

ISRAEL'S HISTORY - WHY IS IT UNIQUE?

Reflections on the meaning of history - Sense or Senselessness?

"I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind." [Ecc 1:14](#)

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1. INTRODUCTION

Whether we are concerned with the biographies of our own lives or with the histories of nations - history that consists of endless repetitions (as King Solomon describes them), histories with neither goal nor purpose beyond themselves, histories that will not be remembered and learned from - in other words, history without plan and purpose makes no sense. ¹ Without an infinite reference point even plans have no sense or meaning in space and time.

Historians have the duty to tell posterity how it was. They collect, select, evaluate to separate fact from fiction and seek to establish cause and effect of what happened in the distant past, they observe and may interrogate eyewitnesses in the present and may dare to guess or predict what will happen in future. Since they work in a closed system and cannot step outside their own worldview they can never be fully objective and will at best end up with hypotheses that may turn out to be illusions in the end.

Biblical history according to its own claims is different. Jews and Christians have understood it to be the history of the people of Israel within the framework of the Biblical worldview. Since Israel's history is the instrument through which God reveals who he is and what his Plan of Salvation is its history has a meaning, a metaphysical or more precisely a theological meaning. This is the difference between Israel's history and all other histories. "No people has ever insisted more firmly than the Jews that history has a purpose and humanity a destiny. ²" Israel's history is intended to provide meaning for all other histories and as long as they are not connected to its history they risk being meaningless, including Church history, for they do not know from where they come, what purpose is theirs and where they are going. ³ They have no reason for existence than to exist. Their "progress" may be technological but the lives of their individuals and the works of their hands are likely to end up in the fire of God's judgment. The apostle Paul's sobering words have a profounder meaning than it appears:

"For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ/Yeshua Hamashiah. Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work." [1Cor 3:11-13](#).

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2. THE THEOLOGICAL MEANING OF ISRAEL'S HISTORY - IT'S UNIQUENESS AND PURPOSE

2.a. On the uniqueness of Israel's history as a history with meaning.

The history of Israel is the only history with a meaning in that it is unique. [⁴[Meir Simcha Sokolovsky](#), 1991. "The accepted rules of history which govern the fates of other nations have no bearing on the history of the Jews." ... "It is a people that shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations." (Num., Bemidbar [Num 23:9](#)) "Jewish history defies the conventional laws of history and stands in a category of its own, above natural rules of cause and effect." ... "The events of

Jewish history are truly remarkable and extraordinary. Aside from their having been predicted in advance, they serve as intrinsic proof of the unique and supernatural guidance which Jewry has always enjoyed as God's Chosen People." pp. 7-9 . "Ever since the Destruction [of the Temple] we have been beset with persecution and suffering. We have endured this bitter exile for nearly two thousand years, an exile unparalleled in the history of other nations, while all the curses mentioned in the Torah have ultimately come true." p. 15[^]] Its meaning is not man-made, it is derived from God. As He is unique, as His people are unique, so is the meaning of its history. It contrasts with all other histories, for it is divinely intended to point and to lead individuals and nations to God. As history is progressive, revelation is progressive. His people are called to be a light to the nations, a testimony to the world. Israel's very existence has a prophetic significance. The history of its continued existence is a prophetic statement. ⁴ Its prophets who foretold it were men moved by the Holy Spirit. They were filled with the Spirit of Jesus who is the Spirit of prophecy (Isa 66:18-19; 2Peter 1:21; Rev 19:10)"

2.b. On the theological meaning of Israel's history

The meaning of Israel's history is theological and lies in its revelational and testimonial and prophetic character. Israel's history reveals the nature of the only God whose name is "the One who was, who is and who is to come." In Him, because He is the Creator of time, history is past, present and future in one. His name is "I am". He is the God who reveals himself through Israel's history, a History that has a beginning and an end, a reason and a purpose. Its purpose is essentially salvation, yet salvation is a comprehensive term (Hebrew 'Yeshua' can also be translated as help, deliverance, health, welfare, prosperity, victory. The German root 'Heil' in Heilsgeschichte is related to 'wholeness.'). Salvation presupposes the lostness of man. Israel's history explains the reason for this state of affairs and shows the need for a Savior in the face of a God who is holy, a concept that needs centuries of history to explain: how God who is the perfection of justice and righteousness, whose way are righteous and just can be loving and faithful at the same time.

2.c. On the testimonial meaning of Israel's history

This history interprets the past ⁵, analyzes the present, foreshadows and predicts the future. ⁶ Its meaning is didactic and testimonial in that those whom God chose are called to be His witnesses, Israel and the Church (see below), Jews and non-Jews alike. History therefore must be remembered and passed on to each successive generation. Its meaning is prophetic as in the past God prepared His Incarnation, the coming of Him who is the Beginning and the End, Jesus/Yeshua the Messiah, the center of Israel's history and of the history of the universe. Since the history of Israel is linked to God's covenant with Israel, an eternal covenant, the "Holy One of Israel" is not finished with his covenantal people. He continues to work through and among His people, the Jews who - consciously or unconsciously - testify to God's existence and character. What happens with Israel today is as significant as what happened to her in the past and what will happen to her in the future. Its history remains meaningful until the end when the Messiah will come a second time. [[^]Sokolovsky, op. cit., quoting the Rambam's commentary on Deuteronomy, Devarim Deut 32, "Now this song serves as a true and faithful testimony for us, clearly stating all that will befall us. If this song had been written by an astrologer who "predicted the end from the beginning" (Yeshayahu Isa 46:10), it would be worthy of belief, since all its particulars have been realized to date; not one detail has failed to materialize. How much more so should we have faith in and anticipate with all our hearts the fulfillment of the words of God through His faithful prophet, Moshe Rabbenu, peace be upon him, the "most trusted in His house" (Num., Bemidbar Num 12:7), the likes of whom has never been nor ever will be." p. 224. We would add "except for the Messiah himself." (See letter to the Hebrews 3:1ff)[^]]

