

# ISSUES

A · M E S S I A N I C · J E W I S H · P E R S P E C T I V E

## WHY DO THE NATIONS **RAGE?**

**Does the Bible Say  
Anything About the  
Middle East Conflict?**

By Dr. Darrell L. Bock

Vol. 14 · 7

Continued from cover

**“We have to get God out of this conflict if we’re going to have any chance to survive as a healthy, secure Jewish state.”**

Political analyst Yossi Alpher, who served 12 years in the Mossad, Israel’s intelligence agency, and later became Israel Director of the American Jewish Committee, uttered these words on a recent *60 Minutes* program.<sup>1</sup> His statement reflects the attitudes of many who see the Middle East conflict as purely political, social or geographical.

Yet, as the media report frequently on the clashes involving Israel, they fail to mention that the horrific terrorist attacks of today are only a small chapter in a history that extends back to biblical times. For thousands of years, from Egypt to exile to the Holocaust, Israel has often suffered and been treated unjustly at the hands of other nations.

Some of this history is recorded in textbooks, but the greatest sources of information we have regarding the history of Israel are our own Scriptures, which have been preserved for thousands of years.

These early texts often show Israel crying out to God for peace and justice in the midst of tense and turbulent international situations. Take for instance Psalm 2, which begins with a very pointed question, “Why do the nations rage . . .?” and continues, “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, ‘Let us break Their bonds in pieces

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and cast away Their cords from us.”

Apparently our ancestors weren’t content to “leave God out” of the conflicts they were having with the surrounding nations. In fact, they viewed the troubles they were having as part of a battle that was not merely a military conflict or a political conflict, but a spiritual conflict.

But can such an ancient text really have relevance for today’s Middle East situation? The answer is yes, for when we look at this Psalm closely, we’ll see that not only does it offer a perspective of the past, but also the present and future. Psalm 2 affirms that Israel’s present suffering is ultimately only part of a much greater story. While Psalm 2 begins by telling of the turmoil of the nations, it ends with a promise of blessing for those who will look to God during such tumultuous times.

### **The pattern of the past**

Nobody can say for sure what exactly was taking place when the Psalmist originally wrote, “The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the LORD and against His Anointed.” What we do know is that throughout Israel’s history many other nations have sought to destroy her. These attempts were viewed not only as attacks against the country, but also against her God. The Midrash on Psalm 2 contains a list of leaders who have raged against the country and God of Israel, including Pharaoh, Sisera, Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>2</sup> As the Midrash links these cases together, what emerges is a pattern of rebellion not only against the God of Israel, but also against the “anointed” ones whom God

selected to represent his people (Moses, Deborah, Barak, Hezekiah and the faithful Jewish exiles).

It's interesting to note, though, that in the midst of this explanation of how other nations have responded maliciously to the Lord and his anointed, there is a surprise reading from the rabbis. They point out that the opponents of the Lord's anointed have not always come from other nations. In section 3 of the Midrash, Korah is mentioned for his antagonism toward Aaron, the anointed of the Lord, during the time of the Exodus. Often in the Hebrew Scriptures we see that the nation of Israel as a whole has failed to heed the words of the prophets whom God anointed. Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel were opposed by vast numbers of people within the commonwealth of Israel. The great king David suffered from the rebellion of his own son, Absalom. Another son who suffers unjustly, even from his own, is described in Isaiah 52:13-53:12. The pattern of rejecting the Lord's anointed one is not something that is done exclusively by outside nations.

Unfortunately, rejecting God's representative is just as bad as rejecting God himself. The Midrash reminds us of this, and continually warns people of the present to keep this in mind and not continue in this pattern.

