

## CHAPTER 3

### ISRAEL – A NATION OF PRIESTS

*As you continue to lead your group, remember that prayer and study is the key to successful meetings. Excellence attracts God's favor. If you are leading the group, then accept the call of God to be the leader. Dream and pray about ways to minister in the group. Let this be more than just a mental Bible study. Pray that it will be life changing for you and for the group. Your own life experience in the Spirit needs to be caught as well as taught. Your preparation will challenge others to prepare. Encourage participation with every person. Do not allow one person to dominate any meeting. If someone begins to move in a wrong direction, encourage them to keep learning but do not let them move the group into meaningless discussions.*

Exodus 19:6 – “You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

Consider also the recipients of Peter's first letter according to 1 Peter 1:1-2 and his statement in 1 Peter 2:4-12 about their “holy priesthood” to a pagan world.

**What we often do not realize is that Peter's first letter is clearly addressed to Jewish believers – “to God's elect, strangers in the world.” Peter's primary calling was to the Jews, just as Paul's was primarily to the Gentiles. James and Hebrews, as well as the gospel of Matthew, were directed first to the Jews, just as most of Paul's letters were directed to non-Jews (although, obviously, all letters are applicable to all believers because Gentiles are grafted in to the promises of Israel).**

In thinking of Israel's priestly role, consider that a priest is a God-worshipper who represents God to the people and represents the people to God.

Exodus 20:3-4,7 – “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol.... You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God.” – p. 51

“The nations of the world have worshiped their many gods, but only Israel and religious faith born out of Jewish roots have maintained that ‘the LORD our God, the LORD is one.’” – p. 52

In what ways has Israel placed its stamp on the nations of the world?

How do the first three of the Ten Commandments articulate Israel's priestly role?

***Belief in the One True God has been kept alive through the nation of Israel. Every monotheistic religion owes a debt to biblical understanding.***

Relate the history of Israel to Deuteronomy 28.

***Israel's choices have always brought about consequences. If Israel had been faithful to their God, they would never have lost possession of the Promised Land. All the horrors that have affected the Jewish nation have their root in their disobedience and expulsion from the Land of their Promise as a result of that disobedience.***

***In our day believers have often lost the reality of cause and effect in their own lives. Since we know that our sins have been nailed to the cross of Jesus, we mistakenly believe that there are no longer consequences for our disobedience. The cross did not, however, remove cause and effect from the life of a believer. In Galatians 6:7-8 Paul told the Galatians that we still reap what we sow, even as believers.***

Compare today's pluralistic society with Israel's idolatry. How do we live graciously and lovingly in today's world while confidently declaring our faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the uniqueness of Israel's Promised Messiah and Deliverer Yeshua?

***Our challenge is to operate in Holy Spirit-activated grace and love toward every person rather than a spirit of judgment or criticism. At the same time, our own actions, through the empowering of the Holy Spirit (grace), do not mirror the actions of our surrounding neighbors.***

#### **\*MINISTRY**

***Pray this prayer (using Psalm 122:6 -9): "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: 'May those who love you be secure. May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels.' For the sake of my brothers and friends, I will say, 'Peace be within you.' For the sake of the house of the Lord our God I will seek your prosperity." Amen.***

#### **A GOD WHO RESTS**

How does Sabbath observance speak of the goodness of God?

***First, we need to accept the goodness of God through Sabbath rest. The Sabbath rest is our way of saying, "We are not slaves. We serve a God who provides for us. We can rest." Isaiah 58:13-14 indicates that God will work as***

*we delight in the Sabbath and rest in His work. He will “cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.” This is similar to the prophet’s admonition to Jehoshaphat to “stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you” (2 Chronicles 20:17). As we rest, He works.*

*Jesus observed Sabbath differently from his contemporaries. When confronted, he said, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath”( Mark 2:27). This is a Jesus-originated principle that must underlie all Sabbath observance. The kind of Sabbath rest to which Jesus and the prophets are speaking is a blessing not a burden to man.*

Read Acts 15:1-29, Colossians 2:16-17, Romans 14:1-8 and Hebrews 4:1-11 and consider how a non-Jewish believer is to relate to the Sabbath command. What principle is involved? How should this commandment affect our lives? Are Jewish believers to observe the Sabbath?

*The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) seems to have been coming against a legalistic observance of rules other than a faith-activated rest, a God-given gift to those who call upon Him. The observance of Sabbath is God’s gracious offer of rest rather than a continual frenetic life of activity. Hebrews 4:11 encourages the believer to enter into the Sabbath rest. There are two aspects of this Sabbath rest, the one given to us weekly on the calendar, plus the rest given in our spirits by not having to work for our salvation. In fact, a legalistic observance of Sabbath actually works against the very thing Jesus was trying to avoid. As human beings we are a three-fold person: body, soul, and spirit. The Sabbath is intended as a rest for each part of us.*

#### **\*MINISTRY**

*Pray this prayer: Father, in the name of Jesus, we declare as a group that we will labor and will be diligent to enter the rest that You have provided for us. In Jesus’ name, amen. (See Hebrews 4:11.)*

### A GOD WHO PROTECTS

What things do we know today as scientifically and medically accurate that were included in the Torah (the first five books of Moses) or the Tenakh (the Old Testament)?

*If you have a copy of S. I. McMillen’s None of These Diseases, this would be an excellent resource. He compares the medical remedies at the time of Moses with God’s recommendations on cleanliness and health. Refer also to the section of the book about washing of hands before seeing patients, less*

*instances of cervical cancer in wives of circumcised males, the time of circumcision, and other comparisons.*

Listen to Jesus' words about the greatest commandment in Matthew 22:34-40 and consider how love is the fulfillment of all the law and the prophets.

*The Jewish rabbis speak of 613 commandments. In some ways those can be condensed to ten. Jesus condensed them to two: loving God and loving your neighbor. All commandments are included in these two.*

**\*MINISTRY**

*Group prayer based upon Psalm 91.*