Center (NAD Jewish Ministry Training), as well as a pastor in the Oregon Conference. Raised in Communist Russia as an atheist, he discovered his Jewish roots when he was passed over for advanced educational opportunities. He responded by immersing himself within Jewish culture and became a powerful opponent to the Christian teaching of Jesus as the Messiah.

Meeting a Seventh-day Adventist in university brought him into a connection with the real Jesus. His heart was won. He served as a professor at Zaoksky University in Tula Oblast, Russia, before earning his MA in Hebrew and Biblical Languages from Andrews University. He recently earned a Ph.D. from Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio.



This prophecy began its fulfillment in the 20th century. Throughout the Middle Ages the majority of those Jews that converted to Christianity did it out of fear of death. During late 18th and early 19th centuries when European governments gave equal rights to the Jews, the number of conversion significantly dropped.

However, in the beginning of 20th century the movement of Hebrew Christians was born in Europe. These new churches were comprised of Jews who on their own volition, without the fear of persecution, found Jesus as their Lord and Messiah. Emergence of Hebrew Christianity coincided with the mass Jewish immigration into the Palestine after the proclamation of Balfour’s declaration at the end of World War I. Unfortunately these Hebrew Christians were not recognized as Christians and almost all perished in the flames of the Holocaust.

In spite of that, after the proclamation of the state of Israel in 1948 the number of Jews finding Jesus as their Messiah has grown exponentially. Before the creation of Israel, accepting Jesus often meant complete loss of Jewish identity. Returning to the land that God promised to Abraham and his descendants removed this threat.

SUMMARY

Throughout the Bible and subsequent history, the story of the Jewish people illustrates to the whole world God’s covenantal faithfulness and unconditional love.

- God took Abraham out of the pagan house of his father.
- God promised to Abraham that in him all nations of the earth would be blessed.
- God gave to the descendants of Abraham His Revelation, the Hebrew heritage of Scripture by which the Messiah and His mission would be recognized
- God sent the Messiah through the Jewish people
- God allowed the Jews in Diaspora (dispersion) to suffer persecution, yet always preserved them from disappearing as a nation.

them the covenant with their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God. I am the LORD.” (Lev 26:44-45).

In His compassion after the horrors of holocaust, God restored His people to the land of Israel (Deut 30:5). While the majority of the Jews in Israel and outside of its borders do not view their country as a literal restoration of a theocratic Temple-centered state, they definitely see the parallels with the Exodus story.

We see God act in the same fashion as seen 3,400 years ago. At that time God saw the tears of oppression of his people and with His great mercy, with miracles and wonders led His people to the land that he promised Abraham. We likewise see in the twentieth century ‘And the LORD your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed’ (Deut. 30:5). In doing this God has one important goal outlined in the next verse of Deut 30. “Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live.”.

In America there are many so called Christian Zionists who desire nothing else for the Jews than to return to Israel in order to defeat all Arabs. In their passion about Israel’s politics, they miss the main desire that God has for His people—to be saved in the Heavenly Jerusalem.

The prophet Hosea predicted salvation that shall come to the children of Israel.

For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, and without ephod or household idols. Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the LORD and to His goodness in the last days. (Hosea 3:4-5)

This prophecy does not talk about King David. During the time Hosea lived David had been dead for over 300 years. Hosea speaks about the Jewish people accepting the Son of David as their Lord and Messiah.

ISRAEL YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW

A JEW MEETS CHRISTIANITY

It was beautiful summer Sunday of 1985. My friend Victor and I, two high school students, lazily strolled through the streets of Kiev trying to kill a few hours before boarding our train home. Suddenly we heard very unusual sounds for our ears—singing coming from one of the distant corners of the square. When we came through the arch, we arrived at the doors of a Russian Orthodox cathedral.

In those days, most of churches in the USSR had been turned into museums, and to find a real cathedral that had real service was very difficult. Victor and I became extremely curious and decided to enter. Passing through the opening in the gate we appeared in a large dark hall lit by candles. Large scary looking icons hung on the walls, and women dressed in black clothing stood by these icons bowing down to them making the signs of the cross.

A tall scary looking man dressed in a black robe sang from the front of the cathedral. His hair and his beard were very long and curly. A huge crucifix hung on his neck. It was his deep bass that we had heard on the street.

The “scary man” saw us approaching the podium and stopped singing. Holding his huge crucifix, he approached us and looked straight into my eyes. “You Jew, Christ killer, how dare you enter into the Holy God’s Temple. You shall burn in hell, son of the devil.”