2.d. On terminological clarifications

Addressing the "theological meaning of history," three clarification of terms are in order: meaning, history and theology. "In order for history to have significance, it must have a goal. Without a purpose or goal, neither history nor individual human lives can have significance." ^z Significance means meaningful distinction in contrast to sameness or meaninglessness or in contrast to lack of purpose or teleology (telos = goal, hence purpose). Theologically meaningful history "signifies" or points to that what is 'signified', a value or a lesson to be remembered. Revelation [of who God is] , Testimony [to God's Guidance, to what He does] and Prophecy [regarding what His plan is for Israel, the Church and the nations] are the three main aspects of the theological meaning of History as will be further explained. [[^]Sokolovsky, op. cit., referring to the Song of Ha'azinu ("Hear..." The Song of Moses, Deut 32:1ff): "All Jewish history is encapsuled in these prophecies." ... "God manipulates the

events of history as 'clay in the hands of the potter' . He alone is able to determine the course of world history in such a way as to ensure that every word uttered to Moshe Rabbenu at Sinai is irrefutably fulfilled." ... "Even if Israel's history had not been predicted by prophecy, it would constitute an irrefutable bond between the God of Israel and His people. Our historical experience is, in itself, a form of God's revelation indicating Divine Providence in the world even the period of covert Providence....Yeshayahu [Isa 48:3](#), pp 3-9 If we attribute several aspects of meaning to Biblical history (for instance revelational, testimonial and prophetic) we do not imply that history should be split into a visual space-time movement and an audio- or written static witness to that movement. [Psalm 19](#) indicates that God's revelation through nature needs to be complemented with His revelation through the Word. Biblical history is not comparable to nature. Biblical History is God's revelation through total communication in the visible or invisible space-time continuum including any verbal record that occurs in its flow.^]

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3. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ISRAEL'S AND ALL OTHER HISTORIES

3.a. On the difference between Biblical History and all other histories.

Non-biblical history is primarily concerned with the enumeration of facts, with complete and precise as possible a chronology, with historiography based on the most reliable of eye-witnesses and most genuine artifacts. The two kinds of history show common characteristics such as weighing, selecting and interpreting the facts in terms of cause and effect relationships. Yet non-biblical history has no purpose. It leads nowhere - except to destruction. At its best it can make guesses as to how far away an extrapolated hypothetical goal is, how long it may take to head for catastrophe or to reach a utopian stage of evolutionary progress. Biblical History on the other hand is God's instrument to reveal Himself to his covenant people and through his covenant people to the nations. ⁸ It is the story of God's plan and provision to restore his people Israel, to restore mankind and creation to its original purpose of creation. It is the history of salvation. The instrument to accomplish this plan is his chosen people, Israel in the first place. The coming of the Jewish Messiah is the goal or culmination of His plan. In Him history is fulfilled. ⁹ By His first coming the Jewish Messiah reinforced his witness, Israel, by the ingrafting of the Non-Jews into "His Body," the Church. Biblical theology is rooted in history, is basically teleological [purpose-oriented]. The prophetically predicted plan and purpose is salvation, redemption, reconciliation, restoration and righteous judgment in the end.

3.b. On the difference between Salvation history and a philosophical concept of history

Salvation History, in contrast to a philosophical meaning of history, is concerned with history's theological meaning. It is good to remember that such meaning depends on the kind of theology that forms the basis of interpretation. ¹⁰ If our theology is truly biblical, the frame of reference from which Israel's history derives its meaning is the authoritative, divinely revealed truth about God and His plan of salvation, about how He wants us to see the world and life from its beginning to the end of time - in short - the Biblical worldview ¹¹. That view reveals the nature of His arch enemy the Devil and his host. It opens windows into the invisible world of angelic beings, of spiritual powers, good and bad. A theology that excludes the demonic world from its worldview is incapable of grasping the meaning of Israel's ancient and modern history, to see His plan of salvation and the need thereof. The frame of reference against which to extract the meaning spans across the so-called Old and the New Testament [^It needs to be pointed out that meaning cannot be separated from interpretation. The human mind by itself does not understand the things of God. It is only the Holy Spirit that does. ([1Cor 2:14-16](#)) [Schoeman, Roy H.](#) in *Salvation is from the Jews* in commenting about the meaning of the Shaoh rightly argues that "God is not dependent on our understanding for something to have meaning in His eyes; even less is the meaning that he finds in something dependent on the meaning that we attribute to it. It is the role of theology, whether Christian or Jewish, to understand God, not to define Him as though he does not exist outside of our interpretation of Him." But then he wrongly concludes: "If "Christian theology " finds a meaning in the Holocaust that "Jewish theology" does not, that is because it has a different understanding about how God works through human events, about the role of suffering and death, about the economy of salvation and the unfolding of salvation history, and about who Jesus was, not because the source of the meaning itself comes from the theology. The meaning can come only from God; theology contributes only the ability to understand the meaning." (pp 176-177). His axiom that understanding is independent from theology seems to ignore the

