

# Remove the Stones

Three Spiritual Steps  
to Stand with Israel,  
God's Chosen People

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# ***REMOVE THE STONES***

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When I listened to a message from last year's Europe Conference, I was moved that Pastor Ulf Ekman opened with Isaiah 40:3–4. He challenged us to prepare the way of the Lord and to begin doing that in our own hearts. Today let me also read a verse from Isaiah:

“Pass through, pass through the gates! Prepare the way for the people. Build up, build up the highway! Remove the stones. Raise a banner for the nations” (Isaiah: 62:10).

It shows us another aspect of how we are called to prepare the way of the Lord. I would like to share something about this with you.

This verse was originally addressed to the remnant of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, calling them to prepare the way for those who would be returning from the exile. But now the Lord is speaking to us Christians as well, calling us to prepare the way for His people.

Outwardly they are returning from all over the world as a miracle before our eyes – but for their inward preparation much work is still to be done. Our Lord allows us to participate even in this work.

The main task which the Lord expects from us is to remove the stones. Removing stones is hard work! But through this work, we end up laying a firm foundation which will enable each one of us to faithfully stand at Israel's side in the time that lies ahead.

Let me talk about three particular stones which I hope will be easy for you to remember.

## **1. The first heavy stone which we need to remove is: Our ignorance about the suffering of God's chosen people.**

I am German. The biggest stone is what happened in my country, in Nazi-Germany. The more I confront and try to deal with what took place, the bigger this stone becomes. Most of you here will say: “Thank You Lord, this stone is not my problem – I have never had anything to do with it!” Yet, whoever desires to love the Lord and to love His people needs to confront how we all have contributed in some way to the great weight of this particular stone.

I can explain this by my personal testimony. Although it was completely unusual in postwar Germany: In my early years I already had

a chance to see a documentary film about the atrocities committed under Hitler. I will never forget these pictures and since then I have felt ashamed of being German. It seemed to be too much for me to face the suffering which we inflicted and the guilt of my people. I wanted to enjoy life and not burden myself with this painful history. A small example from my childhood illustrates this. Our family had a precious hand carved silver box. My mother used to keep raspberry sweets in it – when she had some. Such a sweet was the greatest reward for my sister and me when we had helped our mother pile up wood for the winter. I knew that we had inherited this box from “Tante Wolf” and I heard that Tante Wolf was Jewish. Sadly, I have to confess that for many years I never asked what happened to Tante Wolf, nor did I try to find out more about her life story. I turned my face to the other side. Even as a Sister of Mary it took years before the Lord could change my attitude. This is a typical example of how easily we can also become guilty and it proves that I am no better than my fellow countrymen under Hitler – even if I was brought up after the war.

Perhaps many of you know that your nations had a similar attitude towards the Jews – they looked to the other side. They knew, but they did not want to know – they did not want to get involved. We call that neutrality. Please do not think that I want to reduce our German guilt; I only want to show you that all of us are in danger of easily slipping into the same pattern without even realizing it. Do not be surprised! This is possible because our hearts are full of our own selfish interests, and we pass by just as the priest and Levite did with the man who fell into the hands of robbers (see Luke 10:30ff).

Our lack of love, our indifference, is the first great stumbling block for Israel. If we want to build up a highway for His people, then our heart must at least want to know more about their painful history. That means we will take time to read, time to ask, time to listen, time to pray – it is a matter of love, otherwise we will never be able to pave the road for His people. You can find more literature which deals with these facts at the book tables in the tent, like for example the Pamphlet: THE GUILT OF CHRISTIANITY which is available in 11 languages. (<http://canaaninthedesert.com/ebooks/>)

Nobody else has been hurt more deeply, has been wounded more painfully or has been constantly offended by us Christians throughout nearly 2000 years as God’s chosen people have been. Only a repentant, inwardly weeping heart can find the way to the heart of His people and help to remove the stones so that the way is free for them to recognize their Messiah.

