

What in the World is God Doing With the Modern Nation of Israel?

The theological world was in shock and awe when the United Nations granted the Jewish people rights to a home land in Palestine in 1948 after nearly nineteen hundred years of dispersion outside the land. This was brought about by the brutalities of the Nazi holocaust. In the years following 1948, Christian support for the return of Israel to her land being a direct fulfillment of Bible prophecy was a popular position in the Christian world, especially within dispensational circles. The golden age of Premillennial Dispensationalism in Bible Colleges and Seminaries was born, and lasted into the 1980's. But time drug on to fifty years passed 1948, then sixty years, and theological support for the 1948 return of Israel to her land has waned in recent years. What many thought to be a significant event in the prophetic calendar has turned to doubt and unbelief, even in dispensational circles. Certainly Amillennial Covenant Theologians do not believe in any significance to 1948, and many in the Progressive Dispensationalist camp have dramatically downplayed it in recent years, if not abandoned ship on it altogether. The 199th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), separating the political return from theological significance declared: "[As] no government at any time can ever be the full expression of God's will, [so is the] State of Israel a geopolitical entity and is not to be validated theologically."¹

Even in traditional Dispensational circles, the response often given is, "Well Israel today may or may not be significant... we simply don't know." It has been so long now since 1948 that dispensational pastors are afraid to talk about Israel in the land today dogmatically, for fear of being wrong if something should happen to that nation:

Is that what is happening today? I can't say for sure. It is the first time in 2,500 years, though, that you have this kind of constitution of people in that land, but I don't *know* what that means. This may be the prelude to end-time events, but I think we're presumptuous if we try to give it meaning beyond that. It *may be*, that's all we can say.

The reluctance of such pastors to give stronger verbal support of Israel's return to their land stems from the fear of being lumped in with the "date setter" crowd. If Israel should fall to the Arab world or be destroyed, how would that make them look?

¹ Randell Price, "Is The Modern State Of Israel Prophetically Significant?," *Pre-trib Research Center*, NA, 2011, http://www.pre-trib.org/articles/view/is-modern-state-of-israel-prophetically-significant#_ftn5/ (accessed May 1, 2011).

Intro:

Our purpose of this evening will be to examine the return of Israel in 1948 to see if it is biblically significant. First the return from Babylon after their 586 B.C. captivity will be compared to 1948's return. Then a two phase return by Israel will be presented that began in 1948 and will come to fruition at the second coming of Christ. The Scriptures teach that the Jewish people would be gathered back to their land first in unbelief for the preparation of judgment and purging, and then later gathered again for the purpose of national salvation and restoration at Christ's return. Together these two returns make up the two-phase return of Israel prophesied in the last days.

I. Background

A. The Five Levels of Judgment

1. What does it mean to be God's Chosen People?
 - a. When God freed the nation of Israel from Egyptian bondage, He led them to Mount Sinai, called them His people, and gave them His law.
 - b. It was God saying, "If you are going to be my people and my representation to the nations, and I am going to tabernacle among you (glory cloud, pillar of fire, shekinah glory), then you must act differently than the rest of the nations."
 - c. Romans 9:1-5
2. The Mosaic Covenant
 - a. Blessings and Cursings (Lev. 26)
 - b. The Five Levels of Cursing
 - c. Two Times they made it to Level 5 in their History
 - i. 722 & 586 BC = Babylon
 - ii. 70 & 135 AD = Rome
 - d. These judgments upon Israel were from God:
 - i. In 722 & 586 BC – for massive idolatry and not giving the Land its Sabbath rest (Lev. 26:34, 2 Chron. 36:15-21).
 - ii. In 70 & 135 AD – for her rejection of Jesus as their Messiah (Deut. 18:18-19; Lev. 26:14-33; Deut. 28:49-62).
 - e. NOTE: It is interesting that in both instances Jerusalem was under siege so long (first by Babylon and then by Rome), that the people resorted to cannibalism to stay alive (Lam. 4:10; 2 Kings 6:24-30), just as Lev. 26:29 and Deut. 28:52-53 predicted.
 - i. Deut. 28:62-67 - stories of the Nazi Holocaust cannot help but echo in the mind.

