

# ISRAEL Teaching Letter

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## ISRAEL: Light & Blessing to the world

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Bridges for Peace...Your Israel Connection<sup>®</sup>

“...IN YOU ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH  
SHALL BE BLESSED.” (GEN. 12:3)



Gadi Yampel/DF spokesperson

Israeli humanitarian mission to Nepal

**IN THE FALL OF 2015**, Bridges for Peace was privileged to host over 100 people for our annual solidarity mission. As we traveled the country and met with Jewish people from all walks of life, we were encouraged to see how the presence of Christians in the Land during a time of rising violence brought them great comfort and joy. Our speakers, primarily from the Jewish community, brought an up-to-the-minute report on the political, religious and social climates in Israel as the nation deals with ongoing controversy. One of them, as he spoke of the challenges the country is facing, mentioned that Israel is mandated by Scripture to be a light to the nations. That is not happening yet, he observed—probably someday, but not yet.

With the greatest respect and admiration for our speaker, I must disagree. Perhaps some of our Jewish friends, as they look at Israel’s circumstances with hearts of humility, would agree with him, but I suggest that the evidence to the contrary is just too overwhelming to be ignored. Maybe God is calling us, Christians with a heart of love for His Land, to enlighten the nations and encourage the Jewish people by telling this part of the story—a part that many Israelis are not yet prepared to tell—the story of God’s faithfulness to bless all the nations of the earth through His relationship of covenant love with Israel.

Conceivably, we can help people understand that this story is not just about violence, conflict and propaganda wars. It is about a selfless people who follow

the dictates of *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.), love their neighbors despite the fact that those neighbors hate them in return, and are not just willing, but eager to share the myriad of innovations, inventions and ideas God has given them with a world desperately in need of some light.

## A God of Process

Sometimes, Bible believers forget to put what God has spoken to us through His Word into its proper context. We forget that the trek from Egypt to the Promised Land was not a journey of a few pages but of a few decades. We read the incredible story of God’s revelation at Mt. Sinai and forget that the Jewish people waited **over 400 years** to hear the voice of God that was so familiar to their forefathers. The thousands of years between Abraham and the remarkable stories in the Writings of the Apostles are lost in the reading. In short, we forget that our God is a God of process.

The dictionary defines process as a series of actions or steps taken in order to achieve a particular end, and that certainly describes God’s interaction with His people. He has been in the process of restoring mankind to Himself since the Garden of Eden. His actions and steps are definite and intentional as He moves His creation toward the final goal of restoration and redemption. We are all “in process” in our relationship with Him as we allow Him to shape and mold us into the people He wants us to be. And certainly, He is **in the process** of fulfilling every promise He ever made to the people of Israel, bringing them back to their Land from all the nations of their dispersion.

## “I Will Bless...”

One of those promises is that Israel will be a blessing to the nations.

*“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).*

The Hebrew word for “bless” in this passage is *barak* (ברך). It means to do or give something of value to someone else; it refers to a special favor, mercy or benefit; a gift bestowed by God. It means to infuse something with holiness or divine purpose. It is the root of the word *brakah* (ברכה) which we find in those countless passages in the *Tanakh* (Gen.–Mal.) and the Writings of the Apostles which begin with the words, “Blessed is he who...”

Finally, it is the root of the word *berek* (ברך), which means to kneel. Biblical scholars believe this is a critically important element in understanding the overall importance of the word in the Genesis 12:3 passage. It points to the association between humbling oneself before God and then receiving mercy, benefit, gifts, holiness and/or divine purpose for life.

When God made that incredible promise to Abraham, He created a paradigm, a new way of looking at relationship with Him. It is a remarkable, beautiful paradigm of blessing, expressed through a glorious cycle of interconnection and interdependence, with the God of the universe bound together in oneness with His

people, a relationship infused with holiness through unconditional and everlasting covenant. And we are invited to participate.

Clearly, this is serious business from the Lord's perspective because very specific curses are attached. The first use of the word "curse" in Genesis 12:3 is *arar* (ארר) in Hebrew and means to bring harm and trouble upon, with a feeling of deep hatred and loathing. The second time it appears in the verse, it is the Hebrew word *qalal* (קלל), which means to treat with contempt, but even to simply treat lightly or ignore.

