

BETWEEN TWO MOUNTAINS

THE STORY OF ISRAEL AND THE
BIRTH OF THE CHURCH



THE BABYLONIAN CONQUEST

The Fall of the Southern Kingdom



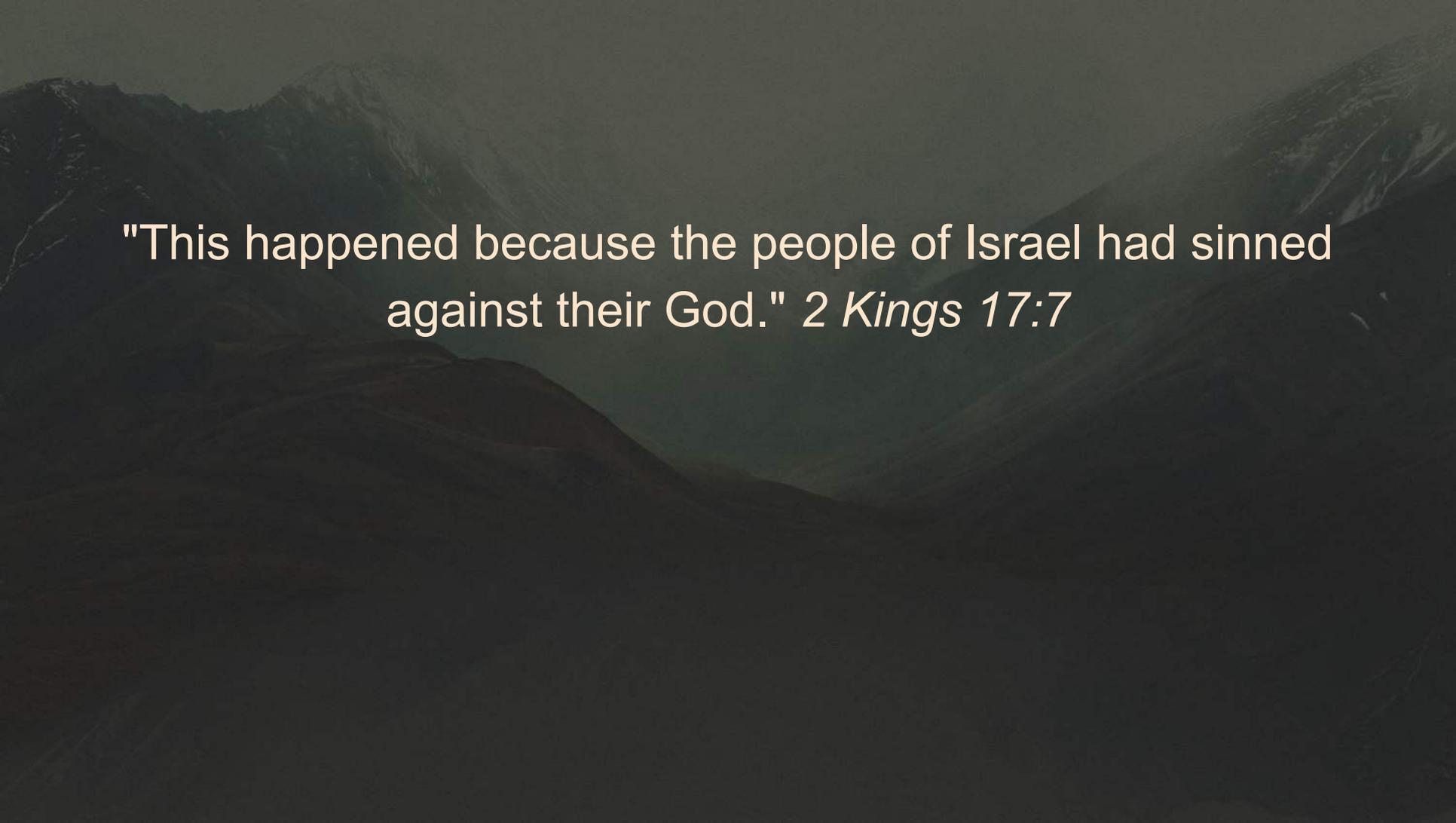
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- The Northern Kingdom (a.k.a. Israel) made up of 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel included areas like Galilee, Samaria, and parts of the Transjordan (east of the Jordan River).
- Its capital city was Samaria
- Despite repeated warnings from prophets like Elijah, Elisha, and Amos to turn from idolatry and injustice, the Northern Kingdom was conquered by Assyria in 722 BC.



