

ISRAEL AND PROPHECY

By Mike Burnham

Israel has been singled out by God to be in the *center* of His prophetic program. Any study of history or scanning of newspapers today will back up this truth. Israel is very special to God, Ps. 135:4; Deut. 32:9-10; Zech. 2:8. Why did God choose Israel for this privileged position among mankind? Deut. 7:6-9; 4:32-39.

When starting a study on Israel one must start with Abraham, Gen. 12:1-3. Chosen by God, Israel was destined to make mankind aware of God's sovereignty and grace. *By her laws*, she would witness to the Lord's holiness and justice. His eternal truths would be *revealed and recorded through her*. And best of all, through the line of Abraham the *promised Messiah*, Jesus the Christ, would enter this world. No higher calling could come upon a people than to be God's agent to carry out His purposes! She would be the Lord's representative on earth and the vehicle of salvation, like the Church is today.

A LAND OF THEIR OWN

In Gen. 12:6-7 the Lord gave them a land of their very own, some of which they occupy today. This same promise is repeated in Gen. 17:7-8; 28:13-15; 35:9-12. In spite of her privileges, however, the nation of Israel failed to fulfill her God given destiny. Again and again they disobeyed God. They rebelled against His will, they fell into unbelief, and they violated the trust God placed in them. Sounds like a lot of Christians today, in fact, the history of the nation of Israel is a picture of a Christian's life.

THE LAND---A CONDITIONAL PROMISE

The promise to Abraham and Jacob was unconditional. But the promise to Israel was conditional, Lev. 26:3-4;14-15;31-35;40-46.

Between Israel's origin and the ultimate end of the nation, there are many things that have come upon the nation that have involved the world as a result of what Israel did, and what Israel did not do. Because this is true, let's look at some of the conditions that were laid down to Israel upon their possession of the land, Exo. 34:10-16.

They were to thoroughly purge the land of all symbols of any other religion. Some people today accuse God of being unfair in destroying the people and their religions. But the land was given to Israel by God, its owner. Why weren't they living there? Because a famine came in the land and they headed for Egypt to survive and were later enslaved. They were in Egypt approximately 400 years, and while they were gone these other people just took over. The religion of these squatters was deeply involved in sex worship and human sacrifice by burning their children on altars and running them through fires. It was an abomination to God and the human race. God said, don't let these pagans hang around because if you do your sons will marry their daughters. You know, boys have a way of doing that -- if they are around they will marry them. The same thing happens today among Christians and non-Christians.

God knew that if these people intermarried it would destroy the identity and purity of His people. Do you know what the most powerful waterfall in the world is? A woman's tears. They'll turn wheels that rivers won't turn. When those pagan wives of Solomon began to say, "you think a lot more of your Hebrew wives than you do of us, and you haven't been fair, you haven't built an altar to our God." Solomon said, "Okay, just quiet down and I'll put one right up here on the Mount of Olives, just above the temple," and he did.

These conditions were repeated to the younger generation that had come along, Num. 33:51-53. In verses 55-56, God, through Moses, tells the people exactly what to expect if they didn't purge the land. Moses warned them again just before he died, Deut. 4:22-31.

THE PROPHECY

Look at the prophecy involved here. They haven't even gotten to the promised land yet. They don't even have their national government set up yet. and God said that when you get into the land and have been there a long time you're going to be scattered from the land among every nation. Why do we find Jews in every nation of the world instead of their own land for the last 2500 years? Because they didn't listen to God.

What did the Israelites do when they got in the promised land? Judges 1:21, 27-33. Verse 29--Israel as a strong nation said it wasn't necessary to drive the people out like Moses had said, instead we can tax the people to death. What was the result? Judges 2:1-5.

ISRAEL COMPROMISES

Next we will see what happens to Israel because they compromise instead of following God's word. It's a dangerous thing to compromise the Word of God just to get along or get together like many churches are doing today.

SOMETIMES GOD GIVES US WHAT WE WANT

1 Samuel 8:45....The first thing that happens is that they reject God's system of rule. Where did they get the idea? From the people they left in the land, which God said should have been driven out.

1 Samuel 8:6-7...."*They have rejected me*" God says "*Be ye holy and separated.*" Israel, who is a type or picture of us and our lives, would rather be rebellious and the same is true of us. Now once they had a king in Israel and had gone into paganism, the king led them further into paganism, 1 Kings 11:1-2. Go back to God's prophecy, Exo. 34:13-16 and compare 1 Kings 11:4, 9-10.

ISRAELS' DECLINE

Israel now began its decline. It had risen to a great nation under

David, that other nations feared. Its borders had expanded, and Solomon had become a wealthy and wise king that other kings and queens sought and envied. But his and Israel's involvement with pagans and their gods caused their downfall.