hermeneutical circle according to which we cannot escape the effect of the framework (theology and its influence of our understanding of salvation history and vice versa) in which we interpret. While it is true that meaning can only come from God, theology nevertheless determines our understanding. As a very striking example: the meaning that he attributes to Romans 11 at the end of his book can clearly be linked to Catholic theology that considers the Catholic Church to be the continuation of Judaism. All meaning requires a frame of reference and that frame in the largest sense is called theology. If we find meaning that does not fit our theological paradigm, it may call for a paradigm shift. Jewish theology in fact does find meaning in the holocaust: "The Holocaust serves as a supreme example of the metaphysical nature of Jewish history. From the atrocities of World War II we see all the more clearly that the anti-Semitism, suffering and hardship which is the lot of our People is not a natural, rational phenomenon but rather an incontrovertible act of God in fulfillment of the unheeded admonition and prophecies of the Tochechach." [Deut 32]. Sokolovsky, op.cit. p. 206. One wonders if the Christian Church has come to an equally clear understanding as far as her own part is concerned. ^]. If we can accept this understanding we can discover the unity between the two parts of the Bible. With the Holocaust behind us and with Israel back on stage, the Biblical theology of history needs to be rediscovered, for the history of theology has at times allowed it to be forgotten or to be lost altogether. ¹² The Early Church recognized that this history presents patterns or principles and types (see 1Cor 10:6,11) that either prophetically foreshadow events to come (e.g. the ark of Noah as an image of salvation, the Sacrifice of Isaac as a prefiguration of Christ's / the Messiah's substitutionary, sacrificial death, Joseph as the future Messiah who will reveal himself to his nation at the Second Coming, King David as a type of the Jesus coming for the second time as King, the Exodus as an image of deliverance from bondage), or illustrate spiritual truths and divine wisdom, spiritual laws and teachings to show man how to live.

The prophetic allusions to the Messiah, the lessons of Biblical history so often reviewed throughout Scripture, the doctrinal themes captured in chain reference editions and the covenantal passages that ought to be included in thematic concordances, the typological insights, the links between prophecy and fulfillment - all of these aspects of Israel's unfolding history are all like strings woven together to form an unbreakable cord that unite the 66 different Jewish books (perhaps with the exception of Luke) the into the history of salvation.

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4. THE HISTORICITY OF ISRAEL'S BOOK OF HISTORY

4.1. On the reliability of Biblical history

Bearing in mind the focus and function of Biblical history, it is reasonable to believe that the Biblical writers through the guidance of the Holy Spirit selected the time-space events to record history with selections and perspectives that served God's purposes best. Biblical history is concerned with causal connections between events, with prophetic explanations why things happened for what purposes and with what consequences and by what means. It is concerned with the relationship between prophetic promise and fulfillment as evidence of God's characteristics in every respect. Is this manipulation of facts? By no means. It is wisdom and perspective, for manipulation is dishonest and deceptive. [^An example for the difference in focus between the History of Israel and all other histories can be seen in 1 Samuel 6:20. Other histories like modern history would focus on a mathematical precision in the statistics of those that were slain at Beth-Shemesh. What is in focus for Jewish history is to maintain a record of a historic moment that demonstrated the consequences of disregarding God's holiness. Different manuscripts report different numbers in this incident. - Also see Walter C. Kaiser Jr. in our footnote 11 on 1Sam 17. David Howard, Jr. "All history is perspectival and there is no "objective", uninterpreted history. . . . The creative arrangement or rather purpose-guided arrangement of the final product does not mean the text has to be historically accurate in the sense of secular, chronologically and archeologically oriented historiography, and the absence of textual or archeological evidence for an event, or the impossibility of repeating it (ex: "the sun stood still" in Joshua) does not mean that it did not occur. The purposes of historiography are known to the historiographer, in our case God alone, through a variety of chosen vehicles in the spectrum of time. The internal coherence of the of the final product -- the message of the Bible passed through the prophets and Messianic apostles over several millennia -- speaks for itself." See David Howard, Jr. Introduction to Old Testament Historical Books. (Chicago, Ill. : Moody Press. 1993.)^] Past prophetic fulfillments in time and space serve to give assurance that still unfulfilled promises will equally be fulfilled in our time and space, reinforcing the meaningfulness of Israel's history.

