



Will Israel Find Peace?

By Ferrell Jenkins

Introduction:

There has been much speculation in recent years that the events in the Middle East are preparing the way for the complete restoration of the Jews to Palestine, the second coming of Christ, the setting up the throne of David in Jerusalem and a literal earthly reign of 1,000 years, the Jews will be converted to Christ and play a prominent role in the millennium kingdom. This has been fueled by a number of events over the past century: the Zionist movement, the founding of the state of Israel in 1948, the June War of 1967. Every new conflict in the Middle East creates even more anticipation and speculation.

Israel has always had enemies. The Bible is replete with illustrations. In modern times there have been many enemies of Israel. My first real awareness of this was May 2, 1967.

I. A Common Teaching of Premillennialists.

- A. Carl F. H. Henry wrote an editorial in *Christianity Today* shortly after the June War of 1967 entitled “Next Year in the New Jerusalem?.” He said, “The Old Testament teaches that God has given the land of Palestine to the Jews forever, but the New Testament teaches that he is keeping the Jews in the world so that they may participate as a nation in the events connected with Jesus Christ’s return” (*Christianity Today*, July 7, 1967: 997).
- B. Charles C. Ryrie, long-time professor at Dallas Theological Seminary whose name is associated with the *The Ryrie Study Bible*, said: “Is this promise to Abraham relevant to the contemporary situation? Premillennialists (of which I am one) are quick to say yes. They point out that something must be done with that promise and that there are only four options: Either it has been canceled, or it was fulfilled sometime in the past (as in the days of Solomon for instance), or it has been transferred to the Church and will not be literally fulfilled, or it will yet be fulfilled. They feel that the last of these is the correct understanding of the promise and that the Jewish people will possess that promised land completely some day. Therefore, any movement toward that end is of great significance to the premillennialist. The Six Day War in June, 1967, in which Israel tripled its land area, appeared to be another step toward the eventual occupation of the total area from the Euphrates to the River of Egypt. And every such gain is generally viewed with rejoicing, for the furthering of God’s purpose for Israel seems to indicate that the coming of the Lord draws near” (“Perspective on Palestine,” *Christianity Today*, May 23, 1969: 768-69).
- C. World Wide Pictures produced a movie in the early 70s entitled *His Land* which was distributed exclusively by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Films. The movie interpreted the “restoration” prophecies of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah as being fulfilled in the return of the Jews to Palestine in this century.
- D. Jerry Falwell said, “Many evangelicals, including Billy Graham and millions of others, believe in the imminent, premillennial, pretribulational second coming of Jesus Christ for all of His Church” (“Falwell Clarifies Belief That Biblical Antichrist Will be Jewish.” <http://www.falwell.com>. 21 Aug. 1999.)
- E. Former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin (1977-83) was widely known for his view that modern Israel should possess the land which ancient Israel occupied. *Time* mentioned Begin’s knowledge of the Old Testament, saying “The parts that Begin knows best are the countless verses of the Old Testament that refer to the existence of Erets Yisrael (the land of Israel) and to God’s promise of a homeland for his chosen people” (“The Bible: A Fallible Guide.” 25 July 1977: 32).

- F. These speculations are based on a misunderstanding of the Land promise which God made to Abraham and of the “restoration of the Jews” prophecies of the Old Testament. Time used in an examination of these will be well spent.

II. Will Israel Find Peace?

The Bible records several promises of peace for Israel.

- A. Ezekiel prophesied peace for Israel in the vision of dry bones. “And I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever” (37:26).
- B. After the return from Babylonian exile, Zechariah prophesied, “And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, And the horse from Jerusalem; And the bow of war will be cut off. And He will speak peace to the nations; And His dominion will be from sea to sea, And from the River to the ends of the earth” (9:10; cf. 6:13).
- C. Are these prophecies to be fulfilled at the second coming of Christ as premillennialists claim or have they been fulfilled at some other time and in some other way?

