

Comfort Ye My People!

The Bible gives very clear directions to the nations, particularly to the Believers, about their conduct and responsibilities towards Israel. If this advice is heeded, YHWH promises to bless both parties – the giver *and* the recipient. These directions are mostly given in the imperative form and are therefore commands. If you want to know YHWH's will regarding your relationship with Israel, and at the same time secure blessings for yourself and your nation, then *do* these things.

In Revelation 1:13, Christian congregations are likened to lampstands. As witnesses of Messiah we must be like lights shining in a dark world. The lampstand referred to in this case, has seven branches. It also features in the Jewish religion, and is called a *menorah*. Apart from our general commission as witnesses of Yahushua in the world, these seven candles must also be made to light up Israel's way, as indicated in the illustration.

However, many Believers and Christian congregations have lost sight of their spiritual mission and are bogged down in self-centred activities and Paganism. They have even backslided from Yahushua Himself, and only serve Him with their lips. If such congregations become spiritually estranged from YHWH, it is no wonder that they have also lost touch with Israel as the covenant people of YHWH. Yahushua lovingly but very explicitly admonishes such congregations:

"I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place - unless you repent" (Rev. 2:4-5).

The key concepts mentioned in the Bible in connection with our responsibilities towards Israel, are mentioned below. In order to grasp the full significance of these words, some of them are explained in terms of definitions found in the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*. The obeying of these commands will result in a comprehensive program of caring for Israel in every sphere of life.

The main aim with a ministry of this nature is to win the hearts of the Jews and to show them the way to the Father through the Messiah, Yahushua.

Bless them

Right in the beginning, with the calling of Abraham, YHWH said:

"I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:3).

To bless somebody is to ask YHWH's favour or protection for him. The opposite of this disposition is to curse him. That means to express a wish that great misfortune will happen to someone, especially by calling on magical powers. In ancient times, the neighbours of Israel often invoked the occult powers of heathen gods against the people of God. However, these curses backfired on them and they invariably fell into the pit that they had dug for Israel. Those who are against YHWH, also turn against His people:

"Those who hate You... have taken crafty counsel against Your people... They have said: Come, and let us cut them off from *being* a nation, that the name of Israel be remembered no more" (Ps. 83:2-4).

Do you want to enjoy the blessings of the Lord? Then serve Him with all your heart and bless His people!

Comfort them

"Comfort, yes, comfort My people! says your Elohim. Speak comfort to Jerusalem..." (Is. 40:1-2).

To be in comfort is the state of being free from anxiety, pain, or suffering, and having all one's physical needs satisfied. A comforter is a person who gives strength, hope or sympathy to an unhappy person.

Are you comforting the people of Israel who are experiencing anxiety in a hostile region, who have become victims of an international campaign of anti-Semitism,

and who also experience financial hardships and unemployment in their own country?

Care for them

To bless and comfort Israel in a meaningful way, we need to back up our positive attitude of spiritual alignment with practical programs to care for them and lend a helping hand where the most urgent needs exist. To care is *the process of looking after and giving attention to someone who needs it*.

The logistics of caring for Israel can take on a variety of forms:

- Awareness programs can be organised to inform people about the situation in Israel, and to suggest practical ways in which to alleviate the situation.
- Assistance can be rendered in the diplomatic sphere to support Israel.
- Efforts can be made to refute the diabolical ideology of anti-Semitism.
- The spiritual needs of this people should be met in a very sensitive way.
- Financial support, clothes and other material goods form an essential part of caring for Israel.

Apart from preaching to his fellow-Jews and introducing them to Yahushua, the Messiah, Paul also organised practical programs to care for them in various other ways:

"For the present, however, I am going to Jerusalem to bring aid [relief] for the saints - YHWH's people there. For it has been the good pleasure of Macedonia and Achaia to make some contributions for the poor among the saints of Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and surely they are in debt to them, for if these Gentiles have come to share in their [the Jerusalem Jews'] spiritual blessings, then they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings" (Rom 15:25-27 AB).

In what program are you involved to care for those in Jerusalem who are going through such hard times?

Pray for them

The heart of any support program for Israel is prayer:

"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: may they prosper who love you" (Ps. 122:6).

"O Jerusalem, I have set intercessors on your walls who shall cry to YHWH all day and all night for the fulfilment of His promises. Take no rest, all you who pray, and give YHWH no rest until He establishes Jerusalem and makes her respected and admired throughout the world" (Is. 62:6-7 LB).

