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Modern Israel's Right to the Land

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Modern Israel's Right to The Land *Tom's Perspectives*

Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, your brothers, your relatives, your fellow exiles, and the whole house of Israel, all of them, are those to whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, 'Go far from the LORD; this land has been given us as a possession.' Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, though I had removed them far away among the nations, and though I had scattered them among the countries, yet I was a sanctuary for them a little while in the countries where they had gone.'" Therefore say, "Thus says the Lord GOD, 'I shall gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries among which you have been scattered, and I shall give you the land of Israel. When they come there, they will remove all its detestable things and all its abominations from it.'"

— Ezekiel 11:14-18

The modern state of Israel is under attack like never before since her 1948 founding from all sides throughout the world. Recently a secular Israeli said shortly after this summer's war (2006) with Hezbollah, "Every year they hate us more." No matter what Israel does, whether good or bad, it is viewed by most of the world as a provocation that justifies the world's hatred toward God's covenant nation.

If that's not bad enough, you would think that people of the Book (Christians), would be unified in their support of contemporary Israel since God is bringing His people back to their land. Yet, an increasing number of many within Christendom are speaking out, and like the unbelieving world, they too are blaming Israel for the problems in the Middle East.

LAND VERSES JESUS?

Typical of those within the Evangelical orbit of those who deny Israel's clear prophetic future in the Bible is replacement theologian Gary DeMar, who said of a Christian and Jewish pro-Israel rally: "Those in attendance are more concerned about the land of Israel than the life-transforming gospel of Jesus Christ." So DeMar is able to judge the thoughts and intents of people's hearts? He continues by saying, "The only concern of these end-time advocates is Israel and their land."¹

Rather than attempting to guess one's motives, as DeMar does, it is better to look at one's deeds in relation to this issue. It is patently clear that preterists such as DeMar are hardly known for their evangelistic efforts, let alone Jewish evangelism. However, as historian Timothy Weber notes concerning the rise of the dispensational viewpoint, "premillennialists were able to stress the evangelization of the Jews while at the same time they supported Jewish nationalistic aspirations."² In fact, the heightened interest in dispensational evangelization of the Jews has been documented in a study of the history of Jewish evangelism. Yaakov Ariel says,

The rise of the movement to evangelize the Jews in America also coincided with the rise of Zionism, the Jewish national movement that aimed at rebuilding Palestine as a Jewish center. The missionary community, like

American dispensationalists in general, took a great deal of interest in the developments among the Jewish people. . . .

Perhaps not surprisingly, missionaries to the Jews were among the major propagators of the dispensationalist premillennialist belief. . . .

They condemned anti-Semitism and discrimination against Jews worldwide.³

THE BIBLE AND THE LAND

All throughout the Old Testament God says that the land we know as Israel is for the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, or the Jews. Every Old Testament prophet, except Jonah, speaks of a permanent return to the Land of Israel by the Jews.⁴ Nowhere in the New Testament are these Old Testament promises ever changed or negated.⁵ In fact, they are reinforced by some New Testament passages. Walter Kaiser notes that “the writer of Hebrews (6:13, 17–18), . . . swore by Himself when He made the promise: to show how immutable His purpose was.”⁶ Paul says of the promises to Israel: “for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29).

The only legitimate basis for the Jews to claim a right to the land of Israel comes from the Bible. In fact, if it were not for the biblical history of Israel who would even know to associate the Jewish people with the land of Israel? It is precisely because God associates the Jewish people with the land that He gave them—located in today’s Middle East—that we could even have a movement today known as Zionism. (Zionism is the name most frequently used of anyone, Jew or Gentile, who desires the Jews to own the Land of Israel.) Detractors of Zionism must attempt to say that God’s promise of the land of Israel to the Jews has somehow been invalidated. My how many have tried down through the years to prove just that! But God’s Word speaks louder than their shrill voices combined.

The case for Zionism rises or falls upon what the Bible teaches about Israel and the land of Israel. It is true that a just case for Israel can be presented upon many grounds, but ultimately it boils down to what does God think about this matter as communicated through His inerrant and authoritative Word—the Bible.

GOD’S PROMISE OF THE LAND

The Lord called Abram out of Ur of the Chaldeans and made an unconditional covenant, or contract, with him. This contract, known as the Abrahamic covenant, contained three major provisions: 1) a land to Abram and his descendants Israel, 2) a seed or physical descendants of Abraham, and 3) a worldwide blessing (Gen. 12:1-3).