## **2. The second big stone we have to remove is:**

### **Our ignorance about the abyss of our own sinful hearts.**

When you come to know Jews personally, you will sometimes hear them say: “This is a really good person!” They suffered so much hatred that anyone who seems to be different is a remarkable ray of light for them. It is completely beyond their understanding that Auschwitz was possible in a country where most of its citizens were baptized Christians. None of us can really comprehend what took place, because in the depths of our hearts we somehow expect to find something good in human nature. This shows that our thoughts are marked by humanistic idealistic attitudes. Already in Genesis 8:21 the Bible says: “Every inclination of the heart of men is evil from childhood.” And you can read in Romans 3:12, “There is no-one who does good, not even one.” And Paul says of himself in Romans 7:18, “I know that nothing good lives in me.” This is the truth, yet many Jews and many of us Christians are idealists. Therefore we fail to see the truth about ourselves and about others. This idealistic mentality leads us to believe that something like Auschwitz will never happen again. Indeed, I think that it will not be repeated in the same way as 60 years ago. But are you really convinced that over the last 60 years mankind has developed into a better human race? It seems to be just the opposite: Today the devil has become a very popular companion, even for children.

Although I had known, heard and read much about Auschwitz, my actual visit there was one of the most shaking experiences in my life. You look into the abyss of cruelty. I wished to cry aloud, but I could not, I wanted to weep – but I could not. Never before had I felt so completely helpless and unable to give a single reaction as during these two days. I prayed a long time – but heaven seemed to be closed. However, afterwards I felt that the Lord started to explain something to me, something that is written in the Jewish prayer book – in the Psalms. You surely remember the Lord’s cry while hanging on the cross: “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani” – “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” These words reflect Auschwitz’s deepest agony. I asked myself: If all the malice, tortures, sadistic cruelties – in one sentence: if hell on earth can be so real – how real will hell be for all eternity? Hell is a reality for Jesus – He takes it seriously – as seriously as our sin. In order to save us from hell, He has given His life. He warns us, because He sees it as the greatest danger – not only for the godless world but even for each one of us. But because most of us Christians are idealists, this has become the most unpopular topic in our Churches and fellowships. It is a tabu in the

Christian world. Nobody should speak about it – otherwise we might create fear and make people feel uncomfortable. But we should listen to Jesus' warning. The abyss of hell corresponds to the abyss of sin in our heart.

Last year I visited an exhibition in Frankfurt commemorating the Auschwitz Trials 40 years ago. The exhibition took place in the original courtroom. You could walk from booth to booth. Every booth covered something of the life of the accused with photos and parts of the trial which could be read and heard in the original sound. But there was something else which went directly into my innermost heart: In every booth you could read a report published by a very popular German magazine, DER STERN. The headline was: "The murderers are like you and me." All of them had been quite ordinary people, fathers who cared for their children. "The murderers are like you and me." Each one of us has to personally identify with this truth, otherwise we deceive ourselves and end up living and praying like hypocrites.

Many of you will know the book: MY UTMOST FOR HIS HIGHEST. In it Oswald Chambers emphasizes how everyone is a potential criminal, everybody is capable of everything. If we are good people, it is only because of the grace of the Lord. Maybe we were brought up in a good family, we had a praying grandmother, a good teacher, or an upright, loving person who came into our life just at the right moment – in any case, it is never because we are by nature good people that we may seem to be better than others – it is nothing but the grace of our Lord.

Do not be afraid! The Lord will never show us the abyss of our poisoned sinful heart all at once. He knows that we could not bear it. Jesus is the very best counsellor. He is working in us through the Holy Spirit who gives us light increasingly – not only in recognizing my own heart, but also in recognizing my beautiful Saviour! So we will not be led into despair – but just the opposite: We will experience true joy, love and gratitude. This is the Gospel! Jesus says in Luke 7:47 "He who has been forgiven little loves little." This also means "He who has been forgiven much loves much." My whole sinful character even gives me an advantage: It helps me to love Jesus more than ever before. Because of my failures, I have to keep very close contact with Jesus. This close contact brings forth a wonderful result – it transforms my character into His image, not all at once, but step by step. Believe me, it is an easy way – it is a blessed way – everyone is able to walk on it; all it will cost me is a fall from my "high horse" – a fall into the arms of Jesus. That price is not too high!

