

Israel - our brother people in faith

1) Pardon of Israel

It is as if Paul had a premonition of the view that would prevail among Christians throughout the centuries: namely that the Church is the new Israel. He therefore begins chapter 11 of Romans with an important question: "I say then, has God rejected His people?" (v. 1).

Although the LORD has repeatedly said that the Israelites are a "disobedient and rebellious people" (Romans 10:21 according to Isaiah 65:2), Paul calls out to us: it is "impossible" that God has rejected His people. The psalmist is also certain of this: "For the LORD will not cast off His people; He will not forsake His inheritance" (Ps 94:14).

In Romans 11 we read: "God has not cast off His people whom He foreknew" (v. 2) God knew exactly who He had chosen. HE knew Israel through and through, even in their stubbornness, when HE "knew them beforehand". HE cannot be "disappointed". Although HE had to punish disobedience, "In my fierce anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting mercy I will have compassion on you, says the LORD your Redeemer" (Isaiah 54:8).

This is why it says in Romans 11 with regard to Israel: "For the gifts of grace and the calling of God are irrevocable" (v. 29).

Paul picks up the thread again with the question: "Did they (the Jews) stumble so that they should fall? Certainly not!" (V. 11).

What was Israel's "fall"? They did not recognise that Immanuel, the Messiah Yeshua, had come for them - according to the prophetic announcements. Isn't it amazing that even at the presentation of Jesus in the temple (after 33 days), the old man Simeon said: "This one is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel and for a sign which will be spoken against" (Luke 2:34)

We know about Jesus: HE spoke to the Jews in parables, "because seeing they did not see, and hearing they did not hear nor understand..." (Mt 13:13).

Isaiah had already said: "For the LORD has poured out on you a spirit of deep sleep, yes, He has closed your eyes, namely, the prophets; And He has covered your heads, namely, the seers" (Isaiah 29:10).

So, it was the LORD who poured out this "spirit of deep sleep" on the Jews. This shows that God had a purpose in doing so.

The Jews are addressed in Acts: "It was necessary for the word of God to be spoken to you first, but because you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46).

This turning to the Gentile nations was part of God's great plan of salvation.

The crucial event in God's plan of salvation

It is an incredible grace that we have been able to experience the Saviour Yeshua Ha Mashiach. Let us remember the moving story in Acts 10: Peter is led into the house of Cornelius in a strange way. He preaches in the house meeting there, and the Holy Spirit fell on those gathered. "And the believers from the circumcision, as many as had come with Peter, were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit had also been poured out on the Gentiles" (Acts 10: 45). This was a colossal event in the history of God's salvation. Can this still inspire us today? Are we still beside ourselves over this incredible event? Or have we "framed" it in the context of our piety to such an extent that we have become too accustomed to it?

In Romans 11 we are shown that "the spiritual condition of the Gentile world is directly dependent on the spiritual condition of Israel. Israel is the key to the revival of the world!"¹

"You were without God in the world" (Eph 2:12). Can't we grasp the power of Jesus' work of redemption anew in awe from this word?

"At that time, when you did not know God, you served those who by nature are not gods" (Gal 4:8). In Ephesians, Paul describes what our situation was at that time with the words "futility of mind", "darkened understanding", "alien to the life of God", "ignorance", "hardening of the heart", "numb" (Ephesians 4: 17 f).

The Jews were never without God! The Creator already said to Abram: "I will put My covenant between Me and you (Gen 17:2).

We were "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise " (Eph 2:12). Through Jesus' sacrificial death, we are no longer strangers to these promises. "For all the promises of God in Him

¹ J. Gerloff in Feigenbaum No. 323, p. 14

are Yes and in Him Amen" (2 Cor 1:20), that is, also to all the promises made to the Jewish people. Paul writes to us that we "have been made partakers of the fatness of the olive tree" (Romans 11:17), through the blood of Jesus alone we are reconciled with the Father.