B. The Babylonian Captivity and Return

1. The first time Israel reached the 5th level of cursing and were kicked out of the Land – 586 BC
2. The first return came in 3 phases over 93 years
 - a. The first came shortly after the Persian conquest of Babylon (538-536 B.C.; Ezra 1-2), led by Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel (50,000 Jews).
 - b. The second came eighty years later, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes Longimanus (459-458 B.C.; Ezra 7-8), led by Ezra (5,000 Jews).
 - c. The third came thirteen years after the second, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes Longimanus (445-444 B.C.; Nehemiah 2), led by Nehemiah (Bible doesn't say how many).
 - d. This is important for two reasons:
 - i. Today anti-Israel theologians argue that Israel's return cannot be significant because it was 63 years ago
 - ii. The final return in the Bible, if taken literally, seems to indicate that it will take place at the second coming of Christ, making any biblical significance of 1948 improbable...
 - a) ...unless it happens in phases as it did in the first return (from Babylon).
3. For anti-Israel Replacement Theologians out there:
 - a. The three phase return that began in 583 B.C. and ended about 100 years later consisted of only about 60,000 Jews that came back from Babylon, and all theologians consider that an official "return."
 - b. How is it that since 1948, over 6,000,000 Jews have returned to the land of Israel from all around the world, yet you hesitate to call that a "return"???

II. The Biblical Basis For a Two Phase Return

A. Isaiah 11

1. Context = the second coming and setting up of the millennium kingdom.
2. A Second Return?
 - a. Isa. 11:11 – "...the Lord shall set His hand again the **second** time to recover the remnant of His people.
 - b. When was the first time?
 - c. Do the scriptures mention a third time?
3. Four main interpretations:

- a. This is the church gathered at the 2nd coming (the Amil, Replacement Theo position).
- b. Since Isaiah 11 takes place at the second coming and start of the millennium, it must mean the second return (the first being from Babylon in 538 B.C.) of Israel is still future, so 1948 cannot be significant.
 - i. Problems with this view:
 - a) Forces the second regathering of Israel in scripture to be only at the end of the Tribulation (Isa. 11:11), and therefore would make 1948 either insignificant or make us uncertain as to its significance.
 - b) Does not see the “return” of over six million Jewish people to Palestine over the last 63 years as a significant return, but would see the sixty thousand that returned over the 100 years from the Babylonian captivity as a legitimate “return.”
 - c) Further this view would be open to the Jews being kicked out of the land again today, and a regathering of Jews to the land again sometime in the future, but would not call that a *third* regathering. In other words, they seem to ignore Isaiah’s wording, “a *second* time.”
 - d) Those who hold to this view do not understand the whole of scripture as related to Israel’s return, which will be examined in the next section.
 - c. Since the second return in Isaiah 11 is from the whole earth, the first must also be from the whole earth - So the first return from the whole earth was in 1948 and the second return from the whole earth will be at the second coming (Isa. 11:11).
 - i. This view sees 538 B.C. as a return from Babylon, but not from the whole world, so Isaiah 11 does not have the 538 B.C. return in mind as the first return.
 - ii. Problems with this view:
 - a) Requires one to believe that the first regathering had to be from “the whole world”, which they believe was in 1948.
 - b) They believe 538 B.C. return could not have been the first regathering, since it was just from one nation and not the whole world.
 - c) This view fails to see that the text of Isa. 11 does not demand that the first regathering had to be from the whole world.
 - d) This view minimizes the 538 BC return.

- d. The Two-Phase 2nd Return - the first return was in 538 B.C. from Babylon and Isaiah 11 is speaking of a second return that will be worldwide at the second coming.
 - i. Sees Isa. 11 as the final phase of the second return, the first phase being 1948.
 - ii. Why this view is the best view:
 - a) recognizes the many phases of the 538 B.C. return from Babylon over the hundred years that followed, and sees the same for the second return that began in 1948 and continues to this day
 - b) Sees Isaiah 11 as speaking of the climax (or second phase) of the second return that began in 1948, which will happen at the end of the Tribulation when the millennium is about to begin.
 - c) Sees 1948 as very significant and does not deny the obvious return that has been taking place before our eyes over the last 63 years.
- e. For anti-Israel Replacement Theologians out there:
 - i. What an amazing coincidence it would be if the Bible spoke time and again about a massive return of Jewish people from the whole world in the last days (which it does), and the world saw a massive return of Jews from the whole world over the last 63 years to the tune of over six million (which it most definitely has), but yet somehow it was not scripture unfolding before our very eyes.
 - ii. If what we are seeing is not biblically significant, then God must be embarrassed that what He said is actually happening, but just by coincidence, and not by His doing.