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## PSALM 2

- 1 Why do the nations rage,  
And the people plot a vain thing?
- 2 The kings of the earth set themselves,  
And the rulers take counsel together,  
Against the LORD and against His Anointed,  
saying,
- 3 "Let us break Their bonds in pieces  
And cast away Their cords from us."
- 4 He who sits in the heavens shall laugh;  
The LORD shall hold them in derision.
- 5 Then He shall speak to them in His wrath,  
And distress them in His deep displeasure:
- 6 "Yet I have set My King  
On My holy hill of Zion."
- 7 "I will declare the decree:  
The LORD has said to Me,  
"You are My Son,  
Today I have begotten You.
- 8 Ask of Me, and I will give You  
The nations for Your inheritance,  
And the ends of the earth for Your  
possession.
- 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron;  
You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's  
vessel."
- 10 Now therefore, be wise, O kings;  
Be instructed, you judges of the earth.
- 11 Serve the LORD with fear,  
And rejoice with trembling.
- 12 Kiss the Son, lest He be angry,  
And you perish in the way,  
When His wrath is kindled but a little.  
Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.

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## **Putting a stop to the pattern**

But how can we possibly heed the words of the Psalmist and the Midrash today? Who is the “anointed” of Israel to whom this applies? Where is the ruler we are to accept?

The answer is found later in the Psalm. The writer records the words of God:

“Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession.’” (Psalm 2:6-8)

Despite rebellion that has historically taken place inside and outside Israel, the Midrash urges the reader to have hope because God has declared through Psalm 2:7-8 that, “All these goodly promises are in the decree of the King, the King of kings, who will fulfill them for the Lord Messiah.”

The rabbis were referring to God’s promise that one day there would be one who would be the great king, the King of kings, the promised Messiah, who would deliver the promises of God (2 Samuel 7:6-16; Isaiah 9-11; Daniel 7:9-14). Psalm 2 draws a connection between the “anointed” and the “King,” the Messiah to come.

The hope of this psalm is that one day God will send his Messiah and put an end to the raging nations. The psalm concludes with the message that one day, all must be prepared to give homage to this great one, being prepared to “kiss the Son.” So however long it takes or whenever he comes, one day God will be

exalted, and the Messiah, the “anointed” who is greater than all other “anointed” ones before him, will play a key role in bringing all people to the one true God.

The psalmist recognizes that, given this promise, all opposition to God is futile. The Midrash on Psalm 2 understands two key points: (1) God and his chosen one have not always been followed, but (2) one day *the* chosen one will be followed as a sovereign God delivers his people.

## **So who is the Anointed?**

Even before the Midrash was penned, there were Jewish people who recognized that the Anointed One of Psalm 2 had already come. As members of this first-century Jewish community in Jerusalem were facing a turbulent time, it is recorded that they prayed,

“Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: ‘Why did the nations rage, and the people plot vain things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the LORD and against His [Anointed].’” (Acts 4:24a-26)

The prayer continues,

“For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together . . .” (verse 27)

These first-century Jews believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the “Son” the psalmist wrote about. They believed God had anointed Jesus with ability to heal and deliver. Some of them had heard God speak of him as Son (Matthew 3:17). All of them were despondent when Jesus was put to death, yet in the book of Acts, in the New Testament, it is recorded that they were turning to God in confidence and boldness. Why? Because Jesus’ messiahship had been proven by his resurrection.

They were confident that Jesus was the Messiah, even though believing in him didn’t make these Jewish people very popular with the authorities, both Jewish and Roman. In fact, the words above were spoken as a prayer for Peter, a first-century Jewish man, who had

been imprisoned for telling others about Jesus. So what did these Jews actually pray? “And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness. . . .” They asked to be given strength to continue declaring boldly the identity of the one they knew God had shown to be the chosen one of God. They did so despite the realization that many did not believe in Jesus and would rage against them and him.

Psalm 2 offered real hope for these people in the midst of turmoil. Though many were raging against them, including their friends and family members, these Jewish people believed that if they took refuge in Jesus they would ultimately be safe. After all, the point of the psalm is that whoever opposes God’s anointed stands opposed to God, and whoever takes refuge in God’s anointed will be blessed.

## Conclusion

Two thousand years later, there are still millions of people who believe that Jesus is the Messiah that God promised to send. They believe he offers everlasting peace with God to all those who will believe in him.

Many people do not want to accept this—they believe peace can be achieved by other means.

Psalm 2 tells us that it often is the case that the Lord’s chosen is not recognized and revered. Isn’t it interesting that this very rejection is in itself kind of a “prerequisite” for being the Anointed?