2) Becoming a partaker

What have we now become partakers of? Let's take a look at how Paul describes the calling of the Jews: "To the Israelites belong sonship and glory and covenants and giving of the law and service of God and the promises" (Romans 9:4).

We read several times in Scripture that Almighty God describes His relationship with the Jewish people as one of father and son. When the Lord promises kingship to Salomon, He says: "I will be his father and he shall be My son" (2 Sam 7:14), and He says: "When Israel was young, I loved it, and out of Egypt I called My son" (Hos 11:1). As believers, we also have the promise of sonship, and so we can read in Romans 8: 14 f.: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God... You have received the Spirit of sonship, in whom we cry out: Abba, Father." But there is a big difference between the sonship of the Jews and the sonship of us from the Gentile nations: we from the Gentile nations, we non-Jews, are indeed creatures of God like all people, but we only come into sonship when we have accepted Jesus as Saviour. Sonship has always been given to the Jews, not to individuals but to all! We read in Genesis 4:23: "Thus says the LORD: My firstborn son is Israel."

We are in the process of examining the extent to which we have been made partakers of the blessings of Israel according to the words of the Bible. Paul goes on to write that the glory is for the Jews. We read many times in the Bible that the glory, Shekinah, of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob appears to the people of Israel, for example in the tabernacle: "The glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle" (Ex 40:34). And in Isaiah 46:13 it says beautifully: "I give salvation in Zion and my glory to Israel." Salvation is called jeshuah in Hebrew. And the Hebrew name for Jesus is JESHUA. The King of the Jews is also our Saviour, there is salvation in no other name. "Salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22). And so we, from the Gentile nations, may hear: "The Spirit of glory and of God is upon you" (1 Pt 4:14). What Jesus said in His High Priestly prayer

to the Father: "The glory that You have given Me, I have given to them (that is, to My followers) (Jn 17:22).

Let us go one step further: Paul writes that the covenants are for the Israelites. And we read: JESHUA is the "mediator of a new covenant" (Heb 9:15), whom we remember in the Lord's Supper, which HE instituted with the words: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is shed for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:28). We cannot praise Him enough that He has added us to His first beloved people Israel!

And this Jewish people has been given "the law". The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob emphasises: "Where is there a great nation that would have such righteous ordinances and legal provisions as this whole law that I am setting before you today?" (Deut 4:8). The law is the Torah, the five books of Moses. Yes, we don't want to be legalistic... but what do we read in the New Testament? "All Scripture is given to us by inspiration of God for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction, that the man of God may be right, equipped for every good work." (2 Tim 3:16)

We should "Torah" better translate as "instruction, teaching" - and we all need that! "The law of the LORD is perfect and restoreth the soul", writes David (Ps 19:7). God has imparted His teaching to us through the Jewish people.

If we continue to follow the word from Romans 9, we read: the Israelites have been given the service of God. Now you might ask why this is particularly emphasised. After all, we also celebrate worship. What could be meant here? The Holy One of Israel has appointed the Israelites to serve for His name's honour. This included eradicating the idolatry of the Canaanites. And so we also read repeatedly that the LORD also uses His people as an instrument of judgement "to execute vengeance on the nations... to execute on them the judgement already written down" (Ps 149:7 ff). This is therefore part of the "service of God" for the honour of the LORD. And Israel is also called to be a witness for God's power and grace.

Now to us: the word "service of God" rarely appears in the New Testament, but Paul exhorts us to "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1). Like the Jewish people, we too are called to a royal priesthood and to witness for the sake of the honour of our Saviour.

Finally, Paul writes in Romans 9: the Jews have the promises, and we know about the promise of land, the promise of return from the dispersion, the promise of physical salvation and spiritual restoration. We can only marvel at the divine promise for the end times: "In those days and at that time Israel's guilt will be sought, and it will not be there, and the sins of Judah, and they will not be found, for I will forgive those whom I leave" (Jer 50:20). This is about a national forgiveness and restoration that is promised for no other people.