After this experience, I was afraid to enter a Christian church for a few years. Five years later, persuaded by my schoolmate Anatoly, I reluctantly entered the premises of a Charismatic church located on the outskirts of Kiev.

“I brought my new friend Sacha,” Anatoly proudly exclaimed. “He is a Jew”. The church immediately became quiet.

I felt a hundred pairs of eyes at once turn towards me. I have never experienced such a sense of embarrassment in my life. These people treated me like some higher being. They told me that I was specially chosen by God because I belonged to the special nation, and that everyone must look up to me.

These two stories serve as an illustration of the polarized views that exist among Christians in regards to the nation of Israel. According to Deuteronomy 7:6 and 14:2 God says in regards to the Israelites: “For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.” (NASB). Based on these verses many Christians the view that God gives to the people of Israel preferential treatment and loves them more than any other nation on the earth.

On the one hand, many other Christians believe that “God’s choice” was given to the Jews on condition (Deut 28:9). And since the people of Israel failed to meet these conditions, they are no longer chosen and therefore Jewish people have no special significance for the present time.

As we can see both views pretend to have scriptural support. However the main problem with these two extreme positions is their complete misunderstanding of God’s reasons for choosing a specific nation. This misunderstanding leads many Christians to believe that Jews are over privileged and therefore serves as a main reason for anti-Judaism and even anti-Semitism.

ISRAEL TOMORROW

WHAT IS THE DESTINY OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE?

It is true that the priestly commission for the people of Israel outlined in Exodus 19 and Deuteronomy 7, 14 and 26 was conditioned upon their obedience to the principles of the Torah. Without the strict adherence to these Laws the mission of Israel would be impossible. This is why God outlined the curses that would befall Israel for their failure to keep God’s covenant in Leviticus 26 and in Deuteronomy 29-30. It is also true that Israel was unfaithful to the Lord throughout its history. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to suggest that because of Israel’s disobedience God sent the covenantal curses upon them and rejected His chosen people.

Significant sections in the prophetic books of the Bible are dedicated to the predictions of the destruction of different kingdoms. The Babylonians, Moabites, Ammonites, Phoenicians and other nations were completely wiped out according to the word of the Lord that He spoke through His prophets. Contrast this total loss of national identity with what has happened to the Jews.

The Jewish people lived through the destruction of the Temple, through Crusades and through the horrors of Medieval persecution. Six million Jewish men, women and children perished in the atrocities of the Holocaust, but in spite all of this, Jewish people not only survived but also succeeded in rebuilding their Homeland. Could this story of survival be a mere coincidence?! Could this survival happen for two thousand years without God allowing it to happen?! According to Romans 11:1 the answer is clear. “I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be!”

Unfortunately many Bible students today do not read Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 29–30 to the end. In both of these passages, God’s wrath upon Israel is followed by His compassion:

“Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, nor will I so abhor them as to destroy them, breaking My covenant with them; for I am the LORD their God. But I will remember for

that represented a distorted version of the Scripture. This is why Jesus recommended the Samaritan woman learn from the true Scripture, which was in the custody of the Jewish people.

Nowhere in the New Testament do we find any reference that would suggest that God has dismissed Jewish people from their responsibilities as the keepers of the Scriptures. On the contrary, all writers of the New Testament except Luke were Jewish.

In his epistle to the Romans, Paul wrote: “Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God” (Rom 3:1-2). This statement has remained true throughout the last two millennia. Because of the titanic efforts of the Masoretic Scribes, the books of the Old Testament have been preserved in their entirety. During the eighteen centuries of the Dark Ages in Europe Jewish people persevered, observing the Sabbath and the Laws of the Torah.

While early translations into the vernacular language were based upon Latin translations from the Hebrew or the Greek Septuagint, the careful preservation of Hebrew texts served as the inspiration for Christian reformers to search the Scripture in its native tongue.

In essence, it would have been very difficult for the reformation in Europe to succeed without the help of the Jewish communities who preserved the original language of the Scripture. This enabled reformers to translate the Old Testament more accurately into vernacular languages.

Today modern Israeli scholars are on the forefront of Biblical research. The discoveries of the Dead Sea Scrolls and many of the archeological excavations that confirm Biblical truth would not be possible without the existence of the State of Israel. Seventh-day Adventist scholars heavily rely on the Biblical science which confirms the truth taught by the Adventist Pioneers. Rejecting the significance and contribution of the Jewish nation in the transmission and the understanding of the Scripture will be absolutely detrimental for the Adventist message preached around the world.