"This happened because the people of Israel had sinned
against their God." *2 Kings 17:7*

- The Southern Kingdom (a.k.a. Judah) consisted of 2 (of the 12) tribes of Israel encompassing the region south of Samaria (known as Judah).
- Its capital city was Jerusalem.
- Unlike the Northern Kingdom, Judah lasted over a century longer, due to its occasional reforms and faithfulness to God, before being conquered by the Babylonians.

Key Facts: Fall of the Southern Kingdom

- A. Judah fell to Babylon in 586 BC after years of idolatry and injustice.
- B. The Babylonians sacked Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple, exiled the elites, and left the land in ruins.
(2 Kings 24-25)
- C. The fall of Judah/Jerusalem shattered national identity, disrupted worship, and forced God's people to redefine their faith in a foreign land.

The Assyrian Approach to Conquest

Strategy: Assimilation through deportation and resettlement

- A. They forcibly deported large portions of the population to other parts of the Assyrian empire.
- B. Simultaneously, they repopulated the land with foreigners from other conquered regions (2 Kings 17:24).
- C. The goal was to break national identity, destroy resistance, and mix cultures to ensure control.

The Assyrian Approach to Conquest

Result: Led to the loss of tribal identity

- A. The intermarriage between foreign settlers and remaining Israelites produced the Samaritans, later despised by Jews in the New Testament period. (i.e., the Samaritan woman, John 4)
- B. Imported peoples brought their own gods leading to blended worship of Yahweh and pagan deities.

The Babylonian Approach to Conquest

Strategy: Preservation through exile & assimilation

- A. They exiled the political, religious, and intellectual elite to Babylon (e.g., Daniel, Ezekiel).
- B. Unlike Assyria in the north, Babylon did not populate the Southern Kingdom (Judah) with foreigners.
- C. Many common people (including the prophet, Jeremiah) were left in the land under appointed governors like Gedaliah (2 Kings 25:22)

The Babylonian Approach to Conquest

Result: Ethnic and religious identity was retained in exile

- A. The exile led to the rise of synagogue worship, scribal traditions, and a deepened emphasis on Torah observance.
- B. Eventually, many Jews returned to Judah after the Persians conquered Babylon (539 BC), leading to the restoration of Jerusalem and Temple worship under Ezra and Nehemiah.

Prophets in Exile: Ezekiel & Daniel

Hope in a Foreign Land

- A. Contemporaries: both lived during the Babylonian exile.
- B. Ezekiel began his prophetic ministry in 593 BC, five years after being exiled in 597 BC (Ezekiel 1:1–2).
- C. Daniel was taken into exile earlier, in 605 BC, but his visions and writings span a longer period (from the Babylonian court through the Persian era).

Ezekiel: Levite by Birth, Priest by Calling, Prophet by Necessity

- A. His priestly service was cut short by the Babylonian conquest of Judah and his subsequent exile.
- B. In Babylon, God redirected Ezekiel from temple service to prophetic ministry.
- C. In Ezekiel 37, God gives him a vision of a valley filled with dry and scattered bones symbolizing Israel's present hopelessness, yet pointing with hope to a future filled with restoration and redemption.

