



CHRISTOPHER J. KATULKA

ISRAEL ALWAYS

Experiencing God's Steadfast Purpose for Everyone
Through His Chosen People



“Christopher Katulka has written a masterful work in *Israel Always*. He walks the reader through the whole counsel of God and Israel’s history as it relates to her purpose and role in redemptive history—past, present, and future. I readily recommend this book to anyone who wants to know why, when other nations come and go in history, Israel always will exist. This book is desperately needed in this day when the church is losing its understanding of Israel’s relevance and importance.”

Jim Showers, DMin

Executive Director/President
The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry

“Christopher faithfully presents the purpose of the nation of Israel in God’s plan from early history until today, helping the reader understand why the land and the people are called ‘the center of the earth.’

“He helps readers to understand contemporary politics and how to treat God’s chosen people in a way that will glorify His name. Had this knowledge been accepted in the hearts of those in the medieval institutional church, as well as those in Israel’s neighboring countries, much of history could have been different.”

Meno Kalisher, DMin

Pastor of Jerusalem Assembly House of Redemption

“Israel is miraculous. Its landscapes and biblical sites inevitably turn tourists into pilgrims! With the logical ‘yesterday, today, and tomorrow’ approach taken in *Israel Always*, as well as the touching personal stories, this an excellent resource for any traveler. And Christopher, with a precise and loving pen, adds an extra dimension beyond historical chronology: his faith in the divine purpose for the chosen people in the land. Unlike any other, this book prepares Christian readers for an unforgettable visit as well as a spiritual journey to their origins.”

Tito Anidjar

Licensed Israeli tour guide with 40 years’ experience

“Books on Israel abound, but each tends to focus on one aspect of Israel’s history, politics, or prophetic role. Christopher Katulka has provided readers with a rare service—a comprehensive, up-to-date survey of Israel in almost every important aspect, yet as a succinct and compelling story. His background in Jewish ministry has given him a unique and necessary perspective for this work, and I enthusiastically commend *Israel Always* to a wide readership!”

J. Randall Price, PhD

Distinguished Research Professor, Biblical & Judaic Studies
The John Rawlings School of Divinity
Liberty University

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HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS
EUGENE, OREGON

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Cover design by Brock Book Design Co., Charles Brock

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Interior design KUHN Design Group

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Israel Always

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Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97408

www.harvesthousepublishers.com

ISBN 978-0-7369-8312-9 (pbk)

ISBN 978-0-7369-8313-6 (eBook)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022938667

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Printed in Columbia

22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 / NI / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*To my wife, Karen.
One inch at a time.*

*And to my children,
Olive
Cohen
Preston
Levi*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As you read through *Israel Always*, I hope you sense my passion to communicate biblical truth about Israel and the Jewish people. I want to thank Dr. Jim Showers and the leadership of the Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, who graciously provide me the platform to do ministry and live out my calling from the Lord. I'm honored to serve with such an amazing ministry.

My passion for Israel and the Jewish people started in high school at the dinner table of Steve and Alice Herzog, 25 years ago. Steve and Alice's hospitality, kindness, grace, generosity, encouragement, and meals with lots of food sparked my interest in Jewish ministry. One of my favorite aspects about serving at the Friends of Israel is ministering side by side with Steve, my mentor, my friend, and my Jewish sage!

I wouldn't have this passion for the Lord or ministry without the love and support of my mother—Michelle Katulka. During my childhood, my mom directed me and my sisters, Caleigh and Olivia, to the relentless love of Jesus. Thank you, Mom, for always placing God at the center of our family and endlessly investing in my relationship with the Lord. And to my dad—Bob Katulka, who is now with Jesus—thank you for always believing in me and always telling me how proud you were of me. I miss you, Dad. I wish you were here so I could hear you laugh at the idea of me authoring a book.

Years ago, I studied at Dallas Theological Seminary to learn more about the Bible; and there I met Karen, my best friend and the love of my life. Karen, no one believes in me like you do. You've championed me every day in my ministry. You encouraged me to keep pushing forward with *Israel Always*, despite the craziness surrounding the pandemic. The Lord has blessed us with a full and meaningful life of love, four beautiful kids, very little sleep, and lots of laughs. I love you!

I also want to thank Steve, Becky, and Nate Miller, along with the entire Harvest House team, for their long-suffering spirit as my young family lived through a once-in-a-century pandemic. The Miller family have become friends; they made my writing experience enjoyable from start to finish, even during a difficult time.