For us from the nations it is like this: only if we have made a personal decision for JESHUA does the promise apply: "Whoever believes in HIM will not be judged" (John 3:18).

As followers of Jesus, we have the promise of a heavenly home. Yeshua shed His precious blood for us in order to "deliver us from the power of darkness" and bring us into the kingdom of God (Col 1:13). According to the divine promise, the guilt of every individual who has accepted JESHUA as their LORD is completely cancelled. Hallelujah! (The Hebrew word Shalom comes from the verb "leshalem" = to pay in full!)

3) Made One

So we have seen that we non-Jews can share in the blessings of Israel in many different ways. But now the letter of Ephesians takes us an important step further: the Prince of Peace JESHUA has reconciled Jews and Christians in one body with God through the cross (Eph 2:16).

There was a millennia-old divide between Christianity and Judaism, even though the New Testament and the Jewish Bible, the Old Testament, are inextinguishably linked. Early in the history of the church, people consciously distanced themselves from their Jewish roots.

And this is often still the case today. Let's listen to some typical voices of Christians, which often reveal a distancing from the Jews and Israel:

"I have nothing against the Jews, but when it comes to the topic of Israel, it becomes too political for me as a Christian."

"Today's Israel has nothing to do with the Israel of the Bible."

"The Jews are to blame for the death of Jesus."

"The Jewish Bible, the Old Testament, is about a cruel God. I am

happy to believe in a merciful God.”

“The Jews don’t even believe in Jesus.”

Such attitudes as I have just mentioned show that just as Jesus is a stumbling block for non-Christians, Israel is an annoyance even for some Christians.

If we experience such attitudes, then the message from the letter to the Ephesians is all the more precious: JESHUA "has made both Jews and Christians one and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity." (Eph 2:14).

Paul writes: "You are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone. Joined together in Him the whole building grows into a holy temple in the Lord." (Eph 2, 20).

We can see an outward sign that the way to the Holy of Holies was opened for everyone in the fact that the curtain in the temple was torn from top to bottom at Jesus' sacrificial death.

Let us hear some precious confirmations of this important truth in salvation history:

"For the Gentiles are to be fellow heirs and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (Eph 3:6)

"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so also is Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptised into one body, whether Jews or Christians..." (1 Cor 12:12 f).

"For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same LORD over all is rich to all who call upon Him." (Romans 10:12).

At the end of days, in the New Jerusalem, the church will consist of Jews and Christians. In the letter to the Hebrews we read: "You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, a festive assembly, and to the church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven" (Heb 12:22 f). This indicates that not only the Christian congregation, but also the redeemed of the Old Testament and angels are gathered in the New Jerusalem.

Marvelling at God's wonderful guidance of Christians and Jews can keep us all the more from Christian arrogance. As a wild olive tree, we are grafted into the noble olive tree of Israel. Our spiritual roots lie in Judaism. We should

beware and have no reason to boast of being followers of Jesus. "You do not bear the root, but the root bears you." (Romans 11:18).

Some branches of the olive tree of Israel have been "broken off" (v. 17), but only branches, not the whole tree has been cut down!

"Through the fall of the Jews, salvation has come to the nations..." (V. 11). The fact that God initially set His beloved Israel aside, so to speak - without ever abandoning it! - has become a blessing for non-Jews. For this was the beginning of the spread of the gospel, the revival. And Paul writes: What then will the renewed complete adoption of Israel "be other than life from the dead?", i.e. all the more blessing will flow.

In Romans 11 we are made aware that "the spiritual condition of the Gentile world is directly dependent on the spiritual condition of Israel. Israel is the key to the revival of the world!" ²

4) Our mission

However, the connection between Jews and Gentile Christians in the history of salvation has yet another dimension:

"Through the fall of the Jews "salvation has come to the nations to provoke them to jealousy" (Rom 11: 11).