A text like this invites us to look at the big picture, to see beyond news reports and recent history, and consider what God is doing. Psalm 2 tells us that God has a plan to bring peace and justice to the earth through the Messiah. Further, Psalm 2 tells us that to know this anointed Son is to have blessing and shalom, despite the circumstances.

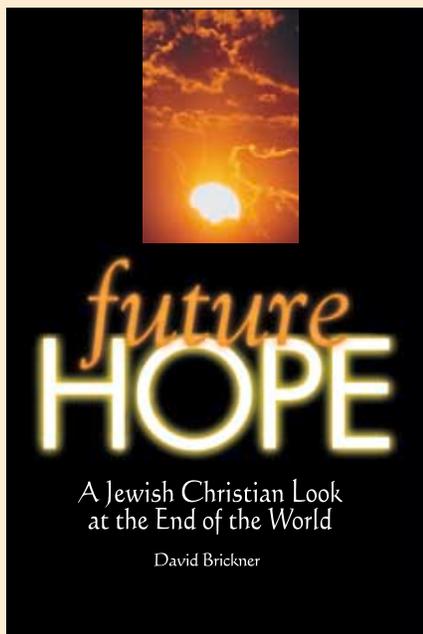
You may well know someone who is talking to you about Y’shua. You may have heard many people speak against him. And yet, if there’s a chance he is the one of whom the Psalmist wrote, the choice of whether or not to believe him is extremely important, whether a person is from Israel or from another “nation.”

After all, it may very well be that the way to achieve true peace is not to “keep God out of it,” but to recognize that God must be in the thick of it for true shalom to take place. ■

1. <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2002/10/03/60minutes/main524268.shtml>

2. “Thus Pharaoh asked: *Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice to let Israel go?* (Ex. 5:2). And when it is said of Sisera that for *twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel* (Judges 4:3), by mightily is meant blasphemously and revilingly, as is suggested by the verse ‘Your words have been all too mighty against Me, says the Lord’

(Mal. 3:13). And Sennacherib spoke foully, *Have any of the gods of the nations ever delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria . . . that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?* (2 Kings 18:33, 25). And Nebuchadnezzar spoke foully: *O Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego . . . who is the god that shall deliver you out of my hand?* (Dan. 3:14-15).”



Do current crises, conflicts and calamities make you concerned about the future? Do you wonder if the human race has any reason to hope? Why not explore what the Scriptures have to say about such things?

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## In The Little Shtetl Of Vaysechvoos

As far as most people in Vaysechvoos were concerned, Reuven Meyerov had every reason to be happy. To begin with, he was handsome, so handsome that the *shidduch* for him was Golda the matchmaker's dream. After all, what young woman in the village would have refused Reuven as her match? Not only was he a pleasure to look at, but by Vaysechvoos standards, he was a man of means. Now it's true, nobody in Vaysechvoos was really rich, but if anyone could be considered well-to-do, it was the Meyerovs. The family was known throughout the region for their superior textiles. A finer material than Meyerov cloth could not be found for miles.

Eventually, much to the chagrin of all the other single women in Vaysechvoos, Reuven married Rivkah, one of the most beautiful women in the shtetl, and soon after, he took over his father's business. It seemed like everything Reuven touched prospered. Every time he went to sell his wares in the nearby shtetls, he came back with many rubles. And all the townspeople loved him. He was a very generous man; good *mazel* seemed to follow him wherever he went—and of course, everyone likes to be around people of such good fortune.

Yet Reuven was not a happy man, and apart from Rivkah, nobody knew the depths of his despair. It all had to do with the children. When their twin sons were born, Reuven and Rivkah felt doubly blessed. Yaakov and Yosef were the best of friends, as thick as any two boys you ever saw. Each one wanted to be just like the other. If Yaakov got a new hat, Yosef wanted the same hat. If Yosef thought it was a good

idea to tease poor Mendel's horse, then Yaakov was right behind him. If...you get the idea.

But things change with time. Eventually, mutual admiration gave way to envy and each began to suspect that the other was always trying to outdo him. If Yaakov got a new hat, then Yosef needed a *better* hat. If they were with a group of friends and Yosef told a story, then Yaakov felt the need to tell a *better* story. It all came to a head over—what else—a girl.