Simply put, God was telling His people that He would draw them to kneel in adoration and humility before Him so that He could pour out happiness, goodness and prosperity upon them. And as others honored Him by honoring His people, they too would be brought into the cycle, receiving blessing from Him through His chosen nation. But for those who would treat the Jewish people lightly, much less intentionally treat them badly, only great loathing and evil would await them.

It is interesting to note that in this passage, God calls on others to bless His people, not to bless Him. But the meaning is very clear. Blessing Israel is blessing Him. He has intentionally, inextricably linked Himself with the Jewish people, a people He created specifically for the purpose of blessing. Loving Him and loving them are two sides of the same coin, and clearly it is impossible to truly love Him while failing to love them. Unfortunately, many throughout the ages have chosen not to bless His people, not realizing that by default, they were choosing the curse.



Yazidi children

Defend International/wikimedia.org

## “I Will Give You as a Light...”

God has also promised in His Word to make Israel a light to the nations:

*“Indeed He says, ‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles...’” (Isa. 49:6).*

The Hebrew word for “light” used here is *or* (אור). In addition to meaning light in the standard sense of the word, it also means the light of godly instruction, life, happiness and prosperity. In short, it means blessing.

For centuries as the Jewish people endured persecution in the Diaspora, the rabbis grappled with the meaning and execution of this verse. Clearly, when God entered into unconditional covenant with Abraham, there was an expectation that His people Israel would be a channel of blessing for all of humanity. But for Jews who had been ghettoized and forced for generations to be separate and insular, fulfillment of this verse seemed impossible.

Little did they know that modern Zionism would become the vehicle through which they would fulfill the call of Isaiah 49:6. Prime Minister David Ben Gurion spoke often of the State of Israel as a moral and social beacon to the whole world, and the selection of the *menorah* (seven-branched candelabra) as the emblem of the state was derived specifically from these words in Isaiah 49. Recently, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that the Jewish people today are “no longer a ruled people, defeated and persecuted, but a proud people with a magnificent country that always aspires to serve as a light to the nations.” With the rebirth of the state, God began the amazing process of making Israel a light to the nations in every sense of the word.

In Deuteronomy 28, God gives the Israelites a list of the amazing blessings that await them should they choose to be obedient to Him. He also lists many curses that would come upon them should they choose otherwise, including eventual dispersion from the Land of Promise. Unfortunately, they made some wrong choices and history tells us that the curses did in fact befall them. But as we read further on in the Scriptures, we find repeated promises from God that He would not forsake His people, He would remember them and bring them back to the Land where He would pour out His promised blessings upon them. The prophet Ezekiel makes it clear that this would be solely an act of love and mercy on God’s part and not because the Jewish people had somehow earned His favor. Further, it would not just benefit Israel, but all the nations of the earth.

## Let the Blessing Begin

Prior to Israel’s declaration of statehood in 1948, the area was called Palestine, and it had for centuries been a desolate, backward, third world part of the Turkish Empire. Israel began its new life with a population of only 600,000 to 800,000 people. Today, a mere 68 years later, it is a thriving first world nation, the only democracy in the Middle East, and the only nation in history to go from third world to first world status in less than 50 years. According to the Israel Bureau of Statistics, the population currently stands at 8.25 million people, nearly 7 million of them Jewish.



Gadi Yampel/IDF spokesperson

Israel also has the highest birthrate in the developed world and recent statistics show that rate increasing among the Jewish population while decreasing among Arab Israelis. Further, of the 223 nations that report on such issues, Israel is in the top eight vis á vis infant mortality, with a rate of only 2.6%. That is lower than the USA, Canada, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, the UK, Japan and Korea.

And despite the image portrayed by the international media, Israelis for the most part feel safe and satisfied. In June of 2015, the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) released the results of its most recent Better Life Index ranking Israel as the fifth happiest nation on earth. Truly, God is blessing this tiny country and His chosen ones who live there, even though they continue to face the issues of violence and terror, threats of war, and undue intervention by the international community.

## **Blessing All to Which You Set Your Hand**

In the past 20 years, Israel has established itself as a global venture capital superpower, with more start-ups and more patents granted per capita than any other nation on earth. It has also become the center for research and development in the areas of technology, communications and cyber warfare. The year 2015 saw a veritable explosion of innovation in the technology sector alone, amounting to billions of dollars poured into the Israeli economy.

