

THE
HOLY LAND
KEY

UNLOCKING END-TIMES PROPHECY
THROUGH THE LIVES OF
GOD'S PEOPLE IN ISRAEL

RAY BENTLEY

WITH GENEVIEVE GILLESPIE

Praise for
The Holy Land Key

“Ray Bentley has immersed himself in the land of the Book and the people of the land. His challenge to not only study prophecy but also to live it rings with the clarity of a bell. He makes an ancient subject come alive, and I found this book riveting and convicting and moving.”

—JERRY B. JENKINS, coauthor of the *New York Times*
best-selling *Left Behind* series

“In *The Holy Land Key*, Ray Bentley ties together history, current events, prophecy, Israel’s feasts and festivals, and the progress of the gospel among Jews and Arabs. Ray also explains the mystery of the Messiah’s return, which God laid out for us to see through dramatic signs in the heavens. This book will challenge your thinking, fill you with hope, and bless your life.”

—TOM DOYLE, vice president of e3 Partners and author
of *Dreams and Visions: Is Jesus Awakening the Muslim World?*

“Seeing prophecy through the eyes of God’s chosen people, Israel, is the only way to fully understand all its implications. Ray Bentley sets forth the importance of being on God’s calendar and seeing the patterns that are visible in God’s feasts. Ray gives us a greater understanding of the signs in the heavens as God’s signals of coming events. I am glad he is getting the truth out in these last days, as we know time is short!”

—PASTOR MARK BILTZ, founder of El Shaddai Ministries

“What I appreciate most about *The Holy Land Key* is the common ground Ray Bentley and I have in our hearts. We both desire that out of every tribe, tongue, and nation countless numbers of individuals would be saved and brought into the kingdom of Christ. I appreciate the growing interest Ray has in the perspective of Arab and Palestinian believers living in the land. We do not have to allow differences

to keep us from loving each other and enjoying the wondrous friendship and fellowship Christ brings.”

—BOTRUS MANSOUR, general director of Nazareth Baptist School
and author of *When Your Neighbor Is the Savior*

“*The Holy Land Key* offers a look into the heart of one who is a lover of God’s people and a true friend of the Jewish people. Ray’s longtime interest in God’s covenant with His people, Israel, and his insatiable desire to find God’s mind on the issues of the conflict in the Middle East make this book a pleasure to read.”

—TASS SAADA, founder and president of Seeds of Hope
and author of *Once an Arafat Man*

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P R E S S

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*To my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ
and my beautiful wife, Vicki.
And to the memory of Ron Nachman
and his beloved wife, Dorit,
who carries on his legacy.
Ron will always be the John Wayne of Israel to me—
a title I know he relished!*



*I also dedicate this book to Chuck Smith,
my beloved pastor,
who has gone home to the Lord.
He taught me to love God's Word
and Israel and her people.
And he ignited a whole generation of believers,
including me,
with a passion to prepare the way
for the Lord's return.
Maranatha!*

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church, to her divine calling in blessing the Jewish people and her neighbors “for such a time as this.”

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These Are the People the Prophets Saw

THE HOLY LAND KEY IS NOT A BOOK THAT RENEWS familiar debates over a prophetic time line or argues for or against a particular interpretation of John's Revelation. We will not try to narrow down the most likely candidates for the Antichrist. It is important to read prophecy carefully, to handle its interpretation with great care, and to anchor all our conclusions in God's Word, but we also want to explore some new territories in Scripture that have prophetic significance.

In the chapters that follow, we will look at certain passages of Scripture from a Hebrew perspective. We also will study what God has written in the heavens and what the Bible says about these heavenly revelations. We will look at the testimony of history, we will study the Jewish calendar and the biblical feasts, and we will even find startling insights based on research done by NASA on blood moons.

Paul wrote in Romans 1 that we are without excuse if we fail to see God and His character in the signs that are clear in His creation. God has left signs for us in more places than we can imagine. It would be a mistake to ignore any of them.