In a way, it is a reciprocal effect: from the Jews to the nations and from the nations back to the Jewish people. The fact that the Jews are to be provoked to jealousy - lured, as it were, to turn to the Messiah - shows that God has not cast them off. He has only opened a new and important chapter in the history of salvation.

(God had already said about the Israelites in the days of Moses: "They have provoked Me to jealousy through a non-God, they have offended Me through their vanities, so I too will provoke them to jealousy through a non-people..." (Deut 32:21; taken up in Romans 10:19).

If we followers of Jesus are to "provoke the Jews to jealousy", this entails a great responsibility. Isa 57:14 says: "Make way, make way! Make a way (literally: clear a path)! Remove every obstacle from the path of My people!"

² J. Gerloff in Feigenbaum No. 323, p. 14

And similarly in Isa 62:10: "Prepare the way of the people! Prepare, prepare the way, clear it of stones!" How can we do justice to this?

Firstly, it is precious to have any contact at all, personal relationships with the Jewish people. And our way of life should be a testimony of love and - especially towards our Jewish brothers - humility.

However, it is not the case that God "needs" Gentiles to become believers as a means of Israel's conversion. For what do we read in Zech 12:10? "(But) on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem I will pour out the Spirit of grace and supplication, and they will look on Me whom they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for the only son, and they will weep bitterly for him as one weeps bitterly for the firstborn."

Paul still has to write: "Blindness in part has happened to Israel" (Rom 11: 25) and: "With regard to the gospel³ they are enemies for your sake..." (Rom 11: 28). Here we hear the divine goal again: "for your sake", i.e. for our sake! But the Jews remain - as Paul emphasises in the same verse - "beloved for the sake of the fathers", because the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob promised the fathers eternal love!

By the way, obduracy is not only found among the Jews! How much blindness and rejection can also be found among pagans and so-called Christians! Only for the future kingdom of peace is it promised: "Then He will swallow up on this mountain the veil that covers the face of all peoples and the covering that is over all nations" (Isaiah 25:7).

5) Putting our relationship with Israel to the practical test

Three biblical examples provide good orientation:

The heartfelt attitude of Nehemiah, the identification of Ruth and the fearlessness of Esther

Our relationship with Israel should prove itself practically in four aspects:

Standing up for the Jewish people in our secular environment

Raising our voice also in the congregation

Standing up for Israel's practical needs and requirements

³ In his interpretation of the letter to the Romans, De Boer claims "They say no to God" (p. 270). I can't agree to that! It is not like that! It is about the gospel, the good news about the Saviour Yeshua.

Interceding before the Lord

a) Standing up in our secular environment

We experience: unjust political decisions, anti-Semitic riots, tendentious comments, lies and distortions in the media, polemicising / disrespectful speech, stereotypical definitions, idioms and jokes

Rightly, we should take a stand against it. Do we remain indifferent and just shake our heads?

Does the fact that we sometimes stand quite alone prevent us? That it is unpopular to stand up for Israel? Perhaps we don't want to burn our mouths and forget that millions of Jews burned to death in the gas chambers back then because of our silence...!

The tongues of Israel's enemies are often as sharp as swords. Do we ourselves expose individual Jews or "the Jews" to the violence of such swords? (Ezek. 35, 5: the LORD threatens Edom with the words: "because you have given the sons of Israel over to the power of the sword in the time of their calamity").

I wish we had the fearlessness of Esther, who faced the hostile king on behalf of the Jewish people with the attitude: "If I perish, I perish". We don't usually have to worry about that today. At most, it's uncomfortable or we might face some hostility.