According to a CapX report from January 1, 2016:

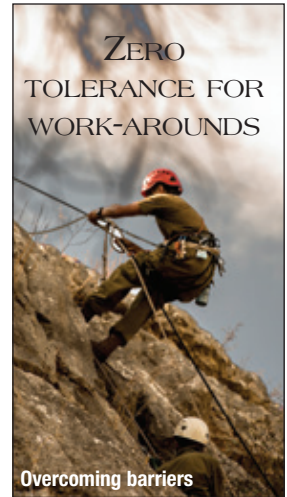
“Research and development is the foundation of all innovation and a key driver of economic growth. With 4.21% of GDP spent on R&D, based on figures from the Organization for the Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Israel ranks first in the world, according to the World Economic Forum, in comparison to the US at 11th, and the UK at 25th.”

Many in those fields are beginning to look for the secret to Israel’s success. One expert gives credit to the skills Israelis learn while in mandatory army service, where they must solve complex problems quickly and with limited resources. Another describes Israel as an environment where there is “zero tolerance for work-arounds” and immense pressure to “develop something that actually works.” Some say Israel has a “national entrepreneurial instinct” fed by the adaptability and resilience of a largely immigrant population. Others say the security situation demands innovation and requires high levels of research while some attribute Israel’s remarkable success to just plain Israeli *chutzpah*.

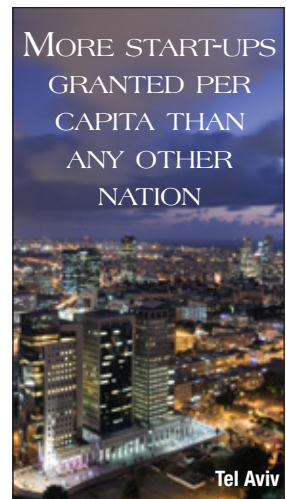
But some, even in the international media, are beginning to recognize that Israel’s foundational belief in a God who created every man in His own image undergirds their respect for human life and fuels that innovative spirit as well as the willingness to share their advances with all of mankind. Bible believers would say it is the fulfilment of God’s promise to bless Israel.

## Do Good to Those Who Hate You

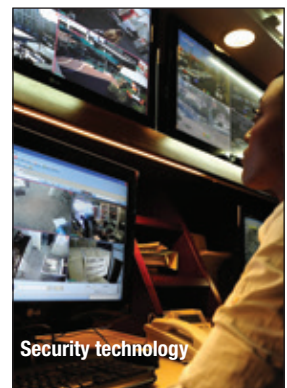
Israel’s ingenuity is not just a money-maker, however. A belief in *tikun olam* (תיקון עולם), literally “repairing the world,” is part of the national DNA and influences Israel’s response to virtually every situation. As the country exports innovation and expertise to the rest of the world, their most incredible humanitarian activity unfortunately goes largely unnoticed and that is their concerted effort to assist their Palestinian neighbors. Israel is actively working to support reconstruction efforts in the Gaza Strip. Following Operation Protective Edge in July of 2014, Israel upgraded border crossings to



IDF spokespersion



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Tons of aid are transported into Gaza daily.



Photo by Ashernet

## A BELIEF IN TIKUN OLAM IS PART OF THE NATIONAL DNA...

allow up to 800 truckloads of building materials and other goods to enter Gaza daily. Additionally, they have allocated \$10 million USD to further expand the capacity of the crossings to over 1,000 trucks per day.

Israel has also facilitated building projects in the Gaza Strip including clinics, schools, infrastructure and even entire residential neighborhoods. In addition, they have doubled the number of entry permits into Israel from the Strip for members of the business sector and have coordinated special travel for engineers and other relevant professionals for international community projects. Further, they have issued over 1,000 special permits for travel from the West Bank\* (Judea-Samaria) to Gaza for reconstruction personnel as well as coordinating the movement of over 500 doctors and medical teams from Gaza to the West Bank\* for continuing education.