B. Ezekiel 37

1. Phase One Return: vs. 1-8
 - a. The bones come together and flesh grows in them
 - b. Verse 8 - but there was no breath in them.
 - c. "Breath" is the same Hebrew word as "spirit" and it implies that the corpses came together, but they had no life in them.
 - d. In verse 11, it is said that the bones are "the whole house of Israel," thus the bones being restored without life are a picture of Israel today back in her land as a secular political people, but without spiritual life since the nation still does not believe in Jesus as their Messiah.
 - e. Further, God says in verse 12, "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel."
 - f. This was the first phase return that began in 1948
2. Phase Two Return: vs. 9-10

- a. God brought the bones together with flesh, but purposely left them breathless because God tells Ezekiel to prophesy a second time,
 - b. This time not to the corpses, but to the breath (or Spirit).
 - c. verse 14 he tells the dead corpses, “I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LORD have spoken *it* and performed *it*”
3. Interpretation of the Vision: vs. 11-14
- a. So there are clearly two prophecies here to Israel, one to the bones to come together and go into the land without the Spirit (the 1948 return).
 - b. And the second to the Spirit to enter the spiritually dead bones so they can come together with the Spirit in belief (the Isa. 11:11 return at the second coming).
 - i. Zechariah 12:10
 - ii. Ezek. 39:25-39

III. **The First Phase – Judgment**

Intro to this section:

Isaiah 11 established that there would be a second return, and that it would be from the whole earth. Ezekiel 37 revealed that it would be in at least two stages, first in unbelief and second in belief (with the breath (or Spirit) of life). If these passages are taken literally then the world would expect to see a great regathering of Jewish people to their land in unbelief as the end of this age grows near. That is exactly what the world has witnessed since 1948. But do the scriptures tell when and why the bones must first be regathered in unbelief?

A. The Timing (when?)

1. Zephaniah 2:1-2
 - a. Describes some of the details of the “Day of the Lord”, which is a very common Old Testament term that always stands for the future Tribulation period and Millennium.
 - i. What is the purpose of the Tribulation?
 - b. This regathering has to be in unbelief since in verse one the nation is not yet aware or repentant of their sins (“undesirable” or better “ignorant”).
 - c. Verse two warns Israel that the Lord’s fierce anger is coming (Tribulation or Time of Jacob’s Trouble) and this regathering will be “Before the Day of the Lord’s anger” (Day of the Lord).
2. Thus Zephaniah tells us there is a regathering of ignorant Jews that need to repent, and that this regathering will happen before the Day of the Lord (Tribulation).

B. The Purpose (why?)

1. Ezekiel 20:34-38
 - a. Reveals the purpose of the first phase of the second return, which is to purge out the rebels by having them pass under the rod of the Tribulation.
 - b. What is Israel's God today?

2. Ezekiel 22:17-22
 - a. Calls the unbelieving among Israel "dross" that will go through the refining fire of God's wrath
 - b. This is a reference to a first regather for the preparation of the purging of the Tribulation in judgment.
 - c. God will use the Tribulation to purge out the dross (rebels) of Israel and sift out the redeemed remnant for salvation.

3. Zech. 13:8-9
 - a. Reveals the number of the dross that will be purged and the number of the remnant that will be saved out of Tribulation.
 - b. This passage makes it clear that the dross that will be purged out and die in the judgment of the Tribulation is two-thirds of the Jewish population.
 - c. Then the one-third remaining will pass through the fire refined as silver and gold, and will be the remnant of Israel that will all believe at the second coming of Christ.
 - d. The people will say "The LORD is my God" (Zech 13:9, a reference to the fulfillment of the New Covenant).

IV. The Second Phase – Restoration

Intro to this section:

If the first phase of the second regathering of Israel that began in 1948 is to purge out the rebels (two-thirds) in the fire of Tribulation, then what about the second phase? Isaiah 11 has already revealed that the purpose of the second phase is to gather "the remnant of his people who will be left" (or remain) (Isa. 11:11), i.e. the one-third not killed in the Tribulation, from the four corners of the earth for salvation and restoration.

A. The Fullness of the Jews

1. Romans 11:11-26
 - a. Romans 11:12 calls this restoration of the Jews at the second coming "their fullness"
 - b. The RSV translates the term "fullness" in Romans 11:12 as the "full inclusion," or "full number." Thus God has in mind a full number of Israelites just as a full number of Gentiles. When the full number of

Gentiles is reached, it will be Israel's opportunity to experience their full number.

- c. Paul calls this fullness "acceptance" and "life from the dead" for the Jewish people (v. 15).
 - d. He goes on to say God will graft the Jews in again (v. 23) since Israel's blinding is only partial until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in (v. 25), and then "All Israel" will be saved.
2. Isaiah 59:20-21
 - a. Paul then quotes Isaiah 59:20-21 which is a passage like Isaiah 11:11 that speaks of the Redeemer (Christ) redeeming Zion at his second coming by removing transgression from Jacob (New Covenant language again).
 - b. Verse 21.a. actually references the New Covenant (like Zech. 13:9 above).
 3. This study has revealed that the one-third of Jews that survive the purging of the Tribulation is the "Fullness of the Jews" that Paul is talking about in Romans 11:12, which Paul calls the grafting back in and saving of "All Israel" in Romans 11:26.