Ezekiel's Vision: The Valley of Dry Bones

"The hand of the LORD was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "Sovereign LORD, you alone know." Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!" (Ezekiel 37:1-4)

Ezekiel's Vision: The Valley of Dry Bones

"This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'" (Ezekiel 37:5-6)

Ezekiel's Vision: The Valley of Dry Bones

"As I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone... and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army. Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says:'..."

(Ezekiel 37:10-12a)

Ezekiel's Vision: The Valley of Dry Bones

... 'My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.'" (Ezekiel 37:12b-14)

Ezekiel's Vision: The Valley of Dry Bones

"I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms... They will be my people, and I will be their God."
(Ezekiel 37:21-23)

Ezekiel's Prophecy: Unparalleled Fulfillment

1. After nearly 2,000 years of global dispersion, millions of Jews returned to their ancient homeland, culminating in the declaration of the State of Israel, in the aftermath of WWII, on May 14, 1948.

"I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land." (Ezekiel 37:21)

Ezekiel's Prophecy: Unparalleled Fulfillment

2. Ezekiel's vision of dry bones represents Israel as a lifeless, scattered people with no hope. The Jewish people, nearly annihilated in the Holocaust and against all odds, were reconstituted as a sovereign nation, fulfilling the prophetic image of being restored again to life.

"Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.'" (Ezekiel 37:21)

Ezekiel's Prophecy: Unparalleled Fulfillment

3. The modern State of Israel united both Jews from the north (the Kingdom of Israel) and the south (the Kingdom of Judah) into one political entity; something not seen since Solomon's reign.

"I will make them one nation in the land... There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms." (Ezekiel 37:11)

Ezekiel's Prophecy: Fulfillment Still to Come

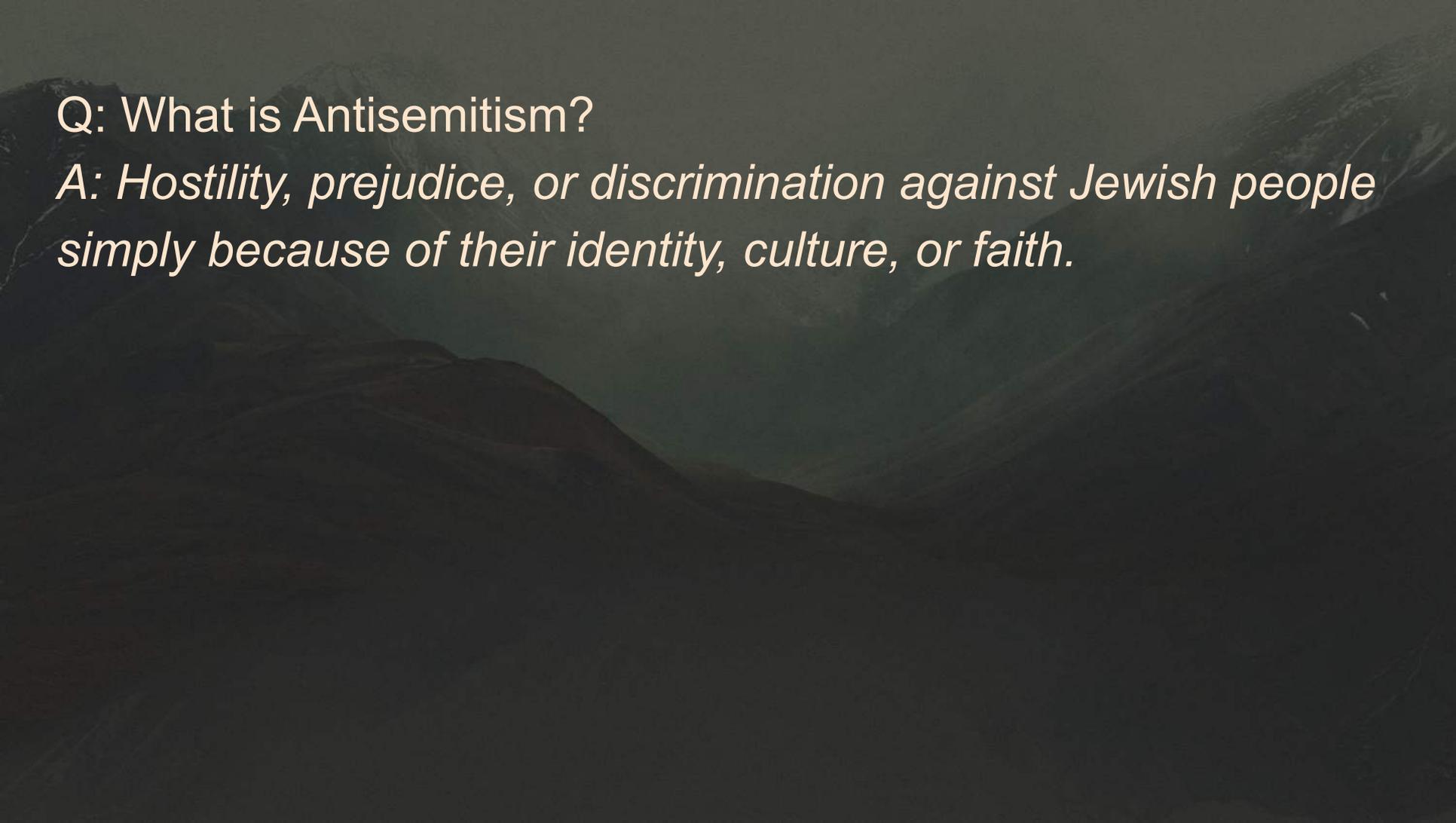
- The language, *“I will cleanse them... they will no longer defile themselves...”* points to a future moment when Israel as a people turns to God and embraces the Messiah, as also prophesied in Zechariah 12:10 & Romans 11:25–27.
- Ezekiel 37:23 is part of the second half of the chapter (vv. 15–28), where God promises not only physical restoration (return to the land), but also spiritual renewal for Israel.