Yosef was the first to fall for Batya. Her beauty and her gentle spirit captured his heart completely. But while Yosef was working up the nerve to let her know of his affections, Yaakov mentioned to his father that he was taken with Batya, and Reuven spoke to Golda the matchmaker, who spoke to Batya's father and a *shidduch* was made. When Yosef heard the news, he confronted his brother: "How could you ruin my one chance for happiness!" But Yaakov insisted that he had no inkling of Yosef's feelings for Batya.

"What, are you blind as well as stupid?" Yosef cried. Stung, Yaakov replied, "Maybe, brother, but I'm the one who's marrying Batya, so I guess I'm doing well enough."

"Well, you may have gained a wife, but you've lost a brother," Yosef retorted, his teeth clenched in anger.

Reuven despaired over the ever-growing rift between his sons. Even though they were civil to each other in public, privately, there was nothing but hostile silence between them. Reuven tried to reason with each of his boys. First he approached Yaakov, to try

and get him to reconsider his marriage to Batya. “You can have your pick of any girl in the shtetl . . . must you choose the one your brother loves?” Yaakov felt a twinge of remorse, but his stubbornness prevailed.

So then Reuven went to Yosef, trying to console him. “Any girl in Vaysechvoos . . . even the Sage’s daughter . . . tell me a name, and I’ll do my best to arrange the match.” Yosef looked at his father and, with tears in his eyes, declared, “Never will I marry anyone but Batya.” Reuven wished with his whole heart that he had never spoken with Golda the matchmaker but being a man of his word, he would not go back on it.

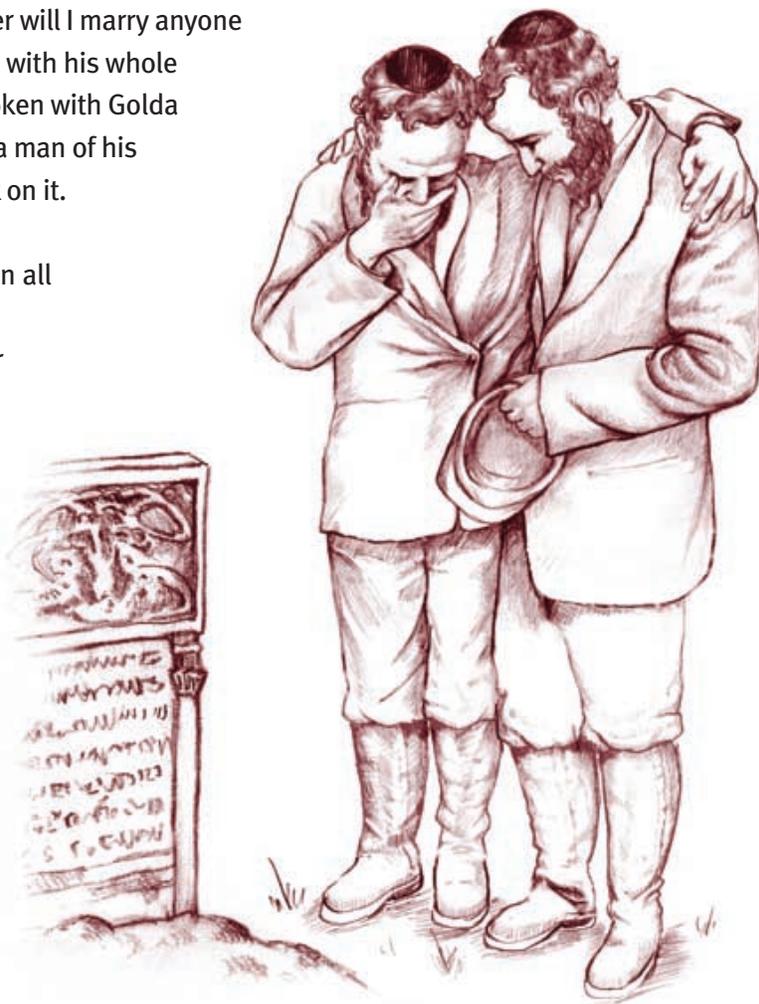
And what of Batya’s heart in all of this? All she knew was that her father had told her she would marry Yaakov, son of Reuven the merchant. As you know, in those days women weren’t given much of a say in whom they married. Yaakov seemed nice enough, and he was certainly handsome and well off; love was something that would grow in time, she reasoned. And there wasn’t much time to think about these things, what with such a wedding to plan.