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

ROMANS 1:16-17

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PART 1:

YESTERDAY



CHAPTER 1

THE BIBLICAL STORY OF THE JEWS

“Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn; look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth. When I called him he was only one man, and I blessed him and made him many.”

ISAIAH 51:1-2

The Bible is the best-selling book of all time. According to researcher, James Chapman, four billion Bibles were sold worldwide in the past 50 years.¹ Year after year, the Bible’s reach expands as it’s translated into more languages, giving more people around the world access to God’s Word.

The Bible that is read in numerous countries and various cultures; among different people and also by you—even if it is in a digital format—hasn’t changed through the ages. It’s been telling the same story for thousands of years to billions of readers.

It tells the biblical story of the Jewish people.

The Old and New Testaments progressively unfold Israel’s history, revealing the people’s origins, laws, practices, festival celebrations, worship of God, and how they interacted with the nations around them.

The authors of the biblical books were Jewish and their original readers were Jewish as well. For the multitude of Christians who worship Jesus Christ it's vital to always remember Jesus Himself was Jewish, the apostles were Jewish, and so was the early church.

Within this book are heroic accounts we have tucked away in our hearts and minds from our youth: the parting of the Red Sea, David's victory over Goliath, Jesus walking on water, and Jesus rising from the dead. These are accounts of faith placed in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is the God who watches over Israel, and over you and me (Psalm 121).

When you read the Bible, you are ushered into the unfolding narrative of God's chosen people. The fact they are chosen is the heartbeat of the story of the Jewish people. It's what defines them and separates them from everyone else in the world.

The Jewish prayer book, the *siddur*, is full of prayers thanking God for choosing them out of all the nations. For instance, when the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament) is read in the synagogue, worship begins with a prayer acknowledging God's kindness in choosing the Jewish people to be the recipients of His law. "Blessed are you, Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who has chosen us from all the nations and given us His Torah. Blessed are You, Lord, who gives the Torah" (Birchot HaTorah).

Sabbath prayers remind the Jewish people weekly that God chose them and gifted them with a day of rest, which serves as a visible indication that they are set apart from all the other nations: "For you have chosen us and sanctified us out of all the nations, and have given us the Sabbath as an inheritance in love and favor. Praised are you, Lord, who hallows the Sabbath."

Even in the closing of the morning, afternoon, and evening services, the *Aleinu* prayer, which grapples with the great responsibility of being the chosen people, reconfirms their faith and dedication to God. "It is our duty to praise the Master of all, to exalt the Creator of the Universe, who has not made us like the nations of the world and has not placed us like the families of the earth; who has not designed our destiny to be like theirs, nor our lot like that of all their multitude."

To be chosen in the eyes of God means to be different from all the other peoples of the earth. According to the Bible, the Jewish people were set apart to accomplish a divine task. God defined their uniqueness to Moses at Mount Sinai:

“Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites (Exodus 19:5-6).

As an outsider looking in, for a people to be chosen by God can sort of seem like those who are within are members of an exclusive club. However, God chose Israel to be a “kingdom of priests” who would reach out to connect a broken world to Himself. For some of God’s chosen people, this position was considered more of a curse than a blessing.

In the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, the main character, Tevye, struggles as a religious Jew to uphold his beliefs and traditions with his family, which includes five daughters. The pressures and influences from the outside world were quickly eroding the vision he had for his family and their way of life. Tevye, knowing that God has chosen his people and set them apart from the rest of the world, desperately cries out in a Job-like fashion, “I know. I know. We are the chosen people. But, once in a while, can’t You choose someone else?”

To fully understand all the prayers, cultural references, and even comedic relief connected to God’s choosing of the Jewish people, you must go back to where it all started, in the earliest parts of the Bible.

The biblical story of the Jewish people begins with a journey, an odyssey that is both physical and spiritual in nature. God called Abraham to step out in faith to follow Him into places unknown. The step of faith required a trust in God’s voice that gave him the confidence to start walking in a new direction. The journey did more than change his physical surroundings; God chose Abraham to reintroduce the world to its Creator.

A PROMISE BUILT ON FAITH

There are 50 chapters in Genesis. Only 11 are dedicated to creation, the fall, the great flood, and the dispersion of mankind throughout the world. You might think an entire biblical book would be dedicated to the earliest movements of creation and human history, but that wasn't God's intention. The plotline in Genesis uses the creation account as a vehicle to introduce one specific man to the one true God who created the heavens and earth.

Let me introduce you to Abraham who, at the time, was called Abram. Genesis 12 opens with God's call to this man:

The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse, and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:1-3).