Identify with them spiritually

Never ask questions about the right of existence of the Jews, but rather give recognition to them as the nation through which the Word of YHWH has come to you:

"What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of YHWH. What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify YHWH's faithfulness? Not at all!" (Rom. 3:1-4 NIV).

There has always been a faithful remnant in Israel with whom we can identify spiritually, while ever reaching out to the unfaithful ones. If you are a believer, please remember the Jewish origin of your religion. Paul reminded the Christians in Rome about this connection:

"And since Abraham and the prophets are YHWH's people, their children will be too. For if the roots of the tree are holy, the branches will be too. But some of these branches from Abraham's tree, some of the Jews, have been broken off. And you Gentiles who were branches from, we might say, a wild olive tree, were grafted in. So now you, too, receive the blessing God has promised Abraham and his children, sharing in YHWH's rich nourishment of His own special olive tree" (Rom 11:16-17 LB).

To be a spiritual partaker of the blessings initially offered to Israel, should arouse a tremendous love in the heart of every saved Gentile towards the Jews - not

only because we share in their spiritual heritage, but also in anticipation of their salvation as a nation:

"For if YHWH was willing to take you who were so far away from Him - being part of a wild olive tree - and graft you into His own good tree - a very unusual thing to do - don't you see that He will be far more ready to put the Jews back again, who were there in the first place?... Yes, it is true that some of the Jews have set themselves against the Gospel now, but this will last only until all of you Gentiles have come to Yahushua - those of you who will. And then all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:24-26 LB).

Think of the wonderful future that the saved Jews *and* Gentiles will have in the kingdom of the Messiah, as partakers of the unsearchable riches of His grace for all of us!

Arouse them to jealousy!

Do you realise the responsibility upon you to live such a convincing Christian life, and to have such an inspiring testimony of what Yahushua has done for you, that Jews who still reject Yahushua as Messiah, will actually be aroused to jealousy! Never give up on your calling to be a witness in Jerusalem first (among the Jews) and from there proceed to other parts of the world. Jewish evangelism is no easy task, but certainly most rewarding. Keep on trusting on Messiah for their salvation.

"So I ask: Have they stumbled so as to fall - to their utter spiritual ruin, irretrievably? By no means! But through their false step *and* transgression salvation [has come] to the Gentiles, so as to arouse Israel [to see and feel what they forfeited] and to make them jealous" (Rom. 11:11 AB).

Proclaim salvation to them

Paul said:

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Messiah, for it is the power of Elohim to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Rom 1:16).

It is a tragedy that some Christians are ashamed to preach the gospel of Yahushua Messiah to the Jews. They do not want to offend them and arouse their resentment. Although it is true that the right example and a very sensitive approach will achieve more than those who just storm in and condemn all unbelievers, we must nevertheless make sure that the testimony about the Messiah is clearly conveyed. There is no hope for Jews who don't put their trust in Yahushua. Jewish evangelism *now* is of the utmost importance as the dark days of the great tribulation are rapidly approaching. Like all other people, the Jews also need to be introduced to the Messiah in order to be saved.

With the correct attitude of love and compassion, the message can be proclaimed to the people of Israel that their iniquities can be pardoned by the Lamb of YHWH who was sacrificed on Calvary for their sins: "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and tell her that her sad days are gone. Her sins are pardoned" (Is. 40:2 LB).

In Isaiah 55:11, God promised that His word will never return to Him void, but accomplish what pleases Him. Despite severe persecution and strong resistance to their message, including laws forbidding Christianity, the Messianic Jews of the first century persisted in proclaiming the gospel of salvation. Their testimony was certainly not in vain:

"And the word of yhwh spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7).

Israel is fast approaching a time of great spiritual awakening: "Behold, I will send for many fishermen, says YHWH, and they shall fish them" (Jer. 16:16).

"For thus said the Master YHWH: Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out... I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick" (Ezek. 34:11, 16).

Confess to one another your sins

What about nations, Churches, organisations and individual Christians who have, instead of blessing Israel, persecuted and cursed her? Yahushua says that although He forgives us instantly when we confess our sins to Him, we still have to put matters straight among ourselves. We must confess our sins to one another, and make restitution where possible. Such actions could go a long way in opening the way to the heart of Israel.