God's Covenant with His Chosen People

One of the clearest and most enduring signs is God's unbroken relationship with the Jewish people. The people living today in the Holy Land are the people the ancient

prophets saw in the end times. They are the descendants of Jesus's family and of His disciples. They are living evidence of God's plan to gather His people back to Israel after two thousand years of exile.

Israel is a witness to the world. It is not an exaggeration to say that when we look at Israel, we are looking into the eyes of God. When we look at Israel, we see God's intentions for the world. We will explore this further in the chapters that follow.

We also will look at patterns throughout history that open our eyes to what the very near future holds. Some of the patterns that most clearly reveal God's plans as well as His heart are found in the Hebrew calendar and the timing of the feasts of the Lord listed in Scripture. The significance of these Jewish holidays is far greater today than was the original purpose of each feast.

Further, it has been revealed that the timing of the feasts—right down to the specific dates—coincides with repeated cycles of astronomical events and patterns. The full meaning of this correlation remains to be seen, but it is significant that God confirms the testimony of history, of the Scriptures, of religious observance, and of the signs He has put in the heavens. All these together point to the coming—and the return—of the promised Messiah. Ultimately, they point to Israel's destiny and to the destiny of humanity. The Jews were given the predictions of the ancient prophets long before the Christians inherited those Scriptures along with the New Covenant of God's Word. It is important to look carefully at the way Jews understand the written testimony of the Hebrew prophets. Familiar prophecies from thousands of years ago are being fulfilled today in Israel. It is no overstatement to say that God's plan is being moved forward by committed Jews, and this, too, is a revelation to us.

God called Israel the "apple of His eye" (Zechariah 2:8). That never has changed, and when God looks at His chosen people today, He sees His plans unfolding at the end of this age. When we look at Israel, we see God's intentions for the world. I will introduce you to modern-day Israelis who—no matter if they are Jewish or Gentile, Christian or otherwise—are answering the call of God on their lives. These current-day brothers and sisters of Jesus have much to show us of the ways and the heart of God.

But the people of Israel and their work to restore the Holy Land is only a start.

In addition, we will look at the signs of what God will bring to pass on earth. This includes a study of the heavens, the way time is recorded, and more. A guiding principle here is to identify and learn from patterns that are repeated throughout Scripture and described in 1 Corinthians 15:46: “However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual.” What God does in the natural realm is a picture of what He is doing in the spiritual realm. God reveals His plans and His future work, including what is in store at the end of the age, first in the natural world.

Bringing Prophecy to Life

Prophecy and its interpretation are a fascinating study. You can get lost in the words of God’s ancient messengers, studying their dreams and visions and seeking to piece together the larger picture. It is important to know what God has said through His prophets. However, we need to avoid the tendency to study prophecy with a sort of academic detachment that separates us emotionally—and spiritually—from the impact of what God is doing on earth. Prophecy is a biblical teaching to be lived out. We need to bring prophecy to life by connecting it to our lives and the lives of others.

By getting to know people who live in the Holy Land (Jews, Christians, Israeli Arabs, and Palestinians), we are drawn into more than just the facts of prophecy. We go beyond end-times theories and encounter the people who are involved in the fulfillment of prophecy. These descendants of Jesus are witnessing events He prophesied when He lived in the same land two thousand years ago.

More and more, Christians are taking action by joining with God’s people of Israel. The Israelis witness daily what God is doing in their ancestral land. They are eyewitnesses to the unfolding of God’s work. You and I—and all people of faith who join with Israel in an active way—are part of the prophetic story. A Jewish friend who helped me go much deeper in my study and understanding of prophecy opened my eyes to this truth.

Ron Nachman, the mayor of a small Israeli city in the West Bank, took great risks to help rebuild Israel after the Jews started returning to their homeland after

1948. He read the Hebrew prophets and studied the ways their visions were becoming reality in the Holy Land—the land he was committed to help restore.