God's call to Abraham time-stamped the official beginning of the biblical story of the Jewish people. Abraham was asked to leave behind his family, people, culture, and religion to embark on a faith journey to start a new family, new people, new culture, and new faith.

DID YOU KNOW?

According to Jewish tradition, Abraham is the father of both the race and religion of the Jewish people. He is fondly remembered and honored as "our Father Abraham."

Abraham was raised in a polytheistic world, which means his people worshipped a multitude of gods. But the God who called Abraham didn't sit among a cohort of Mesopotamian idols. Abraham's God

stood out. He was different from the gods who were often represented by carved images. According to the beginning of Genesis, He was the One true invisible God who created the heavens and the earth and shared His majesty with no one.

God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 is the foundation of the biblical story of the Jews and the thread that's woven throughout all the Scriptures. The voice who commanded Abraham "Go" promised that if Abraham would step out in faith, he would receive the three necessary ingredients to become a nation with God's divine imperative:

1. Land (Genesis 12:1)
2. Descendants (Genesis 12:2a)
3. Blessing (Genesis 12:2b-3)

First, God would give Abraham a land, a place he and his family could inhabit. Every nation needs territorial boundaries (chapter 2 will



A 4,000-year-old Canaanite gate is dubbed "Abraham's Gate." Tradition holds the patriarch passed through this gate to rescue his nephew Lot.

provide more details on the role the land plays in the biblical story). According to God's promise, this land stretched from "the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates" (Genesis 15:18).

Second, the citizens of Abraham's nation would consist of his descendants. God tested Abraham's faith with this promise. The patriarch's wife, Sarah, was 90 years old and barren since her youth. This facet of the promise would require a deep trust that God could perform a miracle.

Finally, God promised Abraham and his descendants a multifaceted blessing on this journey. First, Abraham's name would always be associated with blessing: "I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing." Second, God would protect Abraham's family wherever they went: "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse." Last, Abraham's divine purpose is wrapped up in the blessing: "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

DID YOU KNOW?

"I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse" is the promise given to assure Abraham of God's protection. The phrase "whoever curses you I will curse" consists of two different Hebrew words translated "curse." The first use of "curse" (*qālal*) literally means "to take lightly," while the second "curse" (*ārar*) was God's oath that anyone who took Abraham or this promise lightly would be excluded from the blessing of the covenant.

This three-part promise—the land, the descendants, and the blessing—is foundational to the story of the Jewish people in the Bible because it's the basis for their identity as a chosen nation. But it was all predicated upon Abraham's willingness to step out in faith and follow God. And according to the text, "Abram went, as the LORD had told him" (Genesis 12:4).

Abraham's step of faith shook the world and changed the course

of human history forever. Through this unsuspecting individual, God would intervene—He would bring redemption to all families of the earth through a promised land, a chosen people, and an eternal blessing.

TURNING GOD'S PROMISE INTO A CONTRACT

On the journey there were moments of deep trust in the Lord and anxiety concerning the future. In these ways, Abraham's faith journey is no different than yours or mine.

[The LORD] took [Abram] outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. He also said to him, "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it." But Abram said, "Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?" (Genesis 15:5-8).

In the span of just two verses, Abraham experienced great faith in God's ability to provide and real doubt when he didn't see the proof of God's promise.

PLACES TO VISIT: TEL DAN

A beautiful nature reserve in northern Israel that houses the ancient Canaanite gate that's been dubbed "Abraham's Gate." It is likely that the gate was standing in the days of Abraham when he went through the land in Genesis 14, and possibly even earlier during his original travels into the land of Canaan.

To prove His dedication to Abraham and cement His promise, God entered into a contractual agreement through an ancient ritual. The

more literal term used to explain what happened is that God “cut” a covenant with Abraham.

God commanded Abraham to collect a heifer, a female goat, a ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon. After hearing these instructions, Abraham instinctively acted. He cut the land animals in half while leaving the birds whole. To the modern reader, this probably sounds otherworldly, but for Abraham and the people of his time, this was a common procedure for making a binding contract.

In a normal covenant ceremony, two parties would walk side by side between the animal parts. A simple curse was placed on the two parties: If one party didn't live up to their end of the bargain, their fate would be that of the animals they passed through.² The prophet Jeremiah alluded to this ancient contract: “Those who have violated my covenant and have not fulfilled the terms of the covenant they made before me, I will treat like the calf they cut in two and then walked between its pieces” (Jeremiah 34:18).