5. THE MEANING OF CHURCH HISTORY

5.1. On the theological meaning shared between Israel's and the Church's history

If Israel's history is the only history that has meaning, does it follow that Church history has no theological meaning? The answer is twofold. Since God revealed himself through Israel's history - including His written and His incarnate living Word - the Torah and the Tanach - the B'rit Hadashah ("New Testament"), his revelation in Jesus /Yeshua the Jewish Messiah, and since the Jewish Messiah inaugurated the Church by sending her the promised Holy Spirit ([John 15:26-27](#)) to enable the Church to be His witnesses to what He had begun to do ([Acts 1:1](#)) there is an overlap of theological meaning between Israel and the Church - a Church that was to consist of Jews in the first place and then of Jews and Gentiles together. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Shavuot / Pentecost in Jerusalem was the visible beginning of Church history. Furthermore, since the Canon of God's Word - (a Jewish book from beginning to end with the possible exception of one writer only) in the time of the Early Church was closed, the meaning of Church history can only be derived from the meaning of Israel's history. Without Israel, the Church would be without His word and without Israel the Church would not be able to understand The Word that took on the form of man. Conversely, in what way is Israel indebted to the church? She is indebted only for its testimony of the gospel to the Jews. Yet the validity of such missions have been historically and theologically questioned too often and the resultant apathy of the church in its missions to Israel has been too great. Should it not be corrected before it is too late?

The Messiah's first Coming divided the History of Israel - including world history ¹³ - into two, into a B.C. and A.D. (The modern terms B.C.E. and C.E. are seeking to rewrite or even to obliterate history to fit the modern and post-modern worldview). Israel's history has not and will not be closed before history is no more. It runs alongside the history of the Church.

Had Church history truly remained the history that it was intended to be - the continuation "of all that Jesus began both to do and teach" ([Acts 1:1](#)) and had the Church not separated herself from the history of Israel, would it not have become obvious that the two histories are interwoven? The relationship of the Church to Israel was to be so dependent that Church history loses its meaning if it fails to fulfill God's plan and purpose. It is up to God the Father to decide how far a Church that is not connected to Israel can have a theological meaning at all. If it preaches a Jesus that is not Jewish it preaches "another gospel." The Father may overlook ignorance but He will not tolerate deliberate, conscious separation from Israel. ([Matt 24](#))

How does the Bible describe the connection between Israel and the Church? The image of the olive tree in [Romans 11:17-20](#) serves as an illustration for this historic link. Just as the sap of the roots nourishes the branches, the Church in God's plan was to remain organically connected to Israel. To remain connected was the mainspring of the Church's existence. The more the Church recognizes the purpose of her existence, recognizes "the whole counsel of God" comprising "all that the prophets had written" into Israel's history, the more the history of the Church has meaning. If the Church does not see herself as part of God's plan for Israel and Israel does not see herself as part of God's plan for the Church, both of them remain equally blind. God has only one plan and one goal: 'to make the kingdoms of the world to become the kingdom of God' that He might dwell among man - in his messianic Kingdom. By that time, "all things that have been written by His holy prophets," the original purpose of Creation, will be restored ([Acts 3:21](#), reflecting the Jewish 'tikkun olam' - the restoration of the world). This includes the completion of world mission and the completion of the Return of Israel to its promised land according to the prophets, the fulfillment of the High Priestly prayer of [John 17](#) - the unity in His Body the "Bride" through the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles.

5.2. On the difference between the theological meanings of the history of Israel and the history of the Church

From the point of inclusion of the Church onwards there are now three histories, the history of Israel, the history of the Church and the history of the nations (world history).

Theological meaning of all other histories is a function of their relationship to Israel. According to God's plan such meaning is extendable to the histories of the gentile Church and to the histories of the nations. Any national history that is not linked

to Israel has lost or is losing its sense since it does not know where it comes from, what it is here for and where it is going. (Ecc 1:14; vanity = senselessness; Isa 9:5, 19; Ezek 21:32; Zeph 1:18). A nation (as in the case of Nineveh under the ministry of Jonah) may repent and be spared judgment. An apostate Church through repentance may return to her calling. Will the faithful remnant of the nations recognize its relationship to Israel? Unlike secular nations, the Church has the promise that even the gates of hell shall not prevail against her, yet this promise is dependant on her faithfulness. The letter to the seven Churches in Asia Minor (Rev 2-3) bear testimony to what will happen in the case of apostasy that is not being reversed.

Since the Canon is closed, theological meaning in its full sense as seen in Israel's history - in the sense of revelation and testimony - belongs to Israel's history alone. The Church's theological meaning is not an original meaning. It is a derived meaning expounding that which was already foreshadowed in the Tanach. His Word is the product of God's interaction with man before Abraham and the patriarchs and his interaction with Israel since the patriarchs. Since the Church does not replace Israel's function as God's instrument of (progressive) revelation as is taught for instance in Roman Catholic Replacement Theology, the history of the Church does not have the original, revelatory meaning beyond the teaching of Christ / the Messiah and his apostles as recorded in Scripture. This does not contradict the teaching that the Spirit will guide us into all truth. The Canon of Scripture is closed and extra biblical revelation is to be rejected if it contradicts the Biblical teaching. The Church's calling is to be a light to all the nations (including Israel), an open letter of God's love, an illustration of the principles taught in the unfolding of Israel's history, a testimony of how God works out His plan of salvation in His offering of the Gospel to the nations.

The credibility of the Church's testimony to God's existence and holiness, His justice and righteousness, His grace and love through Yeshua is lost if the Gospel gets disconnected from its origin in Israel's history because the testimonial meaning is damaged and gets lost. (See John 17).