Men such as Ron see the solidarity of Christians who work alongside Israelis as an important sign of prophecy being fulfilled. The people living in Israel are already on the scene of God's culminating work on earth: the return of His Son to claim His own. As God brings this age to a close, Israelis are having their eyes opened to God's dealings with humanity. It is not simply the building of a nation, protecting Israel against the enemies that surround it, or arguing the issues related to territory and boundaries as part of the so-called Palestinian question. All those are important, of course, but there is a growing sense that developments are taking place that transcend political, military, and nationalistic concerns. These are spiritual issues and spiritual concerns shared by Jews, Arabs, and Christians alike.

For years we have seen the Arab-Israeli conflict dominate the headlines. As I was writing this book, Israel was criticized for sending aircraft into Syria to destroy missiles supplied by Iran and stored near Damascus. The missiles were said to have a two-hundred-mile range and were en route to Hezbollah fighters. Hezbollah, a sworn enemy of Israel, typically operates in Lebanon but also has joined the fighting in Syria's civil war.¹ Global tensions have focused in and around Israel since the rebirth of the Jewish state in 1948. Just about everything concerning Israel—even its right to exist—remains the focus of international debate in spite of decades of negotiations, wars, shifting boundaries, and treaties.

What Are Israelis Hearing from God?

Many of the signposts we have missed in our past study of prophecy come clearly into view only when we study Scripture in tandem with committed Israelis. How do the people of Israel read the signs of the times? What do they anticipate for the future as they face the hostility of enemies bent on their destruction?

To study prophecy apart from the people who live in the Holy Land is similar to studying a road atlas and pretending you've visited the Grand Canyon or Yosemite National Parks. Reading words on a page is only one of the steps in learning the

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deeper meaning of prophecy. The prophets delivered their prophecies to people who needed to have their eyes and hearts opened to God's plans. None of this has changed since the days of Isaiah and Jeremiah. God has not changed His plans, nor has He stopped speaking to His people—as we will see.

Many of the people I am working with in Israel are hearing from God. He is opening the eyes of His people to the reality of His power, His involvement in world affairs, His never-ending love for His people, and His plans. He is setting things in order to bring about His kingdom on earth, just as His prophets foretold.

In *The Holy Land Key* you will be introduced to contemporary Israelis—from national leaders to local leaders to ordinary citizens. You will begin to hear from God just as those in Israel hear from Him. Let's start making introductions.

PART I



A MORE COMPLETE WAY TO STUDY PROPHECY



Partnering with Those Who Are Helping to Fulfill Prophecy

IT WAS WINTER IN 1977. A HELICOPTER HOVERED OVER a desolate patch of land in the Samarian wilderness. The downdraft created by the aircraft's blades churned up dirt, thrashed the brown shrubs, and muted the pilot's bellowed instructions.

On the ground below, a man watched the copter descend and guided it to a safe landing. Two civilians and ten Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers gathered behind the man on the ground. When the aircraft landed, the soldiers scrambled to secure the supplies and equipment they needed to survive in this harsh environment. The helicopter then lifted off and sped away.

Alone now on a barren hilltop dusted with snow, the men pitched two tents. The small band set up camp in what is regarded by the rest of the world as disputed territory. But in the mind of the man who guided the helicopter to a safe landing, this area had been claimed for Israel thousands of years earlier. He and his partners were here to found a city that would be named in honor of the sacred city, Jerusalem. This new settlement would be known as Ariel, meaning "lion of God."

In the 1970s the Cold War had the world locked in its grip, and Egyptian president Anwar Sadat made an unprecedented journey to Jerusalem, setting off another round of Middle East peace talks. Frank Zappa and Elton John were singing about

Jesus Freaks, and the best-selling book of the decade had declared an epitaph for our planet: *The Late Great Planet Earth*. It was a time of turmoil and instability, and no region of the world was more contested than the territory of the small nation of Israel.

The city of Ariel began as a campground on heavily disputed land. The gutsy families who lived there hauled in water and relied on their own generators for power. A weekly caravan brought in supplies. The emerging city enraged Palestinians and divided Jews, who were not unanimous in supporting Israeli settlements in contested regions.

Nearly a quarter century later, I stayed in the city of Ariel in a hotel that boasted a large crater in its front lobby, the result of a suicide terrorist attack that failed to demolish its target. The land surrounding the hotel should have been barren, having once been empty desert. But in 2001 I could see that the surrounding earth was rich, the new vines were green, and the hotel shimmered with pools and fountains.