For many years now one of Mother Basilea's best sellers has been: **YOU WILL NEVER BE THE SAME**, translated into 27 languages. People recently sent Christian newspapers from Russia to show us that two chapters of this book were printed in each edition. What makes this book so important is Mother Basilea's introduction, because it helps us to understand basic biblical principles for transformation. Facing the truth, receiving forgiveness from Jesus, and fighting the battle of faith will lead us to experience how the greatest gift of heaven grows in our hearts: a greater love for Jesus!

When we live in this kind of priestly attitude, we can give Israel spiritual support so that they no longer put their trust in humanity – in the good nature of men. They will no longer look for help from human sources, but expect their help from nobody else than their Lord.

Let us take away the stumbling block of our idealistic Christian mentality – let us remove the big stone of our pride and self-righteousness – then God can use us as a catalyst in this process of preparing His people for the coming of their Messiah.

### **3. The third and final stone to be removed is:**

#### **Our ignorance about the suffering of our beloved Lord.**

I will try to explain what this means: When somebody comes to the Lord, he often experiences God's overwhelming love, many answers to prayer, healing and perhaps even miracles. But then a time comes in which even the most desperate prayer-requests seem to go unanswered. You do not sense and enjoy the presence of God anymore. He covers Himself with darkness – He keeps silent. And seldom do our churches and fellowships prepare us to go through such times. This is a real problem because without preparation you fall into a pit instead of standing firmly in your first test of faith. Many come out disappointed, frustrated – they lose their first love, their enthusiasm, even their faith – sometimes forever.

Once I received as a personal word from the Lord, Matthew 11:6, "Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me." This word helped me a lot at times when just the opposite happened of what I had expected of the Lord. As a result of her own experiences Mother Basilea has given us this precious prayer of commitment for dark ways of faith:

"My Father I do not understand You but I trust in You."

Everything that happens to us is usually really nothing compared to what His people Israel has to endure. Look into the life of a single Jewish family, then you will understand what I mean. The worst of all is that their experience often seems to be contrary to what they know from the Tenach:

that in the end God rescues and rewards the righteous and punishes the godless. But in the Shoah the most godly believers and the most godless people were systematically murdered together – not to mention the 1½ million innocent children. This is the source of the question we have all come across: “Where was God in Auschwitz?” The Tsunami at Christmas last year may have given some of us a small idea of what such darkness is like. It would be superficial and even wrong to state that the Lord protected all the believers.

Israel still faces this kind of agony today. Just as people in Germany could have known what Hitler planned against the Jews, we can know the facts about what is going on in the Middle East today; if we would just pay attention to what the Arab media say when addressing their own people in Arabic, rather than only listening to what they say in English. The Arab world does not want an independent Palestinian state – what they want is the whole land of Israel without a single Jew. This is why you cannot find Israel in any of their maps. You may remember the terrible German expression “judenrein”. This is the real root of the problem: once again it is a question of survival. We believe and trust that the Lord will keep His promise and never allow the Jews to be driven completely out of their land, and yet Israel has to stand this severe test of faith again and again.

Now we have to ask ourselves how we can stand the test of our faith? Otherwise we will never be able to faithfully stand at Israel’s side. The question is: How can we receive the authority we need?

One of Mother Basilea’s favourite Bible verses is found in Philippians 3. Here the Apostle Paul describes his life-programme. In 2004, to commemorate the hundredth birthday of our Mothers, I wrote about this text about the secret of bridal love for Jesus: it is about “knowing Him”. This pamphlet is available in German and Norwegian as a give-away.

Here in Philippians 3:7–14 Paul is driven by one desire, he wants to know Jesus – he wants to know Him more – he wants to know Him more deeply. And the most important verse is verse 10: “I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.”