ISRAEL YESTERDAY

WHY DID GOD CHOOSE ISRAEL?

When we take a close look at the sentence structure in the original Hebrew text of these passages from Deuteronomy 7:6 and 14:2, we discover a syntactic anomaly. The phrase translated as ‘the LORD your God has chosen you’ (NASB), appears in Hebrew in reverse word order. Usually a Hebrew phrase starts with the verb, but in Deut. 7:6 and 14:2 it starts with the pronoun *bekhah* (literally ‘with you’). Such usage is called emphatic. Out of 164 occurrences in the entire Hebrew Scripture of the Hebrew verb ‘choose’ (*bakhar*), it is preceded only seven times by the pronoun.

From the context of the remaining five occurrences (Deut. 18:5, 21:5, Hag 2:23, I Chr. 15:2 and II Chr. 29:11) it is clear that such emphatic usage of the verb ‘choose’ preceded by the pronoun points to priestly responsibilities. It is also interesting to notice that the Hebrew phrase *leam segulah* translated as ‘people for His own possession’ (NASB) from Deuteronomy 7:6 and 14:2 is also used in connection to the priestly ministry in Exodus 19:5-6. “... you shall be My own possession among all the peoples.”

In other words, God does not choose Israel because of His arbitrary favoritism. Israel had a specific mission to be Lord’s priesthood in the world and to bring the knowledge of Him throughout the ends of the earth. Such a task is outlined in the book of Isaiah.

“The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

Now it will come about that

In the last days,

The mountain of the house of the LORD

Will be established as the chief of the mountains,

And will be raised above the hills;

And call the nations will stream to it.

And many peoples will come and say,

*“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
To the house of the God of Jacob;
That He may teach us 1concerning His ways,
And that we may walk in His paths.”
For the law will go forth from Zion,
And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”
(Isa 2:1-3, NASB)*

According to this prophesy the people of Israel were appointed to be the guardians of the Temple and the teachers of the Torah. The scripture says with regards to Abraham: “And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Gen. 12:3-4)

The rabbis always acknowledged God’s commission to Abraham and subsequently to Israel to proclaim His glory to the rest of the world. Until Abraham made his way into the wider world, the Holy One was, if one dare say such thing, sovereign only in Heaven... But after Abraham made his way into the wider world he was able to declare Him sovereign over both heaven and earth. (Sifre to Deuteronomy §313)

The biggest mistake of the interpreters of the Bible is to suggest that in the Old Testament God chose Israel, rejecting other nations. While it is true that Deuteronomy 7:6 says: ‘a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth,’ these words need to be understood in the context of the laws of the Torah. In those days God had only one nation, Israel. This nation was comprised of the, biological descendants of Abraham and of those people who wanted to be saved.

According to the laws of the Torah anyone who wanted to be a part of God’s kingdom had to reject his or her original nation and became a part of Israel. “But if a stranger sojourns with you, and celebrates the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near to celebrate it; and he shall be like a native of the land. But no

uncircumcised person may eat of it. The same law shall apply to the native as to the stranger who sojourns among you” (Ex. 12:48-49).

This was the essence of the priestly function of the people of Israel. By building the Temple in Jerusalem and teaching the word of God to all the nations, they were to expand into the four corners of the world. Through conversion, the gentiles would join them as the result of their preaching.

ISRAEL TODAY

WHAT CHANGED AT CALVARY?

The death of Jesus has brought one crucial aspect. The Temple whose sacrifices and rituals pointed to the True Lamb of God has fulfilled its mission. Jesus spoke about this in his conversation with Samaritan woman recorded in John 4.

Referring to Deuteronomy 12 and Isaiah 2, the Samaritan women asked Jesus about the true Mountain where the Lord must be worshipped. Answering her question Jesus said: ‘Believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth...’ (John 4:21, 23). In other words, Jesus spoke about the time when the pilgrimage to Jerusalem will not be necessary because the Shekhinah, the Spirit of the Lord, will reside in the hearts of the believers. As Paul wrote in his epistle: “Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16).

It may appear that with the removal of the Temple, there is no need for it to have guardians, and therefore no need for God to have His special people. However, Jesus did not think so. In John 4:22 Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, “You worship that which you do not know; we worship that which we know, for salvation is from the Jews.”

According to the Samaritan tradition the place to worship God was on Mount Gerizim. This tradition originated in in the Samaritan Pentateuch