The Jews are the primary witnesses to God's plan. Salvation is still from the Jews and so is Revelation. "The Law [Torah or instruction] will go forth from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." (Isaiah 2:3) All other histories are but the outworking of principles that have already been demonstrated through the history of Israel. ¹⁴ The most important of these principles of history is Genesis 12:3. It applies to the history of the Church as well as to the history of the nations.

5.3. On Biblical unity with Israel as the key to the credibility of the Church's witness

The testimonial meaning that the History of the Church shares with Israel's calling is "to be a light to the nations." Both Israel and the Church are meant to point the nations to God. The credibility of this witness is lost as long as the separation between Israel and the Church persists. For this reason, Yeshua the Messiah in his high priestly prayer prays for unity (primarily but not exclusively between Jews and Gentiles - between Israel and the Church) "that the world may believe that the Father has sent me." This is a powerful assertion that is still waiting to be demonstrated before the visible and the invisible world (see Ephesians 3:5-11). And why is it still waiting? Because this prayer is still being interpreted as a reference to unity among the members of the Church. While this is legitimate, it is not the primary meaning of unity: the unity between Israel and the Church, a unity that has prophetic significance. The history of the Church becomes theologically meaningful to the degree that the Church understands the true nature of that unity. A Church that has lost that understanding or has never grasped it, is a problematic church. In terms of the apostle Paul, it does not understand "the full counsel of God." It may be as blind as the historic Church of Laodicea.

5.4. On the meaning of unity in the Biblical sense

The theological meaning of the history of the early church is shown in God's plan that there should be unity in the relationship between Jews and Gentiles. The consequence of the loss of the theological meaning of history or the refusal to consider it is evident in today's efforts to artificially create Christian-Jewish or Jewish-Christian relationships on the basis of interreligious dialogue in a pluralistic society. Such unity is in danger of being influenced by postmodernist rather than biblical thinking and it reinforces the blindness of both sides to their real lack of unity under the guise of "dialogue."¹⁵ It does not correspond to a unity that is based on the Messiah's death on the Cross, a common way of salvation (Eph 2:13-22). He is

the only way to overcome the hatred against the Jews and to mend the wrong relationships between Israel and the Church. He has abolished the "middle wall of partition" ([Ephesians 2:14](#)) and enables the two sides to become one.

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6. ON THE COVENANTS IN ISRAEL'S HISTORY

History is God's story, his revelation to man, of how He relates to and deals with mankind, His creation. The most important aspect of God's story is that it is a History of conditional and unconditional covenants. While Divine revelation gives the impression that God made different covenants at different times, they can be seen as complementary expressions of His Covenant with His people, a covenant that originates in the promise of Abraham that his seed would be a blessing to all the nations. The fact that in his adolescence, Israel displayed rebellion does not nullify or impede God's commitment to bring Israel to full maturity in the obedience of faith and to the fulfillment of its calling to the nations at the end of times. God is ABLE to discipline Israel as a father disciplines his son whom he loves. His love NEVER FAILS. The covenant was eventually renewed and internalized. The Sinaitic, conditional covenant to which Israel agreed but which it could not keep was fulfilled by the Messiah. He renewed it by the shedding of His blood through his death and confirmed it by his resurrection and the outpouring of His Holy Spirit in Jerusalem. In that "new" covenant the Holy Spirit wrote the laws into man's heart. His story is a story of covenantal Relationships - not of Religion, for religion is man's effort in his autonomous strength to be acceptable before a holy God.

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7. THE CONFLICTS IN ISRAEL'S HISTORY

7.1. On the meaning of conflicts in God's progressive revelation through Israel's history.

The theological meaning of history is not only covenantal; it is also a history of conflicts and deliverance from conflicts; the story of the conflict between Good and Evil, both of which He created in order to reveal His glory to the visible and the invisible world. ¹⁶ Conflicts are clashes between opposing parties, between good and evil. History is full of clashes (wars) between individuals and nations, between political systems, cultures and civilizations, between God and the gods. This is one of the reasons why the Tanach (the Old Testament) is full of wars and why conflict situations are one of the main themes of the Psalms. ¹⁷ These conflicts had and have a metaphysical origin, on the other hand they had to reveal man's sin-nature ¹⁸ and reflect God's educational principles to put his people to the test and to show them the need of a 'go-between', of a Savior. In the ultimate conflict the Prince of Peace confronts the Prince of this world and triumphs over him in allowing himself to be executed "for the sins of many" at the Roman stake. His resurrection three days later in Jerusalem fulfilled old prophecy and confirmed His victory over the one who holds the power of death, the Devil. The conflict was mortal but was not a conflict between equals as if two earthly kingdoms had been in collision. The Messiah executed judgment over a usurper to His throne. There is a hint in [1Cor 2:4](#) indicating that had the authorities known what they were doing they would not have done it.