We should be "co-workers of the truth" (3 John 8), our speech should be "seasoned with salt" (Colossians 4:6)

Of course: to do this, we must first be reliably informed and not simply parrot assertions. (West Bank, Palestinian question, settlers, wall). Nehemiah can be an example for us, who informs himself concretely from a distance (see below)

How can we stand up for Israel in our environment? By letters to the editor, calls to the radio/TV, writing to politicians, signing petitions, "hoisting the flag" (verbally and in the figurative sense), simply sharing positive things with our neighbours

b) Raising our voice in the congregation / church

A great deficit in many churches! The perseverance of individuals who have Israel on their hearts is needed and precious. But a clear position of the leadership is important. To delegate the matter of Israel to an "Israel circle" is not enough, but "Israel friends" should be supported. There is often a lack of teaching about Israel. intercession during the services must not be just sporadic.

c) Standing up for Israel's very practical needs and requirements

If we have a biblically orientated love for Israel, then we will also find a rich spectrum of very practical ways to support the Jewish people.

d) Intercession before the Lord

Nehemiah is an example for us here (Neh. 1: 1 – 4):

He informs himself (not: I'm fine here...) and the situation report brings him into action. The wall of Jerusalem no longer provided any protection. What about our "prayer wall"?

Does the affliction of Israel push us into prayer or do we push the affliction away?

Scripture shows us that we - as a "priestly generation" (1 Pt 2) - are to make intercession, and also specifically for Israel:

Ps. 122: 6 - 9 (2 motivations: our brothers, God's dwelling place)

Isa. 62:6 – 7: "You who make mention of the LORD, do not keep silent and give Him no rest till He establishes and till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth:" (Give HIM no rest!!)

What else can help us to intercede for Israel?

- God's promises to Israel are like "climbing poles of our faith" (as Spurgeon put it).
e.g.: "Like birds flying about, so will the LORD of hosts defend Jerusalem. Defending, He will also deliver it. Passing over, He will preserve it" (Isa 31:5)
"And the ransomed of the LORD will return and come to Zion..." (Isa 35:10).
"Whoever attacks you (Israel) will fall for your sake" (Isa 54:15)

"And I will no longer let you hear the reproach of the nations, and you will no longer have to endure the scorn of the peoples" (Ezek 36:15)

- Praying psalms with a Jewish heart, so to speak,
e.g: Ps 90:15: "Rejoice us as many days as YOU have afflicted us, as many years as we have seen evil!"
Ps. 40, 14: "Let them be ashamed and brought to mutual confusion who seek to destroy my life. Let them be driven backward and brought to dishonour who wish me evil."
Ps. 120, 6 f: "Long has my soul dwelt with those who hate peace. I only want peace. But when I speak, they are in favour of war".
Ps 141:9: "Keep me from the net they have laid for me and from the snares of evildoers."
PS. 143, 10: "Teach me to do Your good pleasure, for You are my God!"
Ps 27:9: "Do not hide your face from me; do not turn away your servant in anger!"
- The priestly blessing (Numbers 6:23 – 27): "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying: This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them: ` The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His Face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. ` So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them".
- Learning from the Jewish prayer book, the Siddur.
One prays for instance: "We put our hope in You, our God, that we may soon see Your mighty splendor, to remove detestable idolatry from the earth, and false gods will be utterly cut off, to perfect the universe through the Almighty ´s sovereignty."⁴
"May it be Your will, Hashem, our god, and the God of our forefathers, that You accustom us to Your Torah and attach us to

⁴ The Complexe Art Scroll Siddur, p. 161

Your commandments. Do not bring us into the power of error, nor into the power of transgression and sin, nor into the power of challenge, nor into the power of scorn. Let not the Evil Inclination dominate us. Distance us from an evil person and an evil companion”⁵.

“Master of all worlds! Not in the merit of our righteousness do we cast our supplications before You, but in the merit of Your abundant mercy. What are we? What is our life? What is our kindness? What is our righteousness? What is our salvation? What is our strength? What is our might? What can we say before You...?”⁶

Every Shabbat one prays for the State of Israel:

“Our Father who is in heaven, Protector and Redeemer of Israel, bless the State of Israel, the dawn of our deliverance. Shield it beneath the wings of Your love; spread over it Your canopy of peace; send Your light and Your truth to its leaders, officers, and counselors, and direct them with Your good counsel.