And then it happened. A rash of pneumonia cases swept through the village. It seemed as though every family in Vaysechvoos had at least one member suffering from the illness. Tragically, Batya was one of the first people to catch the disease, and she was too fragile to fight off the attack on her lungs. She died just two weeks before her wedding date.

Before Reuven, Rivkah, Yaakov and Yosef could properly mourn Batya’s death, Reuven himself became sick with the dreaded pneumonia. Because of his sorrowful state, it wasn’t long before he was on his deathbed. Both of his sons were extremely concerned for their father’s health. Each came and fed him barley soup and talked to him as he lay coughing. They even chanted the prayers for the sick

together. But after they left their father’s bedside, they still refused to speak to each other.

And so Reuven’s condition became worse and worse. And he died, they say, more from a broken heart than from the pneumonia. Rivkah knew this only too well. And as she saw her sons say *kaddish* together at their father’s graveside and then embrace one another in forgiveness, she wept because Reuven would never know of their reconciliation.



Even today, it remains the saddest story ever told in Vaysechvoos.

## GLOSSARY

<b>Shidduch:</b>	arranged betrothal
<b>Mazel:</b>	luck, fortune
<b>Kaddish:</b>	mourner’s prayer

# A Cactus Who Lost His Spikes

**M**y name is Shlomy Abramov. I am a sabra (in Hebrew “tsabar”), a native-born Israeli. Sabra is also the name of the Israeli cactus. I was once very much like that prickly cactus. I was born into a Jewish family and as a boy I loved all of the traditions. But when I was 13, I asked God to show himself to me because, if I could not see him, I would not believe in him. He didn’t seem to answer me. So I stopped believing in him. My family was extremely disappointed, but what could they do? My mind was made up.

So began a time of rebellion in my life. I thought only of money and success. After my stint in the army I joined the police force, then went on to private security work. I earned the nickname “Rambo” after serving as Sylvester Stallone’s bodyguard when he came to Israel. My life was a blur of nightclubs, bodyguarding and fights. You would have wanted to get about as close to me as you would to a prickly cactus.

Yet, underneath my tough exterior, I was looking for spiritual answers anywhere: fortune-tellers, cards, mystics. When they failed to provide anything, I went back to my roots in the synagogue. Even there I didn’t find answers.

But God knew I was searching. While I was on vacation in the northern part of Israel, I met a young woman who talked to me about Y’shua (Jesus). I remember telling her, “Don’t talk about that and don’t say his name in my presence. I’m a Jew. If you were a man, I would break you in half.” Yet

I kept asking her questions. And she made me look at the prophecies about the Messiah in the Hebrew Scriptures<sup>1</sup>—where I saw things about the Messiah that I had never learned in all my years of school.

The prophecies seemed to point to Y’shua, but even though I wanted to accept him as Messiah, I struggled within myself. What about my tradition and my family, I thought? But God, who is bigger than any of my concerns, showed me that Y’shua truly was the Messiah. And so God also gave me the ability to make a bold stand for him. Every day I found myself more and more enthused about Y’shua and the fact that I now had a relationship with the God of the universe.

A big change happened in my life. As an Israeli, I had seen how my uncles and friends died in the army. Before I knew Y’shua as my Messiah, no Arab could stand next to me without my thinking about doing him harm. But when the time came for me to get baptized,<sup>2</sup> I was actually immersed with a Palestinian who became my friend. I know—pretty amazing, huh? Because of Y’shua, the spikes on this tsabar are gone.



Shlomy Abramov

1. <http://www.jewsforjesus.org/answers/prophecy.htm>

2. <http://www.jewsforjesus.org/library/issues/02-10/baptism.htm>