7.2. On the root of this cosmic conflict that deeply marks the Biblical worldview

The Biblical worldview with its concept of a world that is visible and a world that is transcendent and therefore invisible allows us to understand the deep meaning of what [Genesis 3](#) refers to as the two kinds of seeds that are in conflict with each other, a conflict that has cosmic proportions; cosmic because the prophets give us glimpses of the origin of evil as the result of pride and rebellion of one of the archangels, Lucifer, who as a result was expelled from heaven together with the heavenly host that sided with this supreme celestial creature. All conflicts can be traced back to this basic cosmic conflict - from Genesis to Revelation, from Israel's wars against its neighbors to the final war of the nations against Israel - not to elaborate on the war between good and evil in every person's heart. Despite these unimaginable dimensions God fulfills his plan of Salvation in the unfolding of Israel's history. The Bible allows us to catch glimpses of the clash of the two kingdoms (Gr. *basileia*), the kingdom of Light (Jesus as the ruler of the Cosmos / Gr. *kosmokrates*) and of Darkness (Lucifer, Satan, Gr. *diabolos* or *satanas*). As the history of Israel presents the story of her physical warfare against Israel's enemies, so the

History of the Church is the story of the spiritual warfare against the powers of the enemy. To Israel belongs the promise that the covenant-keeping God would rather allow the order of the universe to cease than to allow her to be annihilated. In like manner, to the Church belongs the pledge that even the gates of hell will not overcome her.

7.3. On the solution to the cosmic conflict and its effects in Israel 's history

Because He foresaw the need to provide a solution to this conflict - the problem of the sin of covetousness, pride and rebellion - that would result from His creation of man in His image ¹⁹ He conceived of a plan of action - salvation / restoration - to resolve this conflict. Astonishingly, this plan of love and grace was conceived - because of God's foreknowledge - before the creation of the universe. The solution to the problem of how a holy and just God can forgive sin and still be righteous was progressively brought to the attention of the prophets through Israel's historic experiences. They pedagogically foreshadowed and typified the Center of Israel's history, the Messiah. According to this plan the Holy One, the God of Israel was to dwell or "tabernacle" among man and to have fellowship with His sanctified people, the "Bride" or the Body of Christ, the Body of the Messiah. (God's plan to 'tabernacle' or dwell among his people: [Exodus 29:46](#); [John 1:14](#); [Rev 21:3](#); also use this site's search engine: the meaning of shekinah, God's glorious presence).

7.4. On the end of the conflict, the judgment of the nations at the end of time

The final clash between Israel and the nations, between God and the nations will take place at the end of time when God confronts the nations that will gather against Israel in their desperate struggle to exterminate the most tangible proof that God exists and that He is the One who the nation of Israel says he is. Whether the battle in the valley of Jehoshaphat and the battle of Gog and Magog will be the same is not crucial for the purpose of God's plan of salvation: the fact is that He will bring the nations to judgment in space and time and that the judgment is going to be on Israel's soil. The prophets Joel the son of Pethuel and John on Pathmos have not just issued some warnings to the nations. He is a holy God who is a "consuming fire." Judgment is going to be the inevitable consequence of thousands of years of anti-Semitism. Hatred against Israel is hatred against Israel's God and hatred against the Jews leads to hatred against Christ and turns into anti-Christianity. The good news is that God's plan does not end in judgment. The prophets declare that the nations will have a future and a hope, for the day will come "when war shall be no more."

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8. THE NATIONS IN GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

8.1 On the clash in the histories of Israel and of the nations

For obvious reasons conflicts are the occasion where the history of Israel intersects with the history of the surrounding nations. If Israel and the nations are seen as two intersecting spheres, the Creator of the Universe and Lord of History demonstrates His perfect control of all historic developments by virtue of what he displays in that intersection. It is there where History shows its full meaning, it is there where God's intervention gives history its theological significance:

- His power and glory is absolutely unsurpassed;
- He is the Lord of His (invisible) Hosts and is able to do whatever he purposed;
- He is the faithful Covenant God;
- He knows the end from the beginning,
- for Him nothing is impossible even where the battles in the heavenlies are involved (see the books of Daniel and Revelation).

8.2. On the timing of the most important intersection between the history of the nations and the history of Israel

It is in Jerusalem that the history of Israel, of the nations and of the Church intersect for the first time. In that intersection of histories (Rome's and Israel's) "when the time had fully come," God revealed Himself through the embodiment in human

form of Yeshua HaMashiah / Jesus Christ. He is the true and ultimate source of the theological meaning of History, for He is the Beginning and the End, the center and fulfillment of God's plan conceived before the creation, the One without whom there would be no time and no history. Because of Him the History of Israel is absolutely unique; because of Him that there is only ONE history of a nation that has a theological meaning: the Lord of History from His Eternity descended through a window of space and time to tell us that man is once to die "and after this the judgment."

8.3. On the question whether nations could have a meaningful history as well

The definition of a meaningful history does not seem to allow national histories to be meaningful - certainly not under a Biblical perspective (compare the message of Ecclesiastes). Today, we hear a lot about nations having to come 'into their destiny.' ²⁰ Genesis 11 helps us to understand why mankind was divided up into nations: Because of failure to carry out his command to scatter and populate the earth. According to Acts 17, he divided them up into nations that they might seek and worship Him. That chapter with several other Scriptural proofs reveal that God's principle to include nations in his plan of salvation is part of history from the beginning. We must conclude that He has given humanity both the freedom and responsibility to organize itself according to their cultural preferences - including systems of hereditary successions, democratic constitutions and even wars to determine historic boundaries according to whatever political structures prevail.