Earlier that day I had knelt in the dirt of a vineyard and planted grapevines. The sun warmed my back, but the realization of what I was doing rushed through me with a different kind of warmth. Soldiers in camouflage uniforms stood nearby, their weapons at ease. They were young and appeared to be relaxed. But I knew they were highly trained members of one of the best armies in the world, ready at any moment to defend the land of their heritage.

I am one of many pilgrims who have taken part in the ceremony of planting a vineyard in Ariel. Working the soil and adding new vines to this vineyard somehow helped to clarify a number of issues for me. Ariel is not part of what the world community considers to be Israel. It stands in a hotly disputed area known to the rest of the world as the West Bank. Most Israelis identify this area as Judea and Samaria, part of ancient Israel and now considered part of modern Israel as well. It is a contested region where war could erupt at any moment.

In the heart of this hostile area, a man who had the ruggedness and courage of John Wayne arrived to found a city. That's how it seemed to me, anyway. Ron Nachman is the man who put his life on the line many times, a man who became my close

friend. He was proud to be seen as the John Wayne of Israel. The people of Ariel elected him as mayor for four terms. He is one of the reasons I love Israel.

The life-changing visit to Ariel opened my eyes to the deeper meaning of what God is doing in the world. For me, Israel is no longer just a reference point for a prophetic timetable. I have loved the study of prophecy since I was a teenager, but now the people of Israel make prophecy come alive.

As my friendship with Mayor Nachman deepened, we discussed Scripture and prophecy. He saw Scripture as being fulfilled through the homecoming of so many Jews to Israel, which had begun in earnest after Resolution 181 was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in late 1947. From all over the globe, Jews continue to uproot their lives and resettle in Israel, sometimes at great personal sacrifice.

This near-mythical nation whose story is told in Scripture and history had been removed from the earth, its people taken into exile through a series of deportations. Jews were taken captive to Assyria, Persia, and Babylon and then scattered to the four corners of the globe. No other nation on earth has ceased to exist, with its people dispersed for so long, only to be reborn as a nation on its original land. That, in itself, is a miracle.

A New Awareness of an Age-Old Conflict

After my life-changing visit to Ariel in 2001, I caught a flight to meet my family in Hawaii. Shortly after I awoke the following morning, the phone in our hotel room rang. I answered it, and a good friend in Maui said something I didn't catch at first. She seemed to be losing control of her emotions.

"Turn on the television," she said. "Now!" She was barely able to get the words out, but I heard her say, "We're being attacked."

It was September 11. Four commercial jetliners had been hijacked by Al Qaeda terrorists and used as deadly weapons against American citizens. We began checking with other friends and traveling companions. Several of the team members who had traveled with us to Israel had left there on a later flight. They had landed in Newark,

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New Jersey, and were stranded on the tarmac. They saw smoke billowing from lower Manhattan. Many of them ended up hitchhiking home across the country.

With this direct attack on US soil, planned and executed by Islamic radicals, everything changed. A new awareness of an age-old conflict changed how we thought about Islam, the Arab nations, and the Jewish state. Even though the attack was launched against New York City and Washington DC, Israel was the key. The terrorists hated its existence and hated the United States for supporting the Jewish state.

Just days earlier, when I was planting vines in Ariel, the importance of God's people in Israel had been brought home to me. I had studied prophecy for decades, but on that afternoon I knew the fate of the world revolved around Israel. I had come face to face with a new understanding of prophecy and how God has chosen to open our eyes to His work on earth. It is not just the geography of Israel that is important to our understanding. To get the clearest picture of what God is doing, it helps to read prophecy through the eyes of the people who live in Israel today.

Israel and her people are the center of our world, our history, and our future.



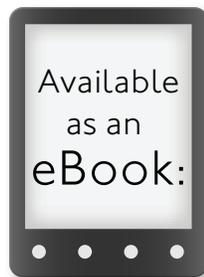
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