I suppose that most of us expect that the desire to come to know the power of His resurrection is the spiritual climax. But Paul goes even further – Paul desires more: the fellowship of sharing the Lord’s sufferings, even unto death. That means: The power of Jesus’ resurrection enables Paul to partake in the fellowship of his Lord’s sufferings. The redemptive power of our Lord’s resurrection will do the same for us in

the hour of world-history which we are living in. But this passage also has to do with the secret of the Bride of Christ and her passionate love for Jesus as it is written in the Song of Songs, Chapter 8:6-7, "Love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like a blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love, rivers cannot wash it away." We need this kind of love, otherwise we will not be able to stand close at the side of His beloved people. Through the power of His resurrection and victory each one of us can find this love which stands the test of faith even in deepest suffering. But how does it work in our everyday lives?

For instance: If we feel rejected – if we do not get the love and recognition we desire – if we feel humiliated – if we have been reproached – then we find our identity in our Lord's suffering, in His disgrace, in His loneliness, and in His humiliation. We find peace and in a hidden way, even joy, because we are united with Him whom we love.

Then we need not fight and struggle to keep up a good image. The Bride belongs to the Bridegroom and she follows Him step by step. This was the secret of Mother Basilea's life, you can find it in her life-story. If we take many small steps in this direction, then the Lord can prepare us for greater suffering – even if that will end in persecution and death.

His people Israel has suffered unspeakable humiliation down through the centuries. The deep rejection and hatred which the Jews suffered even reminds us of Isaiah 53: They were "like one from whom men hide their faces – esteemed to be nothing". They never found an explanation for what they suffered – it was a riddle for them which no one could solve. But everything would be solved if they would find their identity in the suffering of their Messiah. In order for this to happen, we first have to find our identity in Him – only in this way can we support the most exciting birth that will ever take place: the birth of the most beautiful bride – Israel.

Revelation 12:11 shows what the Lord expects from His Bride in the end times – it describes the way she overcomes in suffering: "They overcame Satan by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."

Firstly "by the blood of the Lamb", that's why you can find so many prayers and songs of victory in our literature and song books which praise the blood of the Lamb as the most tremendous power of heaven against hell.

Then we read: "The word of their testimony". A cheap, easy-going testimony is not what is meant here. This testimony costs a lot – maybe even our lives. Before our very eyes we see the hatred of suicide terrorists



who literally hate unto death – in contrast, the lovers of the Lamb should love unto death. Only this kind of love proves itself to be true, godly love. Love which is prepared to sacrifice its own life. In Revelation we find again and again how our Lord Jesus is described and is adored as the Lamb who was slain. The Bride of the Lamb must also radiate His love in a similar way by losing her life.

I know my own weakness; I could never guarantee anything for myself. My guarantee is in Jesus – in the overwhelmingly victorious power of His resurrection which is going to be fulfilled in my weakness.

The Bride of the Nations will never come to completion without the Bride of Israel. Israel is the Lord's firstborn child. The Bride of Israel is the first-fruit. None of us will ever be able to enter the City of God without Israel, for the names of the twelve tribes of Israel are written on its gates. When you listen to messianic believers who love Jesus, you receive a strong impression of the passionate love of this bride. And we from the nations are allowed to be involved in this process of helping prepare the Bride of Israel.

At the beginning of this year, Pastor Ulf Ekman called the time we are Living in "the last minute of grace". Let us use this precious last minute for our Lord's sake and for Jerusalem's sake so that her glory will finally spread out over all our nations.

### **Let us pray:**

Oh Lord, make us ready to partake in Your eternal goal of love with Israel. Make us ready to share in the fellowship of Your sufferings. Make us ready to share in the fellowship of suffering with your chosen and beloved people. Thank You, that You have granted each one of us to live in this last precious time of grace. Thank You that even the weakest and smallest of us is able to remove big stones. Thank You that even the weakest and smallest of us can build up a highway for Your people. We thank You that we are able to do this because You enabled us.

We commit ourselves completely to Your loving heart, You, our Lord, the Alpha and Omega of our faith, our Lamb on the throne, our beloved Bridegroom and King of Israel. Amen.

Sister Joela, Evangelical Sisterhood of Mary, at the Europe-Conference 2005, Uppsala, Sweden, July 2005. Bible quotations taken from the Holy Bible: New International Version. Evangelical Sisterhood of Mary, P.O.B. 13 01 29, 64241 Darmstadt, Germany, [www.kanaan.org](http://www.kanaan.org)

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