In order to make His point clear, the Lord put Abram to sleep and made Himself the only signatory of the contract (Gen. 15:1-21). God told Abram, “To your descendants I have given this land” (verse 18). Even though the Lord was the only active signatory to the cutting of the covenant, as demonstrated in Genesis 15, nevertheless it is clear that Abraham obeyed the Lord during his lifetime: “Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws” (Gen. 26:5). “It is significant that the promise is related to Abraham’s obedience, not to Isaac’s, as the promise now becomes immutable and certain of fulfillment,”⁷ observes John F. Walvoord. This covenant is repeated to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their descendants a little over twenty times in the book of Genesis.⁸ God’s promise to the patriarchs is said to be an everlasting covenant (Gen. 17:7, 13, 19).

The promise of the land covenant is passed from Abraham to Isaac, instead of Ishmael. The Lord told Isaac: “Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will establish

the oath which I swore to your father Abraham. And I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 26:3–4). Here we see a duplication of God's promise to Isaac's father (cf. Gen. 12:3; 15:18).

Number three in the patriarchal descent is Jacob, rather than Esau. Jacob's name is later changed to Israel, which becomes the primary name of the new nation. In Jacob's famous dream of a stairway from heaven to earth, the Lord said, "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. Your descendants shall also be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 28:13–14). This statement also includes a repetition of the land promise made to Abraham and Isaac and would be passed on to Jacob's posterity, fulfilled in his twelve sons, the twelve tribes of Israel and their descendants. Walvoord notes:

A careful study of these passages makes clear that the promise of the land was intrinsic to the whole covenant given to Abraham. Inasmuch as Abraham became a great man, had a great posterity, and brought blessing to the whole world through Christ, it is reasonable to assume that the rest of the Abrahamic covenant will be fulfilled just as literally as these provisions. The nonliteral or conditional interpretation of these promises is not supported in Scripture.⁹

Genesis closes with Jacob, his twelve sons and their descendants sojourning in the land of Egypt. Exodus is the story of their deliverance from Egypt and preparation for entrance into the land of Canaan. Even though Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years because of unbelief, it was there that Moses received the Law that would become the new nation's constitution by which she would be governed in the land.

The book of Deuteronomy says at least twenty-five times that the land is a gift to the people of Israel from the Lord (Deut. 1:20, 25; 2:29; 3:20; 4:40; 5:16, etc.). Old Testament scholar, Walter Kaiser notes that, "sixty-nine times the writer of Deuteronomy repeated the pledge that Israel would one day 'possess' and 'inherit' the land promised to her."¹⁰

Deuteronomy 28—30 lays out the conditions for Israel to experience blessing within the land. We must remember that while the land was given unconditionally to the people of Israel, the Mosaic Law provides subconditions for the nation to enjoy God's blessings in the land. The tribulation period will be a time of divine discipline on the nation, bringing about Israel's repentance obedience. And then, during those grand and golden days of the millennial kingdom, she will experience full occupation of her land, reaping the many blessings promised in the Old Testament.

The Psalms, Israel's handbook of praise to the Lord, often lead the worshipper in thanksgiving to the Lord for His covenant promises and faithfulness. For example, Psalm 105 says, "He has remembered His covenant forever, the word which He commanded to a thousand generations, the covenant which He made with Abraham, and His oath to Isaac. Then He confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant, saying, 'To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion of your inheritance'" (Psalm 105:8–11). Elsewhere in the Psalms, the Lord declares: "For the LORD has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation. 'This is My resting place forever; Here I will dwell, for I have desired it'" (Psalm 123:13–14). God's choice of

providing the land of Israel for the Jewish people has remained steadfast down through history.

Throughout the Old Testament the prophets convict Israel of her disobedience, but always with a view toward a future restoration, when ultimately Israel will dwell in peace and prosperity. Throughout the Old Testament the prophets provide promise after promise of this time of future restoration to the land (Isa. 11:1–9; 12:1–3; 27:12–13; 35:1–10; 43:1–8; 60:18–21; 66:20–22; Jer. 16:14–16; 30:10–18; 31:31–37; 32:37–40; Ezek. 11:17–21; 28:25–26; 34:11–16; 37:21–25; 39:25–29; Hosea 1:10–11; 3:4–5; Joel 3:17–21; Amos 9:11–15; Micah 4:4–7; Zeph. 3: 14–20; Zech. 8:4–8; 10:11–15). A specific example of a restoration passage can be found at the end of Amos: “‘Also I will restore the captivity of My people Israel, and they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them, they will also plant vineyards and drink their wine, and make gardens and eat their fruit. I will also plant them on their land, and they will not again be rooted out from their land which I have given them,’ Says the LORD your God” (Amos 9:14–15).