When the original family of nations became morally corrupt to the extent that God had to destroy it, He started with Noah and his family. He saved them from perdition. Noah's offspring again failed to live up to God's moral standards and thus God chose Abraham to make him into a model nation that would lead the other nations to live according to His standard. This nation was to be called Israel, "the apple of God' eye" - the instrument - the prototype of nation - through which God was going to reveal himself to mankind, to the nations.

Since from the beginning Israel as the "apple of God's eye" is at the center of history, its symbolic representation, Jerusalem, is the stumbling block (skandalon) of the nations. See Zechariah 12:3. If Israel and the Jews could be exterminated, according to Israel's opposition, the "light of the world" could be replaced by the "light" of God's arch enemy. The Holocaust as the path to the 'Final Solution' was the signal that history is close to its end. Antisemitism (hatred of the Jews and of Israel, Anti-Zionism) is the outward manifestation of the invisible war that is taking place to eliminate the testimony to God's truthfulness and the validity of His word. The battle grows fiercer as history moves to its goal.

8.4. On the meaninglessness of the history of the nations

As long as the nations are on a collision course with the Lord of History they toil for the fire of a judgment that they will bring upon themselves. That judgment was not God's purpose of allowing them to come into existence. Neither is this view of the nations' history due to the apparently pessimistic view of certain schools of eschatology. It is a fact that nations have come and gone. Israel is the only one that survived over the thousands of years of history because God's purpose for her will remain to the end. It is God's intention to incorporate the nations into His church and into His kingdom. It is also a fact that Israel's contacts and conflicts with its neighbors reveal the principles of how God deals with nations. According to Matthew 24 He judges them on the basis of their relationship to Israel.

On the positive side, the Missionary Mandate - given to the Jewish disciples and to the Jewish Church in the first place - is the fulfillment of what the prophets had spoken: God's plan of salvation envisaged ingrafting the gentiles from the beginning but He needed an instrument to show them the way to the Father of nations. The Jews failed to complete their mission. Will the gentiles do any better? It seems unlikely under the prevailing conditions. Israel's enemies of old had thought that He is a nationalistic God like their own gods. But He is the God of all the earth, not just of Israel. As stated above, it is in Jerusalem that the history of Israel, of the nations and of the Church intersect for the first time. The focus of attention from then on shifts to the nations but Israel remains what it always was: God's own possession, his inheritance.

8.5. On the need to grasp God's plan for the Messiah's return

Since God is both inside and outside History and has set limits to what He allows to happen, He can use angels and demons to accomplish His plan; He can intervene or apparently not intervene, he can oppose and overrule the plans of the nations or use them as instruments of His judgment. Whatever nation goes beyond its assigned function is punished by another nation or nations in turn. Is it arrogance to point out one of God's principles of history, that while He can use angels to fulfill "all that His holy prophets have spoken" he has chosen the Church to stand behind Israel in order that Israel might finally discover her calling? Israel will then find its intended identity and take the lead in the final world harvest of the remnants from the nations. These remnants will be clearly allied with Israel presenting the picture of the Bride made ready for the Bridegroom, the Messiah. As such she only will escape the judgment.

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This web site seeks to focus on what the prophets have spoken with regard to Israel. It seeks to do justice to the fact that both the Holocaust and the Rebirth of the nation of Israel are screaming milestones in the History of Salvation. Missing those signals on the way, the Church will continue to ignore the prophetic word of [Acts 3:21](#) and continue to lack credibility before the invisible and the visible world.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ The German Bible translation, Good News in Today's German, renders the Hebrew word vanity, hbl, as "completely senseless". Something that has no sense has no meaning. It is meaningless. [↑](#)
- ² [Paul Johnson, A History of the Jews](#), p. 2. - Walter C. Kaiser citing Will Herberg says, "Will Herberg says that Biblical faith is also historical, not because it has history, or deals with historical events [...] but because it is itself history. The message that Biblical faith proclaims, the judgment it pronounces, the salvation it promises, the teaching it communicates, these all defined historically and are understood as historical realities [...] To de-historicize history or to de-historicize faith is like trying to paraphrase poetry. You ruin it." Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. [The Old Testament in Contemporary Preaching](#), p. 73. [↑](#)
- ³ op.cit. concerning the earliest Jews: "They always knew that Jewish society was appointed to be a pilot project for the entire human race." p. 586 [↑](#)
- ⁴ Johnson, Paul. op. cit. "The Jews are the most tenacious people in history." p. 3. [↑](#)
- ⁵ Interpretations of the past: such summaries of history as for instance in [Deuteronomy 8](#); [Joshua 24](#); [1Sam 12:6-25](#); [1Chron 16:8-22](#); [Neh 9:9-28](#); [Psalms 7 8, 81, 105, 106](#); [Ezekiel 20](#); [Acts 7](#); [1Cor 10:1-6](#) (especially [1Sam 12:22](#)); the letter to the Hebrews, a group of Messianic Jews. Also, note footnotes 12 and 16, [Adolph Saphir](#). [↑](#)
- ⁶ [Ramesh P. Richard](#), 1997, quoting an unnamed source: "if history has meaning, this meaning is not historical, but theological; what is called Philosophy of History is nothing else than a Theology of History, more or less disguised." ... "In seeking to ascertain the meaning of history, one must give attention to an all-inclusive whole - to the future as well as to the past and present." All three aspects of prophecy are covered by the Hebrew prophets. [↑](#)
- ⁷ [Roland H. Nash](#), p. 38. [↑](#)
- ⁸ With regard to the so-called 'historical books' of the Bible (Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings) Walter Kaiser remarks that they had better be called the 'Earlier Prophets.' "They aim at teaching lessons from the prophetic eye of inspiration rather than simply providing a chronicle of how events occurred in time and history." p. 214 on 'Why Did Saul Ask David's Identity?' [1Sam 17:55-58](#), Walter C. Kaiser Jr., [Hard Sayings of the Bible](#), IVP 1996 [↑](#)
- ⁹ [Adolph Saphir](#), [The Divine Unity of Scripture](#), first published 1894, republished in Israel 2001, "He is the end of the Jewish History. This you can see from the genealogy in the book of Matthew." p.243. Yet see footnote 11. [↑](#)
- ¹⁰ A book review on the Internet of one of Charles Dyer's (Moody Publishers, Chicago) books typically reads: "this primer takes the historical past of the Middle East as seriously as its prophetic future." One's theology determines one's worldview and one's understanding of the meaning of history. [↑](#)

