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SOME GLORIOUS AND INCOMPARABLE PROMISES OF THE BIBLE

Tom's Perspectives
by Thomas Ice

During the first half of World War II General Douglas MacArthur was forced to leave the Philippines in the Pacific Theater by the Japanese. Upon his departure he made a promise to the Philippino people: "I will return." General MacArthur, through the strength and power of the American military was able to keep his promise. If humanity can make and keep promises of rescue and deliverance, how much more will our great God keep the glorious and incomparable promises He has made in His Word! Indeed, He has told us that He will one day return and fulfill the great and many promises about the glorious future in store for those who know Him as their Savior.

Why are promises important to God? Promises are important to God's plan for history, because God keeps His word. History is a record of God's faithfulness to keep His promises. Thus, God delights in making seemingly impossible promises so that He, through the most difficult circumstances, demonstrates that He keeps His promises. Think of God's record of faithfulness next time you are tempted by circumstances to go back on your word. There are three great promises that God has made to His people that I want to examine in this article. These promises are Israel's permanence, Christ's second coming, and eternal life to all believers.

PROMISE OF ISRAEL'S PERMANENCE

Scripture makes it clear that God's integrity in history revolves around His chosen people Israel. It is through Israel that God has chosen to leave His mark through out history. It is through Israel that God gave His Law, founded a nation, caused His presence to dwell, mediated His Word, and sent the Savior of the world. It will be through Israel in the future that God will work to preach the gospel through out the whole world, invoke the second coming, reign for a thousand years in Jerusalem, and place His eternal glory. Thus, God's promise to Israel is that they have an eternal permanence in history and throughout eternity (Jeremiah 31:35-36). Without Israel, the second coming cannot take place, since they must be there for this glorious event to occur.

REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY

Most American evangelical Christians today have a high view of Jews and the modern state of Israel because of the positive influence of the dispensational premillennial view that national Israel has a future in the plan of God. Yet, there are those within Christendom who deny that Israel has a permanent place in the plan of God. This view is known as replacement theology.

What is replacement theology? Replacement theology is the view that the Church has permanently replaced Israel as the instrument through which God works and that national Israel does not have a future in the plan of God. This is also known by the term "supersessionism." Some replacement theologians may believe that individual Jews will be converted and enter into the church (something that we all believe), but they do not believe that God will literally fulfill the dozens of Old Testament promises to a converted national Israel in the future. Reconstructionist patriarch, R. J. Rushdoony uses the strongest language when he declares,

The fall of Jerusalem, and the public rejection of physical Israel as the chosen people of God, meant also the deliverance of the true people of God, the church of Christ, the elect, out of the bondage to Israel and Jerusalem, . . .¹

A further heresy clouds premillennial interpretations of Scripture—their exaltation of racism into a divine principle. Every attempt to bring the Jew back into prophecy as a Jew is to give *race* and *works* (for racial descent is a human work) a priority over *grace* and *Christ's work* and is nothing more or less than paganism. . . . There can be no compromise with this vicious heresy.²

Historical Development

As it should be, the nature of Israel's future has become a watershed issue in biblical interpretation that has caused a polarization of positions that we find today. Today most Reformed interpreters do not believe in a national future for Israel, even though many have held such a view over the last 400 years. Why? Early in the systemization of any theological position the issues are undeveloped and less clear than later when the consistency of various positions are worked out. Thus it is natural for the mature understanding of any theological issue to lead to polarization of viewpoints as a result of interaction and debate between positions. The earlier Reformed position included a blend of some Old Testament passages that were taken literally (i.e., those teaching a future conversion of Israel as a nation) and some that were not (i.e., details of Israel's place of dominance during a future period of history). On the one hand, as time passed, those who stressed a literal understanding of Israel from the Old Testament became much more consistent in applying such an approach to all passages relating to Israel's destiny. On the other hand, those who thought literalism was taken too far retreated from whatever degree of literalness they did have and argued that the church fulfills Israel's promises, thus there was no need for a national Israel in the future. Further, non-literal interpretation was viewed as the tool with which liberals denied the essentials of the faith. Thus, by World War II dispensationalism had come to virtually dominate evangelicals who saw literal interpretation of the Bible as a primary support for orthodoxy.

After World War II many of the battles between fundamentalism and liberalism began to wane. Such an environment allowed for less stigma attached to non literal interpretation within conservative circles. However, today, as we see a decline in literal interpretation within Evangelicalism as a whole, we see an erosion among Evangelical scholars for support for modern Israel.

The Modern State of Israel

The fact that the last 100 years has seen a world-wide regathering and reestablishment of the nation of Israel, which is now poised in just the setting required for the revealing of the Antichrist and the start of the tribulation, is God's grand indicator that all of the other areas of world development are prophetically significant. Dr. Walvoord says,

Of the many peculiar phenomena which characterize the present generation, few events can claim equal significance as far as Biblical prophecy is concerned with

¹Rousas John Rushdoony, *Thy Kingdom Come: Studies in Daniel and Revelation* (Fairfax, VA: Thoburn Press, 1970), p. 82.