It is important to note that Zechariah, following the return from the Babylonian captivity, speaks of a future restoration to the land, thus suggesting that Israel's past restorations did not ultimately fulfill the land promise given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Zechariah 9–14 lays out an end time plan of restoration of the nation to Jerusalem and the land of Israel. Kaiser notes: “Repeatedly, the prophets of the Old Testament had depicted an Israelite remnant returning to the land (e.g., Isa. 10:20–30) and becoming prominent among the nations (Mic. 4:1) in the end day. In fact, Zechariah 10:8–12 is still repeating this same promise in 518 B.C., well after the days when many in Israel had returned from their last and final exile, the Babylonian Exile.”¹¹ Further, Israel has a future in their land since nowhere in the Bible has the Lord revoked any of His promises to His people Israel: “for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29).

MULTIPLE END-TIME REGATHERINGS

To properly understand the end-time homecoming or regathering of the Jews to their promised land, we need to keep in mind that the Bible predicts that Israel will experience two worldwide, end-time regatherings to the Promised Land. The first regathering will be partial, gradual and in unbelief, while the second regathering will be full, instantaneous and when Israel enters into belief in Jesus as their personal and national Messiah.

Dozens of biblical passages predict this global event. It is a common mistake, however, to lump all of these passages into one fulfillment time frame, especially in relation to the current state of Israel. Modern Israel is prophetically significant and is fulfilling Bible prophecy. But when we read God's Word, we need to be careful to distinguish which verses are being fulfilled in our day and which await future fulfillment.

In short, there will be two end-time regatherings: one before the tribulation and one after the tribulation. The first worldwide regathering will be a return in unbelief, in preparation for the judgment of the tribulation. The second worldwide regathering will be a return in faith at the end of the tribulation, in preparation for the blessing of the millennium, or thousand-year reign of Christ.¹²

One important passage that deals with Israel's two regatherings is Isaiah 11:11–12:

Then it will happen on that day that the Lord Will again recover *the second time* with His hand the remnant of His people, who will remain, from

Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And He will lift up a standard for the nations, and will assemble the banished ones of Israel, and will gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. (Italics added.)

The return in Isaiah 11 clearly refers to the final worldwide regathering of Israel in faith, at the climax of the tribulation, and in preparation for the millennial kingdom. Isaiah specifically says that this final regathering is the second one. That, of course, raises the obvious question: When did the first regathering occur?

Some maintain that the first return is the Babylonian return from the exile that began in about 536 B.C. But how could this return be described as *worldwide*, as set forth in Isaiah 11?¹³

Arnold Fruchtenbaum writes:

The entire context is Isaiah 11:11—12:6. In this context, he is speaking of the final worldwide regathering in faith in preparation for blessing. Isaiah number the final worldwide regathering in faith in preparation of the Messianic Kingdom as the *second* one. In other words, the last one is only the second one. If the last one is the second one, how many can there be before that? Only one. The first one could not have been the return from Babylon since that was not an international regathering from the four corners of the world, only a migration from one country (Babylonia) to another (Judea). The Bible does not allow for several worldwide regatherings in unbelief; it allows for *one* worldwide regatherings in unbelief; followed by the last one, the one in faith, which is the second one. This text only permits two worldwide regatherings from *the four corners of the earth*. Therefore, the present Jewish State *is* very relevant to Bible prophecy.¹⁴

This chart provides a quick visual comparison and contrast between Israel's two great regatherings.¹⁵

THE PRESENT (FIRST) REGATHERING

THE PERMANENT (SECOND) REGATHERING

Worldwide
Return to part of the land
Return in unbelief
Restored to the land only
Man's work (secular)
Sets the stage for the tribulation (discipline)

Worldwide
Return to all the land
Return in faith
Restored to the land and the Lord
God's work (spiritual)
Sets the stage for the millennium (blessing)

MODERN ISRAEL FULFILLS PROPHECY

When the modern state of Israel was born in 1948, it not only became an important stage-setting development, but also began an actual fulfillment of specific Bible prophecies about an international regathering of the Jews in unbelief before the

judgment of the tribulation. The following Old Testament passages predict this development: Ezekiel 20:33-38; 22:17-22; 36:22-24; 37:1-14; Isaiah 11:11-12; Zephaniah 2:1-2 and Ezekiel 38-39 presupposes such a setting.

Before these things can happen, Jews from all over the world must return to the land, just like we see happening with the modern state of Israel. This, of course, does not mean that *every* Jew in the world has to be back in the land. But it does clearly mean that many of the Jewish people must have returned to their ancient homeland. End-time prophecy in Scripture is built upon the assumption that Israel is both regathered to her land and is functioning as a nation.