The kingdom was divided, the northern kingdom "*Israel*", and the southern kingdom "*Judah*", 1 Kings 11:11-13; 12:19,20. Jeroboam, taking ten tribes to the north, went immediately into idolatry, 12:25-28. After a series of kings over Israel God brought the Assyrian Empire against them and they were carried away captive, 2 Kings 17:1,6-8,12,22-23. Judah too, soon became very idolatrous, 23:26-27, and God brought Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, against her, 25:1,7-12,21.

587 BC - THE TIMES OF THE GENTILES

Here begins the "*Time of the Gentiles*", Luke 21:20-28; Psa. 79:1-13; Rev. 11:1-2. During this time of the Gentiles, God is choosing for Himself a people out of them also, 1 Pet. 2:9. Compare this to Deut. 14:2; Exo. 19:5-6.

God charged Israel, through His prophet Malachi, of the polluted worship and priesthood, and their killing of the prophets God sent. Then in 1:11 He warns them that *He is going to the Gentiles*. God didn't speak to Israel as a nation again for 400 years, until John the Baptist came on the scene, the one crying out of the wilderness to pave the way of the Lord.

Following the captivity in Babylon and Assyria the city and the land of Israel came under the heel of the Persians, the Greeks, the Syrians, the Egyptians, the Romans, the Arabs, the Turks, and the English. The Gentiles were trampling over it. One empire would trample through it to defeat another. Another would come back through it to defeat the next and it became a battle-ground for Gentile empires, until Jerusalem was no longer looked upon as anything but a trouble spot.

Because of Israel's state of apostasy, when their Messiah, who was heralded by all the prophets of the O.T., did come they *rejected* Him, John

1:10-11. When Pilate, the Roman Consul, asked the Jews to turn Him free since he couldn't find where Jesus had done anything wrong, they cried "*Crucify him!*" Matt. 27:15-25. "*His blood be on us, and on our children.*" And that's exactly what has happened down through the centuries. They cried out and God granted their petition. The unsaved are saying the same thing and will go through an eternity of torment.

GODS' MERCY AND GRACE TO THE GENTILES

About 40 years from the time Jesus spoke the words of Luke 21:20-27, Titus, the Roman General, drew his armies from nearly every corner of the empire against the city of Jerusalem, and the slaughter that took place in that city as been unequalled. As Israel was dispersed from the land, for judgment, the Gentiles come under the spotlight of God's grace and mercy, and the door of faith is opened to them. This is the beginning of the second aspect of the times of the Gentiles. God was setting this in motion when He warned Israel through the prophet Malachi 400 years before.

It's interesting that God opened the door of faith to the Gentiles officially through a Jewish missionary out of Jerusalem. Today, the Gentile Christians are sending missionaries to Jerusalem with the same message. Acts 10:9-20, 28-29; then in verses 34-43 we find Peter in Caesarea preaching to the Gentiles.

We can look back and see how Israel made their mistake and we can say they should have known better. They compromised their beliefs, got involved with false religions, and false teachings and intermarried. But you know, the Gentile churches are doing the same thing, making the same mistakes. The ecumenical movement is one of the biggest mistakes today. They say it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you love one another. It didn't work that way for Israel and it won't work for us either. Fellowship in Christ is fellowship with the truth.

ISRAEL A BYWORD

One of the prophecies that dealt with the dispersion of Israel was that

the they would become a byword, a proverb, among the nations where they were dispersed, Deut. 28:15,37, 62-65; 29:22-28. For instance: Where'd we get the word "*ghetto*?" From the Venetian word "*geto*" meaning *foundry*. There was a foundry on an island in Venice. So the island itself was referred to as "*the geto*." In 1516, Jews were restricted to that island and the name became identified with the Jews. In certain European cities, a section to which Jews were formerly restricted was known as "*the ghetto*." Today, any section of a city in which many members of some minority group live, or to which they are restricted as by economic pressure or social discrimination, is called a "*ghetto*."

When you think of a cheapskate the first person that comes to mind is probably a *Jew*. When we barter for something we are *Jewing* them down.

When people need someone to hate they have always turned to the Jew. When you look at the News Papers you can't help but notice the double standard that is set for Israel alone. Ps. 44:14; Jer. 24:9.

DISTRUCTION OF THE CITIES AND THE TEMPLE

The cities themselves were to be destroyed, Lev. 26:31-35. Ashdod went completely out of existence, Capernaum, Bethsaida, Chorazin went out of existence and are still out of existence. It is desolate. They haven't worshipped in the temple since 70 A.D. Some believe that God will no longer deal with the Jews but look at Lev. 26:43-45; Romans 11:25-32.