²Rushdoony, *Kingdom Come*, p. 134.

that of the return of Israel to their land. It constitutes a preparation for the end of the age, the setting for the coming of the Lord for His church, and the fulfillment of Israel's prophetic destiny.³

What one believes about the future of Israel is of utmost importance to one's understanding of the Bible. I believe, without a shadow of doubt, that Old Testament promises made to national Israel will literally be fulfilled in the future. This means the Bible teaches that God will return the Jews to their land before the tribulation begins (Isaiah 11:11–12:6; Ezekiel 20:33–44; 22:17–22; Zephaniah 2:1–3). This has been accomplished and the stage is set as a result of the current existence of the modern state of Israel. The Bible also indicates that before Israel enters into her time of national blessing she must first pass through the fire of the tribulation (Deuteronomy 4:30; Jeremiah. 30:5–9; Daniel 12:1; Zephaniah 1:14–18). Even though the horrors of the Holocaust under Hitler were of an unimaginable magnitude, the Bible teaches that a time of even greater trial awaits Israel during the tribulation. Anti-Semitism will reach new heights, this time global in scope, in which two-thirds of world Jewry will be killed (Zechariah 13:7–9; Revelation 12). Through this time God will protect His remnant so that before His second advent "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:36). In fact, the second coming will include the purpose of God's physical rescue of Israel from world persecution during Armageddon (Daniel 12:1; Zechariah 12–14; Matthew 24:29–31; Revelation 19:11–21).

If national Israel is a historical "has been," then all of this is obviously wrong. However, the Bible says she has a future and world events will revolve around that tiny nation at the center of the earth. The world's focus already is upon Israel. God has preserved His people for a reason and it is not all bad. In spite of the fact that history is progressing along the lines of God's ordained pattern for Israel, we see the revival of replacement theology within conservative circles that will no doubt be used in the future to fuel the fires of anti-Semitism, as it has in the past. Your view of the future of national Israel is not just an academic exercise.

PROMISE OF CHRIST'S SECOND COMING

Though many may not realize its significance, the return of Jesus Christ to planet Earth is the most important event that will occur in the future. But what do we know about the coming of Christ? Is it only a heart-felt hope and historical hype, or do we have a clear and certain word from God on this event?

The prophetic promise of the second coming of Jesus Christ to earth is the subject of many passages in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. What are some of the more prominent texts? They include some of the following: Deuteronomy 30:3; Psalm 2; Isaiah 63:1–6; Daniel 2:44–45; 7:13–14; Zechariah 14:1–4; Matthew 24–25; Mark 13; Luke 21; Acts 1:9–11; Romans 11:26; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; 5:1–4; 2 Thessalonians 1:6–2:12; 2 Peter 2:1–3:17; Jude 14–15; Revelation 1:7; 19:11–21.

The most graphic portrayal of Christ's second coming is found in Revelation 19:11–21. In this extended passage Jesus Christ is described as leading a procession of angels and saints or armies in heaven to claim the earth, destroy the armies of the world, and defeat the Antichrist and False Prophet.

This passage shows that Christ's return will be one that entails great physical destruction and many deaths. For those who are not Christ's own, it will be a terrifying

³John F. Walvoord, *Israel in Prophecy*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1964), p. 26

and terrible event. For those of us who know Him as their Savior, it will be a time of great joy, vindication, and anticipation.

The Bible depicts the career of Christ as revolving around two major aspects. Titus 2:11–14 speaks of Christ's two appearances on earth. The first phase is related to His coming in humiliation to die for the sins of mankind. The second phase is when He will come in power and glory to reign over all mankind. Hebrews 9:28 is a single verse that explains and contrasts Christ's two comings. The writer of Hebrews says "so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him." Jesus is coming again. This is a glorious promise and hope for all believers.

PROMISE OF ETERNAL LIFE

Eternal life is the gift of God given to all who believe in Jesus Christ and have accepted His offer of salvation based upon His death and resurrection (John 10:10; Ephesians 2:8-9). In the Bible, eternal life emphasizes a quality of life, a quality that can only be imparted by God Himself. This life does not, of course, make us God, we are and will always remain creatures, however, it is a quality of life that comes from the God who has the quality of eternity. Therefore, eternal life should not be confused with endless or eternal existence which everyone will experience. Eternal existence will be common to the redeemed and the unredeemed, but the destinies will be very different. Christians will enter into heaven and the presence of God; unbelievers will be cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11–15).

For those of us who have trusted Jesus Christ as our Savior, we are given the promise of eternal life the moment we believe. John says, "the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life" (1 John 5:11–13). If you have trusted in Christ, then you have eternal life in the present that will continue throughout eternity in heaven for the believer. Believers have the hope of eternal life in heaven with our Lord for eternity.

CONCLUSION

Anyone familiar with God's word knows that He has a wonderful plan for history and His people. These are indeed glorious and incomparable promises through which He implements His plan. What should the response of the believer be to God's promises? The Psalmist rightly advises, "What shall I render to the LORD for all His benefits toward me? I shall lift up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD" (Psalm 116:12–13).

When we think about the significance of the glorious promises that our Lord has in store for us as His people we respond with a thankful heart. Let us remember that for the believer this present life is the worst things will ever be for us. But, for the unbeliever, this present life will be the best they will ever experience. Let us claim the precious promises that He has made to us in the present so that He will make us fit for eternity.