Finally, Israel has undertaken a number of special initiatives that are aimed at bolstering the economy of Gaza and enhancing the lives of its residents. These include facilitating the export of industrial goods, textiles and furniture to Israel and the West Bank\*, establishing factories equipped with necessary equipment, and doubling the amount of water supplied to the Strip, as well as easing the entry process for those who are in need of urgent medical care. Israel's Export and International Cooperation Institute in Tel Aviv has sponsored special educational conferences for Palestinian businessmen where Israeli experts share their expertise in such areas as marketing strategies, international market trends, establishing trading partnerships in the international market, etc. Despite the ongoing conflict, Israel continues to believe that cooperation may well be a pathway to peace.

\* The descriptive term West Bank has been used for clarity by the agency that provided the information in this section. Our re-use of the term does not imply our agreement.



## Blessed Shall be the Produce of Your Ground

Israel's first major contribution to global agriculture came in 1965 with the advent of drip irrigation. The process was developed to increase Israel's own agricultural output by making the desert bloom, but today it is used in over 150 countries. The water-saving method literally revolutionized agriculture in even some of the most arid places on earth. Israeli scientists also developed the dew tray, a uniquely shaped tray that surrounds the base of a tree or plant and funnels dew directly to the roots before it can evaporate.

Third world countries also struggled to keep their grain market-fresh once it was harvested. Using primitive storage methods, up to 50% of each crop was being lost to pests and mold. Israel created the grain cocoon, a special inexpensive and reusable storage container that protects 100% of contents from air and water, even in extreme heat and humidity. In addition, special microbes have been isolated for use in fish ponds, keeping water pure and insuring a safe and tasty supply of locally farmed fish. The process is now in use in countries from third world Africa to the United States and Canada.

From the personal watermelon and the cherry tomato to the potato that grows without soil, Israel continues as a world leader in agricultural innovation. Today, Israel produces a pear-shaped orange spider that eats only the spider mites that were destroying 60% of California's strawberry crop, and a sterile fruit fly that eats other types of garden pests, exporting them to over 32 nations. And Israel is a recognized global trailblazer in the dairy industry with cows that produce more milk annually than any on earth. Today, they are involved in cooperative efforts with China and with Viet Nam, creating some of the largest and most advanced dairy operations in history. Tiny Israel, feeding the world.

## Sending Help to the Nations

In 1958 after visiting poverty stricken nations in Africa, then Prime Minister Golda Meir committed Israel to helping alleviate hunger, disease and



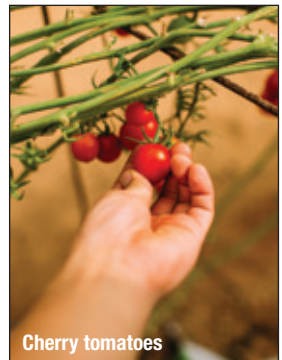
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“I WILL ALSO GIVE  
YOU AS A LIGHT TO  
THE GENTILES...”

(ISA. 49:6)

Israel sent aid and a  
260-strong delegation  
to Nepal after two  
earthquakes devastated  
the country.



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poverty in developing countries. In 1995, a special humanitarian and emergency aid unit was developed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Israel Defense Forces for that purpose. The unit has carried out operations in Kenya, Albania, Mexico, Congo, Haiti, Japan and Nepal, to name only a few. In addition to often being first on the scene of a disaster, this unit provides emergency medical care with state-of-the-art equipment and highly trained medical specialists under the most extreme conditions. Often, when the mission is complete and the Israelis head for home, the equipment is left behind for use by local medical personnel.

But that's not all. After the recent medical mission to Nepal, the "Roof for All" program was established to provide rudimentary housing for the thousands of displaced families who had lost everything in two devastating earthquakes. The unit also holds "eye camps" in several nations where Israeli ophthalmologists treat hundreds of patients annually for preventable blindness and ocular disease.

Special operations are sometimes undertaken when Israel becomes aware of a critical need. In June of 2015, 500 people were severely burned when an explosion ripped through a water park in Taipei. Weeks later, 400 of them were still hospitalized, 200 of them in serious condition requiring skin grafts. Israel organized the donation of two state-of-the-art machines used for making and meshing skin for grafting onto patients' injuries, as well as training Taiwanese doctors in their use.

In other areas of medicine, Israel is a world leader. From the pill cam, a tiny camera in pill form that takes scans of the entire digestive system, to incredibly hopeful developments in cancer treatment, antibiotics to innovations in the treatment of MS and diabetes, Israel is blessing the nations with better health and longer life.