The following account was published in the Nov./Dec. 1992 Newsletter of the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem:

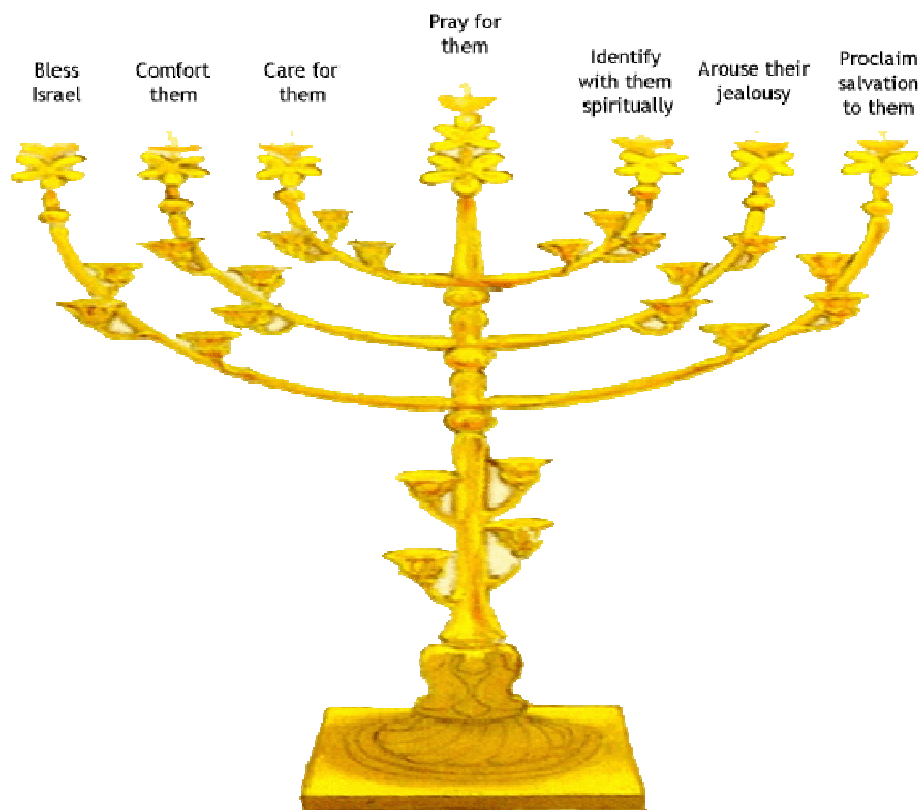
"It was a moving sight when hundreds of Spanish Christians who had come from all over Spain, knelt in repentance and prayer in Toledo. They carried banners saying: *Please, Jewish people, forgive us for what happened in 1492.*

"In 1492, during the reign of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, and under the influence of the Catholic Authorities, the Jews were expelled from Spain. During those years Jews in Spain had three choices: to be killed, to convert to Christianity (Roman Catholicism), or to be expelled. Thousands upon thousands were tortured and killed. Others were forcibly converted - the rest were expelled. It was this past that Christians in Spain knew had to be repented of before God *and* the Jewish people.

"At the Plaza about 900 Christians knelt upon the hard stones close to the Roman Catholic cathedral, and opposite the municipal building of Toledo. Some with their faces to the ground and tears in their eyes, prayed and asked God for His forgiveness and the breaking of the curse that Spain brought upon herself when she killed or expelled His Jewish people.

"One Israeli who witnessed it, could hardly believe his eyes and said he found it difficult to keep from weeping. In the evening a meeting was held in which forgiveness was asked from the Jewish people who were represented by Mr. Yitzhak Navon, former President of Israel, Mr. Toledano, Secretary General of the Spanish Jewish community, and the Consul General of the Israeli Embassy in Spain. In his response, Mr. Navon said:

"I am standing here in front of you, overtaken by emotion, and embarrassed. I am moved as to the warmth and affection that you are bestowing on my people, and I am embarrassed because we are not used to such gestures. Throughout our long history our instincts had taught us how to react to slander, persecution and manifestations of hatred, but not to manifestations of affection and love the way you bestow on us here. We are simply not used to it. Therefore, allow me to tell you quite frankly that our heart is full of deep gratitude because you give us back faith in mankind, and plant in us hope for a better future in interpersonal and interreligious relations."



Lastly: Let us Confess our Sins to one another and Pray for Forgiveness!