- ¹¹ Roland H. Nash's "The Meaning of History" : "We need to understand how one's worldview either helps or hinders the search for the meaning of history." p. 29. Biblical Theology and Biblical worldview are in reciprocal relationship in that one may be considered to be part of the other. What is true of worldview is also true of theology: they provide the framework within which the meaning of history can be discerned. (No attempt is made here to discuss the differences between the Biblical and the scientific worldview as the latter shows materialistic as well as metaphysical variants. See the relevant literature and attempts at reconciliation between science and faith). [↑](#)
- ¹² Adolph Saphir: "...History was always accompanied by doctrine, and was always accompanied by the interpretation given by the prophets, so the history was always connected with the promise of the future, for it was all pointing towards the appointed end. Likewise the history itself was prophecy of the future." ... "The Jewish history is complete in Christ, and the future of the Jewish history is secured in Christ, but it has not come to an end, and therefore they do greatly err who suppose that the Jewish history ends with the first advent and the Christian Church." pp. 242, 243 [↑](#)
- ¹³ Oscar Cullman, Christ and Time, [↑](#)
- ¹⁴ Commenting on the 15 historical books of the Tanach, the Torah, Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings (called the four books of Samuel in the Septuagint), 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Adolph Saphir concludes: "the New Testament shows us the deep meaning of this history...what God meant us to learn by this history is made manifest in the writings of the New Testament..." p. 249 [↑](#)
- ¹⁵ Relationships that are based on principles of tolerance and mutual respect (Christian-Jewish Relationships, Ministries among the Jews), or based on inter-religious dialogue are human efforts that are blind to God's plan and intentions. The Jewish philosopher Emil Fackenheim addresses this problem as follows: "Can a religious witness himself stand related to the Divine and yet let the truth of that relation be called into question by alternative or even religious testimonies? One thus wonders whether the current, superficially admirable looseness in philosophy does not hide a loss of direction, and whether the superficially no less admirable 'dialogical' openness in religion is not an attempt to compensate for a lack of conviction. The last-named possibility was well expressed by a wit who defined ecumenism as the belief that anyone's religion is better than one's own." p.235 Fackenheim's pessimistic conclusion that in a post-Holocaust world the Jew faces a dilemma from which he cannot escape illustrates the fact that the call to witness to the divine image in which man is made is not possible without the power of the Holy Spirit. [↑](#)
- ¹⁶ Schoeman (op. cit.): "One should always ... remember in viewing history as the interaction between the "economy of salvation" (the pattern of the order of creation and 'Divine Providence' whose goal is the salvation of man) and the "economy of perdition" (Satan's 'standard methods' to prevent that salvation) , that the economy of perdition itself is a part of God's mysterious providence and is encompassed by the economy of salvation." (199) [↑](#)
- ¹⁷ Some theologians and historians distinguish between sacred and secular history. Whenever sacred and secular history intersect conflict erupts. This is only partially true as Israel demonstrates that conflicts erupt even inside the borders of the chosen people. [↑](#)
- ¹⁸ in summary this is seen throughout the Bible as law-breaking that leads to pride and rebellion, idolatry and syncretism, immorality and harlotry (physical as well as spiritual - for the latter see the classical parable imbedded in the prophet's interpretation of Israel's history, Ezechiel 16 or the prophetic verdict of [Romans 3:10](#)) [↑](#)
- ¹⁹ Man created in His image above all includes the capacity to choose between good and evil, between love and hatred, between obedience and rebellion. God's Holiness includes the capacity to choose or else love would not be love. [↑](#)
- ²⁰ There are attempts at presenting a 'Theology of Nations' - at demonstrating that God has made a covenant with nations but apart from the Noaic covenant this is speculative theology partly based on the interpretation of Biblical language personifying nations as if they were individual persons and partly based on a premillennial anticipation of conditions pertaining to nations in the millennium only - even if exceptional cases like present-day Uganda may be quoted. This highly problematic interpretation furthermore seems to rely on a concept of 'prophecy' that was reserved for Israel's prophets alone. It remains to be seen if such prophecies will be true or false in the sense that total national transformations are not in God's plan as long as the deceiver of the nations, the prince of this world, is not removed. [↑](#)