“They will no longer defile themselves with their idols and vile images or with any of their offenses, for I will save them from all their sinful backsliding, and I will cleanse them. (Ezekiel 37:23)

Q: Is modern Israel the biblical Israel?

A: *The answer is nuanced.*

- A. The Jewish people today are historically and ethnically connected to the ancient people of Israel.
- B. The modern State of Israel (est. 1948) is a political nation and its rebirth a fulfillment of biblical prophecy.
- C. It should not be confused with "Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise" which refers to both Jews & Gentiles who are in right relationship with God via faith in the Messiah. (see Rom. 9:6–8; Gal. 3:29)

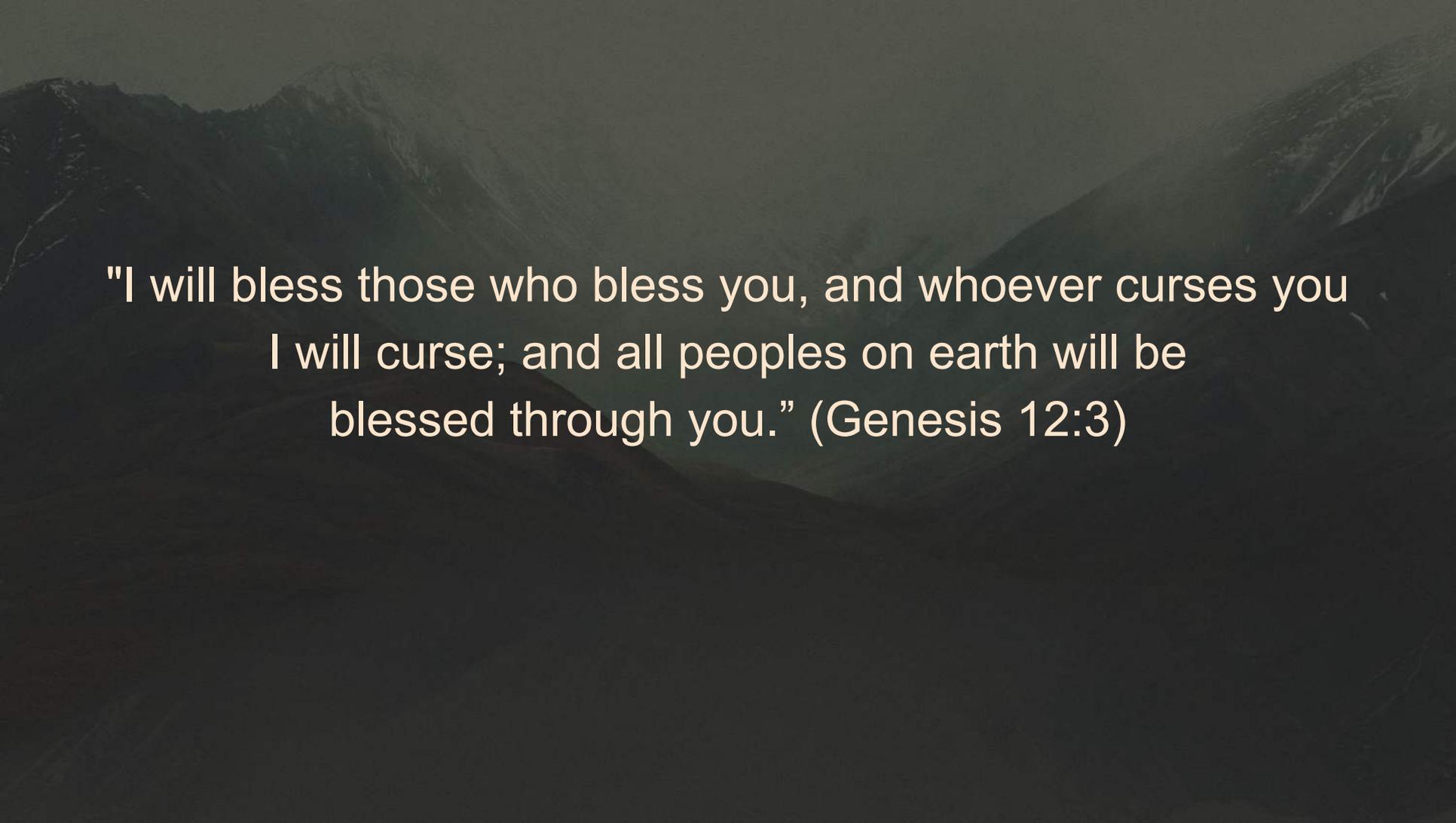


Q: What is Antisemitism?

A: Hostility, prejudice, or discrimination against Jewish people simply because of their identity, culture, or faith.

A Caution for Christians

- Christians may disagree with the actions or policies of the modern State of Israel, especially regarding issues like Gaza or human rights, just as we would with any nation (even our own).
- However, we must be careful that our criticism remains political, not ethnic, religious, or racial in nature.
- Opposing decisions of the Israeli government is not antisemitic: but blaming Jewish people for decisions of the Israeli government, invoking conspiracies, and denying Jewish identity or national legitimacy crosses the line.