Strengthen the defenders of our Holy Land; grant them, our God, salvation and crown them with victory. Establish peace in the land, and everlasting joy for its inhabitants. Remember our brethren, the whole house of Israel, in all the lands of their dispersion. Speedily bring them to Zion, Your city, to Jerusalem Your dwelling-place, as it is written in the Torah of Your servant Moses: “Even if you are dispersed in the uttermost parts of the world, from there the Lord your God will gather and fetch you. The Lord your God will bring you into the land which your ancestors possessed, and you shall possess it; and God will make you more prosperous and more numerous than your ancestors.”

Unite our hearts to love and revere Your name, and to observe all the precepts of Your Torah. Speedily send us Your righteous Messiah of the House of David, to redeem those waiting for Your salvation. Shine forth in Your glorious majesty over all the inhabitants of Your world. Let everything that breathes proclaim: “The Lord God of Israel is King; His majesty rules over all.” Amen.

⁵ Siddur, p. 21

⁶ Siddur, p. 27

e) Giving thanks

We should also not forget to give thanks for Israel! I would like to mention a few things that are important to me.

If you want to make yourself one, you can quietly or audibly say "amen" to it:

O my Lord, you God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, I thank you from the bottom of my heart that I can recognise your way with Israel, how faithful you are, how consistent in your love, how merciful and long-suffering.

You are a strong hero to your people Israel as the God of peace, the wonderful provider, the good shepherd, the protector and guide, the bright morning star.

Thank You that I can recognise so much of Your divine nature in this. Thank You for giving us the example of Israel - as encouragement and also as a reminder.

I praise you for the election of Israel. You said to Israel: "You are my people." You have attached the holiness of Your name to the Jewish people. I can only worship in amazement. Blessed are you that you have made an eternal covenant with Israel.

O thank you for the massive miracle of salvation from Egypt, thank you for all your deeds and guidance during the long wilderness wandering, thank you for the guidance to the Promised Land. Yes, all honour is due to You that You have even sworn by Your holy name to give Israel the Promised Land forever!

Praise be to You, Holy One of Israel, for preserving the longing for Zion into the hearts Your Jewish people throughout the millennia of dispersion

and brought hundreds of thousands back to Israel. Yes, I worship you for the miracle of the founding of the state. And your beloved people can once again find a home where you had already promised it at the time of the patriarchs.

I praise your strong arm, with whom You led Israel through the wars and gave them victory in a marvellous way.

I would also like to thank you for being able to live in such an exciting time, in which you are clearly acting on behalf of your people. I also rejoice over the reunification of Jerusalem as an important milestone in Your actions in the history of salvation. Hallelujah, You show us by Israel how You are hastening history and how Your coming is near, Lord Jesus!

How great You are! You have chosen Jerusalem as your dwelling place. I praise You for it. I thank You that I can be so closely connected to Jerusalem through your work and death, Lord Jesus. Praise and honour be to you that you will soon return there! And so I thank you that I can pray for the peace of Jerusalem and you are pleased about it.

O LORD, Holy One of Israel, I give thanks from all my heart that you yourself said "Salvation comes from the Jews". Be praised for the treasure of the Jewish Bible, for our spiritual roots in Judaism, for our spiritual fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, for your speaking through the Israelite prophets, for the richness of the prayers of David and the other psalmists.

Thank you that many Jewish fellow citizens have become a blessing to our people. Thank You for the rich gifts You have bestowed upon Your people.

Praise and honour be to you, Yeshua, that you have come into this world as salvation, son of David, lion of the tribe of Judah! You deserve thanks and adoration that it pleased you to turn to the nations at all and also to bring the Gentiles the Good news. I give heartfelt thanks for your precious blood, with which you have made Jews and Gentiles one in you, and for the undeserved gift of being grafted into the noble olive tree even as a member of a people who wanted to exterminate your beloved Jewish people! What indescribable mercy!

Thank you again and again! Amen.