B. The Lasting Effect of the New Covenant for Israel

1. The Application of the New Covenant:
Jeremiah 31:31-34 in the classic passage on the New Covenant. There are four things that apply to the remnant of Israel alive at the end of the Tribulation
 - a. First, this covenant was given to the house of Israel and the house of Judah according to verse 31, and not to the church (The New Testament does reveal that the church -- Jew and Gentile united in Christ -- become spiritual partakers of New Covenant salvation in the church age, but that is a sermon for another time).
 - b. Secondly, God will do the work (seven "I wills") for the remnant of Israel left from the Tribulation.
 - i. He will make them believe as Christ returns and they mourn as they look on him whom they have pierced (Zech. 12:10).
 - ii. God will put his law within them on their hearts, forgive their iniquity and never remember their sin anymore (vs. 33-34).
 - c. Thirdly, he will do this for "All Israel" alive at his second coming, for verse 34 says "they shall all know Me from the least of them to the greatest of them."
 - i. This is why Paul used the terms "fullness" and "All Israel" in Romans 11

- ii. The all Israel means just that – every Jew living at that point of time, meaning the third that are left from the original number of Jews living at the start of the Tribulation.
 - d. Fourthly, this is a permanent condition for the Jewish nation (see point 2 below).
- 2. The Permanency of the New Covenant
 - a. Isaiah 59:21 (which was mentioned above that Paul quoted in Romans 11) makes known: “...;this is My covenant with them: My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants’ descendants,” says the LORD, “from this time and forevermore.”
 - b. Jeremiah’s language in 31:34 also implies permanency when it says: “They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.”
 - c. Quote from Fruchtenbaum:
 - i. “The result of the New Covenant will be a total national regeneration of Israel (v. 34). Jewish missions and Jewish evangelism will not be needed in the Messianic Kingdom because every Jew will know the Lord, from the least to the greatest. The sins of Israel will be forgiven and forgotten. While there will be Gentile unbelievers in the Kingdom, there will not be Jewish unbelievers in the Kingdom. To a man, all the Jews will believe. There will be no need to tell a Jew to “know the Lord” because they will all know Him.”
 - d. Israel has a special election for all Jewish people alive at the second coming to believe in Christ as He returns (Zech 12:10), and they have a special election in the millennium as God’s chosen people to be at the head, and in the center, of the nations representing God to the whole world (Zech. 8:20-23)

V. So What?

A. Parallels of Israel’s New Covenant Salvation to Your Salvation:

1. Church saints are spiritual partakers of the New Covenant today, but only after God chooses an individual and does the regenerating work of the New Covenant in his/her heart (as God will choose that generation of Israel and do the work of salvation in their hearts).
2. Once God does this work, it is a permanent condition. We cannot lose our salvation. This is done at an individual level today in the church age. But for the “All Israel” alive at the second coming, the New Covenant will be

enacted for them in both an individual way (on each heart) but also in a national way.

3. God will choose that generation as he chose us, and he will do the work in their hearts as he did the work in our hearts, and once God does that work for the nation, it is a permanent condition for them, as it is for us.
4. What power would the New Covenant have in our lives if our New Covenant salvation were not permanent? In the same way, since the New Covenant was specifically given to the nation of Israel and has its ultimate fulfillment in them, what power would New Covenant salvation have for that nation if it were not permanent?

B. The Importance of Israel's Return for Us

Scripture teaches that Israel back in the land today is significant not just in preparation for its judgment in the coming Tribulation, but also to set the stage for the coming prophetic events:

1. What is the purpose of the Tribulation? (Ezek 20; 22)
2. What starts the 70th week of Daniel (or the Tribulation)? (Dan. 9:27a)
3. What do you have to have in order for the Anti-Christ to sign a treaty with Israel?
4. What happens in the middle of the Tribulation? (Dan. 9:27b; Matt. 24:15)
5. What do you have to have in order to have the Anti-Christ defile the Temple?
6. In order to have a Temple, what must Israel be in control of?

When we see the restorations of 1948 and 1967, Israel back in her land, and God setting the stage for the Tribulation and prophetic events, we know that the *Rapture* cannot be too far away. Thus Israel being in the land today should indeed give the church a great hope, something to rejoice about, and a reason to stand by Israel in these last days as we await the rapture of the church.