III. The Land Promise Made to Abraham

- A. The NATION, SEED and LAND promises made to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3, 7). The land known as Canaan (Palestine) was promised to Abraham.
- B. The inheritance of the land was to be 400 years later (Gen. 15:7-8, 12-20).
1. Extent of the land- from the river of Egypt unto the river Euphrates (vs. 18). The “River of Egypt” is the Wadi el-‘Arish the southern border of Judah, and not the Nile as many speculators claim (*Baker’s Bible Atlas* 31.)
 2. The land was for an “everlasting possession” (Gen. 17:8).
 - a. Circumcision was “everlasting” (age-lasting), but is not now binding (vs. 13; see Gal. 5:1-4).
 - b. If *everlasting* meant what some claim, it couldn’t end at the conclusion of the 1,000 year reign!
 - c. For other examples of the use of the word *everlasting* see Jenkins, *The Theme of The Bible* 23,
- C. Promise renewed to Isaac (Gen. 26:1-5) and Jacob (Gen. 28:3-4, 13-14).
- D. When Israel came to the plains of Moab the promise of the land to Abraham’s seed was UNCONDITIONAL. It was to be received because of the promise made more than 400 years earlier.
- E. The retention of the land was CONDITIONAL. Captivity and return to the land under the law was foretold (Dt. 28:15ff.; 30:1-10).

RECEPTION OF LAND — UNCONDITIONAL — BY PROMISE

RETENTION OF LAND — CONDITIONAL — BY OBEDIENCE

IV. God Fulfilled His Promise.

We shall call five competent witnesses to testify. More than enough to establish the truth.

- A. Joshua (21:43-45; cf. Dt. 1:8).
1. God GAVE the land.
 2. Israel POSSESSED the land.
 3. Israel LIVED in the land.
 4. “Not one word...has failed” (Josh. 23:14-16).
- B. The Cities of Refuge
1. Promise of six cities of refuge; three on each side of the Jordan (Num. 35:9-15).

2. Three given in trans-Jordan, with three more promised *if God keeps His promise* to give you all the land promised the fathers (Dt. 19:7-9).
 3. Six cities named (Josh. 20:7-9). Evidence that God kept His promise. Cf. Joshua's statement.
- C. Solomon reigned over all the land (I Kings 4:21).
- D. The Levites, after the return from Babylonian exile, said: God fulfilled His promise (Neh. 9:7-9).
- E. The Psalmist said: God gave the lands of the nations to Israel (Ps. 105:42-44).

V. Israel and Judah Were Taken into Exile.

- A. Kingdom divided at death of Solomon, c. 931 BC (I Kings 12).
- B. Israel taken away into Assyrian captivity — 722 BC.
- C. Judah taken into Babylonian captivity — 606, 597, 586 BC.
- D. Thus, the curse of Deuteronomy 28–30 did come (Neh. 1:8-10).

VI. A Remnant Returned to the Land (Isa. 10:20-24).

- A. God promised that those from all tribes would return (Jer. 50:3-4).
 1. First group returned under Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest. This was permitted by Cyrus of Persia in 536 BC (Hag. 1:12, 14; 2:2-3)
 2. Second group returned under Ezra the scribe in 458 BC (Ezra 1; 9:13-15; Neh. 1:3-11).
- B. God promised to set His hand a second time to recover a remnant. This was fulfilled in Christ and the Gospel (Rom. 11:5; 9:27-28).

VII. When Jesus Came.

- A. Jesus is the prince of peace (Isa. 9:6), who came to bring peace on earth (Lk. 2:14).
- B. He is our peace (Eph. 2:14). He preached the gospel of peace (Eph. 2:17; 6:15).
- C. When Jesus came to earth His own did not receive Him (Jn. 1:11), but some individuals did receive Him (e. g., Nathanael: “Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel” – Jn. 1:49).

Conclusion:

1. God fulfilled His promise to Abraham.
2. The restoration promise was also fulfilled. The return of some Jews to Palestine today and the state of Israel has nothing to do with the fulfillment of prophecy. The land is not theirs by divine right.
3. The prophets predicted that the Jews would be scattered among all peoples (Dt. 28:64), never a nation again (Jer. 19:10-11), yet never destroyed (Jer. 30:11; 46:28).
4. The only thing left for the Jews today is in Christ and the gospel (Rom. 1:16-17). ***It is only in Christ that Israel will find peace.*** Examples of conversion in the book of Acts show that the same conditions of obedience were required of Jews and Gentiles: Acts 2 (the Jews on Pentecost); Acts 10-11 (the first Gentile convert, Cornelius); Acts 15:7-9.

For Additional Study:

Several other materials have been prepared which deal with these issues. I suggest that you secure these for additional study: *The Mid-East Conflict and the Bible* is available from BibleClassMaterials.com *The Theme of the Bible* and *The Early Church* are available from the Florida College Bookstore (1-813-985-9555; 1-800-423-1648).