Few realize that in December of 2014, Israel took the international lead in the fight against Ebola, providing several fully-equipped medical clinics to disease-stricken African countries as well as deploying infectious disease experts to train local professionals. Mental health clinics and orphanages were also established for the hundreds of children left orphaned by the disease, and Israel has pledged another \$8.75 million USD to continue the fight against the disease.

## Blessings in Abundance

And there is so much more. We haven't even touched on Israel's flood relief in countries like Myanmar and more recently, the UK; special training for police and social workers in countries where rape is used as a weapon of war; tents, mattresses, food and blankets sent to Europe for Syrian refugees; assistance to Christians and Yazidis victimized by Islamic extremists in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Or Israel's incredible advances in the areas of cyber warfare, technology and communications; the electric car and, yes, the flying car; alternative energy sources such as solar window panels that create energy for homes where they are installed; robotic vacuum cleaners, lawn mowers and snow removal machines; baby monitors that protect against crib death. And even the Poopie Scoop, a small device that turns dog's waste into biodegradable ash in seconds. Israelis are teaching the French how to make wine and Belgians how to make chocolate. *And all the while, they are fighting for their very existence.*

## Blessed to Become a Blessing

Clearly, God is blessing Israel, just as He promised He would, and as He does so, Israel is sharing the blessing with the nations. At the heart of it all is that wonderful paradigm of blessing that God created when He entered into covenant with Abraham. He is making Israel a light to the nations, but the Writings of the Apostles tell us that, in the end of days, men will be lovers of darkness and haters of that light. Enemies of God are making every attempt to destroy it, to snuff it out before it can fully accomplish God's purpose.

### Israel has extended humanitarian aid to the following countries:

- Albania • Angola • Argentina
- Armenia • Azerbaijan
- Belarus • Benin • Bolivia
- Bosnia & Herzegovina
- Bourkina-Fasso • Brazil
- Bulgaria • Burundi • Cambodia
- Cameroon • Chad • Chile
- China • Colombia • Congo
- Costa Rica • Cote d'Ivoire
- Cyprus • Czech Republic
- Democratic Republic of Congo
- Dominican Republic • Ecuador
- Egypt • El Salvador • Eritrea
- Estonia • Ethiopia • Fiji
- Gambia • Georgia • Ghana
- Greece • Guatemala
- Guinea • Guinea-Bissau
- Guyana • Haiti • Honduras
- Hungary • India • Indonesia
- Jamaica • Jordan
- Kazakhstan • Kenya
- Kyrgyzstan • Laos • Latvia
- Lesotho • Liberia
- Macedonia • Madagascar
- Malawi • Malta • Mauritania
- Mauritius • Mexico
- Micronesia • Moldova
- Mongolia • Morocco
- Myanmar • Namibia • Nepal
- Nicaragua • Nigeria
- Palestinian Authority
- Panama • Papua New Guinea
- Paraguay • Peru
- Philippines • Poland
- Romania • Russia
- Rwanda • Senegal
- Seychelles Islands
- Singapore • Slovakia
- Somalia • South Africa
- South Korea • Sri Lanka
- Swaziland • Tajikistan
- Thailand • Togo
- Tonga • Tunisia • Turkey
- Turkmenistan • Uganda
- Ukraine • United Kingdom
- United States • Uruguay
- Uzbekistan • Venezuela
- Vietnam • Yugoslavia • Zaire
- Zambia • Zimbabwe

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But we know that Israel will not be destroyed. She will survive and thrive, be the awe of the nations, the head and not the tail, and God's vehicle for revelation of Himself to all the world. It WILL HAPPEN. Not because Israel is deserving of God's special favor, or because we as Christians will somehow save the day. But because God Himself set the paradigm in motion and promised that He and He alone will accomplish it.

The question that remains: where will we be, individually, our churches and our nations, in the process? Will we be lost in the dust of history like so many others who chose the curse rather than the blessing? Rather, let's take our place as partners with God and with Israel in that amazing Genesis 12:3 paradigm, blessing and being blessed, as God continues to fulfill His ancient promises and brings about our longed-for final redemption.

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Scripture is taken from the New King James, unless otherwise noted.



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