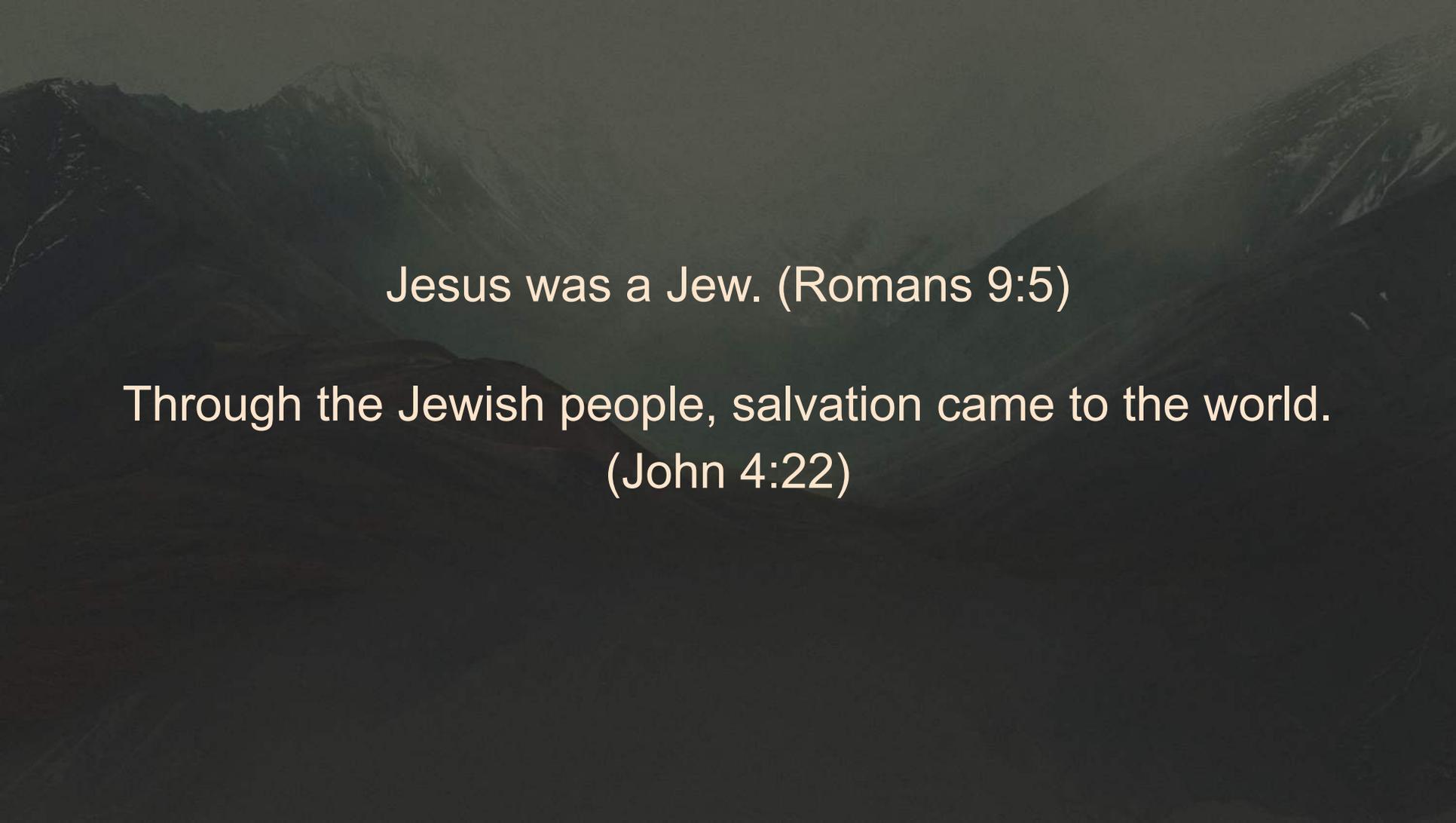
"I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you
I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be
blessed through you." (Genesis 12:3)

What It Means

- A. God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants still matters.
- B. God takes seriously how nations and individuals treat the Jewish people.
- C. Christians are called to honor, pray for, and seek the good of the Jewish people.