However, there is a twist in this covenant God made with Abraham. Just as you expect God and Abraham to walk between the split animals, the text finds our nomadic patriarch asleep as God passed through the pieces alone. This covenant left the realm of the temporal and entered the realm of the eternal with Abraham's absence. The destiny of Israel and the Jewish people were tied solely to God's name.

DID YOU KNOW?

The everlasting covenant God cut with Abraham is symbolically remembered through the act of circumcision (Genesis 17:9-14). Circumcision is a customary religious practice called *Brit Milah* (Covenant of the Circumcision) and is performed on Jewish males eight days after birth.

If God doesn't fulfill the promise, then He is a liar. It's God's holy name and reputation at stake here. The biblical story of the Jewish

people rests solely on God’s faithfulness to see this covenant promise through to the end—to use His chosen people the way He pledged He would. The promise to Abraham is an unbreakable vow ensuring the divine task of bringing blessing to all the families of the earth would not be thwarted.

TRACING THE COVENANT THROUGH THE BIBLE

The covenant that started with Abraham didn’t rest with him. If it had, the biblical story of the Jewish people would be buried with Abraham in Hebron at the Machpelah—the burial cave of the patriarchs. The following chart shows that all throughout Scripture God remembers and honors His promise to Abraham.

GOD’S COVENANT TO ABRAHAM THROUGH THE BIBLE		
Isaac	God’s covenant to Abraham passed on to Isaac	Genesis 26:2-4
Jacob	God’s covenant to Abraham and Isaac passed on to Jacob	Genesis 28:13-15
Joseph	Joseph wishes to be buried in the Promised Land based on God’s covenant to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob	Genesis 50:24
Moses	Moses’ famous words “Let my people go!” were rooted in God’s covenant to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob	Exodus 2:24-25
Israel Enters the Promised Land	God reminded the Israelites before they entered the Promised Land that their inheritance wasn’t of their own righteousness, but grounded on an unconditional pledge to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob	Deuteronomy 9:5
Israel During the Reign of Kings	Despite Israel’s disobedience to the Lord, God remained compassionate toward them because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob	2 Kings 13:22-23

GOD'S COVENANT TO ABRAHAM THROUGH THE BIBLE		
Israel's Prophets	Despite Israel's continual disobedience to the Lord and their impending judgment, the prophets remain confident that God will restore Israel's fortunes to her former glory because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob	Micah 7:20
Jesus' Ministry	The coming of Jesus was seen as God's faithfulness to remember Israel through His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob	Luke 1:72-73
The Church Age	In the book of Acts and the epistles, the promise made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob remains a vital part of reaching the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ	Acts 3:25; Galatians 3:7-9
Israel's Prophetic Future	God's covenant with the patriarchs remains intact and will guarantee Israel's protection and restoration because of His faithfulness to fulfill the oath He swore to Abraham	Romans 11:28-29

The covenant was passed to Abraham's descendants as an inheritance, pushing the biblical plotline forward. The divine purpose of a promised land, a chosen people, and an eternal blessing began at the roots—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—and continued upward to all the branches of Abraham's family tree.

PLACES TO VISIT: **HEBRON**

Abraham purchased a plot of land here to bury his wife Sarah (Genesis 23). Later, Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Leah would also be laid to rest here in what is now known as the Machpelah.

TENSION IN THE BIBLICAL STORY OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

Generation after generation, God protected the heirs of the covenant promise. The holy and perfect God—who freed His chosen people from slavery in Egypt, gave them the law, and guided them into the Promised Land—worked with fallible and imperfect humans. Frequently, God would discipline the people of Israel for their disobedience, but He would never forsake them because of the covenant promise. Remember, it was only God who walked between the pieces of the animals. It is His holy reputation that is on the line.

Do you see why God was the only one to walk through the pieces, making a covenant with Himself? Had Abraham entered the covenant with God, the Bible would have been a much shorter book; the promise would have been broken before the close of the book of Genesis. The writer of Hebrews wrote it perfectly: “When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself” (Hebrews 6:13).

This book is called *Israel Always* because the biblical story of the Jewish people extends throughout all of Jewish history. It is built on the eternal promise that God gave a promised land, to a chosen people, to fulfill a divine mission to bless all the families of the earth. God will sustain the Jewish people during their darkest moments and even guide them to return to their ancient homeland all because of an oath He made to Abraham.

The divine mission mentioned above includes God’s pursuit of you, and all others who answer to His call for salvation in Christ. Come with me and we will experience the Holy Land and the epic of the Jewish people together, and along the way, witness God’s continuing work through His chosen people from the book of Genesis all the way into eternity.