The implications of Daniel 9:24-27 are unmistakable. “And he [Antichrist] will make a firm covenant with the many for one week [one week of years or seven years].” In other words, the seven-year tribulation period will begin with the signing of a covenant between Antichrist and the leaders of Israel. Obviously, the signing of this treaty presupposes the presence of a Jewish leadership in a Jewish nation. This Jewish state must exist before a treaty can be signed.¹⁶

To summarize, then, the logic goes like this: The tribulation cannot begin until the seven-year covenant is made. The covenant cannot be put in place until a Jewish state exists. Therefore, a Jewish state must exist before the tribulation.

CONCLUSION

In view of all this, I believe that the main purpose for the regathering of Israel relates directly to the peace pact with Antichrist, as described in Daniel 9:24-27. For such a treaty to be viable, the Jews have to be present in the land and organized into a political state. And since 1948 *they have been*. It is this modern miracle—something unheard of in history—that we, our parents, and grandparents have witnessed unfolding before our eyes. An ancient and scattered people have returned to their ancestral homeland after almost two millennia, making the peace covenant of Daniel 9:24-27 possible for the first time since A.D. 70.¹⁷

As a result, the stage is set for the very event that will trigger the tribulation and usher in the final days of the world, as we know it. Much to the disappointment of those who are opposed to Zionist theology, the modern state of Israel is in just such a position. This truly indicates that we are near the end of days. Maranatha!

ENDNOTES

¹ Gary DeMar, “Land Over Jesus and The Gospel” Internet article from July 25, 2006, www.americanvision.org/articlearchive/07-25-06.asp.

² Timothy Webber, *Living In The Shadow Of The Second Coming*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), p. 141.

³ Yaakov Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to the Jews in America, 1880-2000* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000, pp. 12, 13, 14.

⁴ Passages include: Gen. 12:7, 13:14-15; 15:18; 17:8; Lev. 26:33, 43; Deut. 26:9; 30:1-11; Josh. 24:20-28; 2 Sam. 7:11-16; Ezra 4:1-3; Psalm 102:13-20; Isa. 11:11-12; 18:7; 27:12-13; 29:1, 8, 44; 60:8-21; 66:18-22; Jer. 3:17-18; 7:7; 11:10-11; 23:3-6; 25:5; 29:14; 30:7, 10; 31:2, 10, 23, 31-34; 33:4-16; 50:19; Ezek. 11:17; 20:33-37; 22:19-22; 28:25; 36:23-24, 38; 37:21-22; 39:28; Dan. 12:1; Hosea 3:4-5; Joel 3:20-21; Amos 9:9, 14-15; Micah 2:12; 3:9-10; 4:7, 11-12; Zeph. 2:1-3; Zech. 7:7-8; 8:1-8; 10:6-12; 12:2-10; 13:8-9; 14:1, 5, 9; Mal. 3:6.

⁵ Passages include: Matt. 19:28; 23:37; Luke 21:24, 29-33, Acts 15:14-17; Rom. 11; Rev. 11:1-2; 12;

⁶ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. “The Land of Israel and The Future Return (Zechariah 10:6-12),” in H. Wayne House, editor, *Israel: The Land and the People: An Evangelical Affirmation of God's Promises* (Grand Rapids, Kregel, 1998), p. 211.

⁷ John F. Walvoord, *Major Bible Prophecies: 37 Crucial Prophecies That Affect You Today* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), p. 77.

⁸ Note the following references in Genesis: 12:1–3, 7–9; 13:14–18; 15:1–18; 17:1–27; 22:15–19; 26:2–6, 24–25; 27:28–29, 38–40; 28:1–4, 10–22; 31:3, 11–13; 32:22–32; 35:9–15; 48:3–4, 10–20; 49:1–28; 50:23–25

⁹ Walvoord, *Major Bible Prophecies*, pp. 77–78.

¹⁰ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), pp. 124–25.

¹¹ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “An Assessment of ‘Replacement Theology,’” *Mishkan* (No. 21; 1994), p. 17.

¹² Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Press, [1982] 2003), p. 99.

¹³ Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah*, pp. 102–03.

¹⁴ Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah*, pp. 102–03.

¹⁵ Randall Price, *Jerusalem in Prophecy: God's Final Stage for the Final Drama* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1998), p. 219.

¹⁶ Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah*, p. 105.

¹⁷ John F. Walvoord, *Prophecy in the New Millennium: A Fresh Look at Future Events* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2001), pp. 61–62.