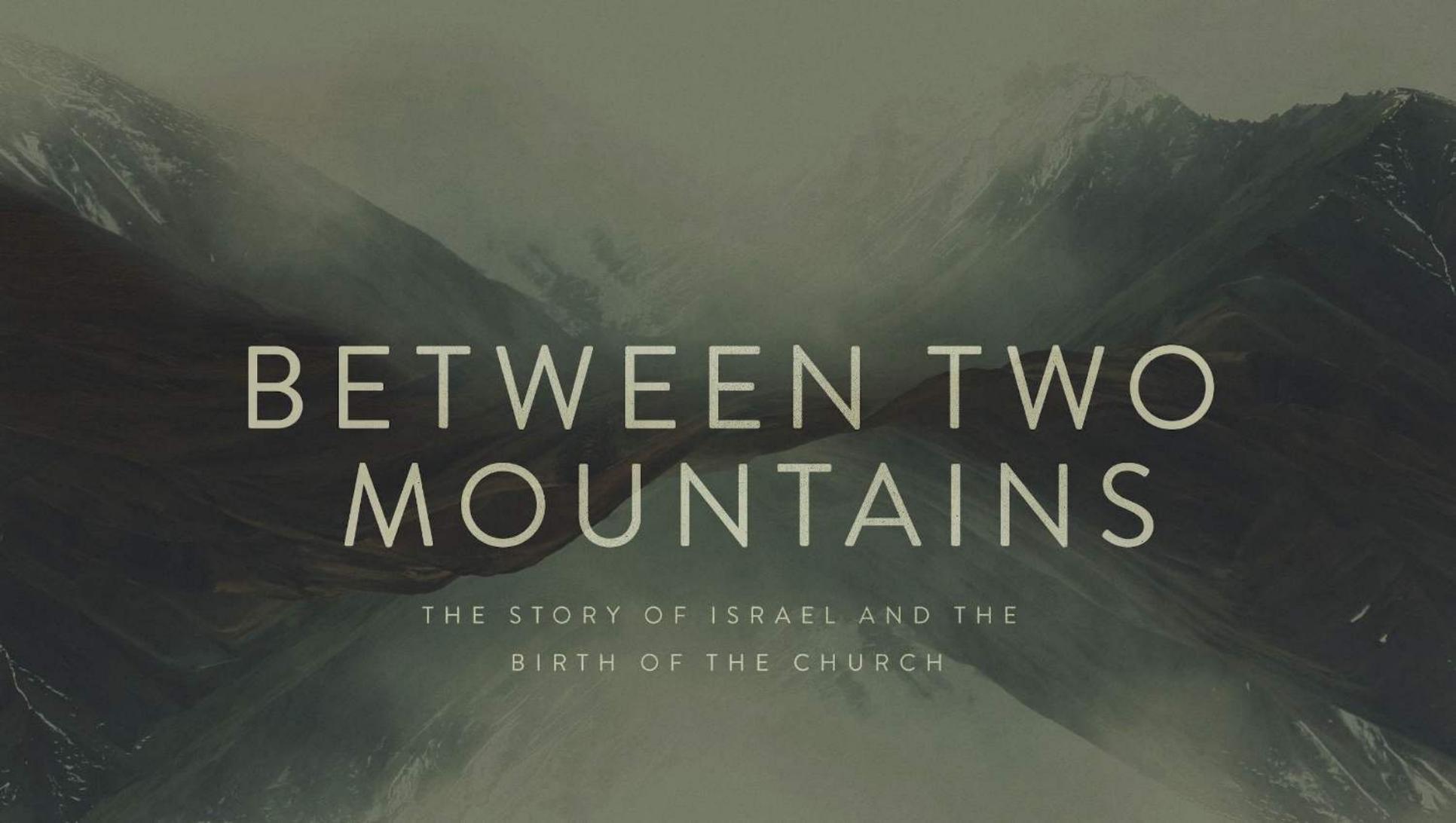
What It Doesn't Mean

- A. It does not mean that Christians must blindly support every action taken by the modern State of Israel.
- B. It does not require Christians to remain silent on actions taken by the modern State of Israel. As U.S. citizens, speaking out is a right and privilege. As Christians, when we do so, we are expected to represent Jesus well.
- C. It does not mean Jewish people are saved apart from faith in the Messiah, Jesus Christ.



Jesus was a Jew. (Romans 9:5)

Through the Jewish people, salvation came to the world.
(John 4:22)



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