Micah 3:12....Jerusalem has been leveled to the ground 17 times since David's day. There's probably no city that has been besieged and destroyed more times than Jerusalem and left in heaps. The only part of the city Titus destroyed that remains is the old "*wailing wall*." The city of Jerusalem has been rebuilt 17 times and always on top of the former heap or tell.

From what I understand, you can go out the Damascus gate of the present wall, go down under the ramp that serves as a walkway, and right below the gate that's used today is the ancient Damascus gate that Saul (Paul) went through on his way to Damascus to take Christians prisoner.

THE RETURN OF ISRAEL

God promised to return Israel to their land, Deut. 30:1-10; Eze. 34:11-14. It's amazing that so many people could come in so short a time to so desolate a land as Israel was, and be fed and survive and begin to export merchandise from the land, Eze. 36:8-11.

There are two forces that are moving nations. One is God and the other is Satan, but it is God who determines the destinies and boundaries of the nations, Jer. 18:5-10.

Jeremiah 24:4-6....This is the reason that every time Egypt or another of the Arab countries tries to invade Israel it's like they are butting their heads against a brick wall. God said He would not pluck them up which implies that He is not going to let anyone else do it either. Verse 7 of this prophecy has yet to be fulfilled. They have returned to the land but not to the Lord. Why does the Lord gather Israel back to their own land? Ezekiel 36:16-24.

EZEKIEL 37

In this chapter there is an interesting prophecy using a vision something like Peter's, using figures of speech where one thing is put for another. In this prophecy we see that Israel is united as one nation again, the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel. (So much for those who speak of themselves as the ten lost tribes like Herbert and Garner Ted Armstrong and others.) They were never lost and when God deals with them again, He will be dealing with Israel as a whole, not Anglo-Saxons as Armstrong teaches.

Read the whole chapter. One thing nice about this vision is that the Lord explains what it means. Verse 11 tells us who these bones represent, the nation of Israel. Israel had been buried in every nation, scattered throughout the world for centuries, spiritually dead and dead as a nation. The nations of the world have been their graves.

Verse 1....The valley was "*full of dry bones.*" Verse 10 says that they stood upon their feet, an "exceeding great army." The presence of many bones may signify that there will be a vast number of Jews living when the time comes for the nation to be regathered. Interestingly, the 20th century has witnessed a rapid growth in the population of the Jews. In spite of all the persecutions they have endured down through the years and more Jews are alive now than lived under the rule of David and Solomon when the nation was at it's peak in power and influence. More than 13 million people today can be identified as Jews.

Verses 2 and 11....The bones were very dry. This likely indicates that at the time of the regathering, Israel will have been dead for a long time. This certainly fits Israels history. They were last scattered in 70 A.D. From a human standpoint, no one would have expected this scattered and persecuted people to exist as a nation ever again. That's why in verse 11 we hear Israel saying, "*our bones are dried, our hope is lost, we are cut off on our part.*" But the Lord has not allowed His people to become incorporated into the nations where they have been scattered and lose thier identity which is what has happened to all other nations that no longer exist, like Edom that hasn't existed since 70 A.D.

The restoration of Israel appears to involve *two* stages. The prophet Ezekiel is commanded to prophecy twice and there are two time periods mentioned in the explanation, verses 11-22 and verses 23-28, speaking of the Millennial reign of Christ.

When he speaks the first time, *five things happen*: **1)** v-7 "*there's a noise.*" **2)** "*there's a shaking.*" **3)** "*a moving of bone to bone.*" **4)** "*flesh and sinews appear.*" **5)** "*skin covers the bones.*" Have we seen the dry bones of the house of Israel come together? I believe we have, but, so far Israel is there in unbelief. The regathering has been political in nature. There has not been a *spiritual* restoration. It could be that in the events leading up to the return of the Jews to their land, and the actual event, we have already heard the "*noise*", observed the "*shaking*", and seen the

"bones come together." In the establishment of the State of Israel, with its own flag, its own government, and its own military forces, we may have seen the "*sinews*", the "*flesh*" and the "*skin*" come upon them. All this could be in preparation for the spiritual revived nation of Israel at the end of the tribulation.

In verses 21-28 four steps take place: **1)** the people are brought home to their own land, v-21-22. **2)** their purification from idolatry, v-23. **3)** the installation over them of one king, the Messiah. **4)** the establishment of God's covenant of peace and His sanctuary in their midst, v-26-28.

THE TWO STICKS

Verse 16...."Judah, and ...his companions" The southern kingdom was made up of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin but many of the godly Israelites came at different times from the northern kingdom to join into the southern kingdom, 2 Chron. 11:12-17; 30:11,18.

RECENT HISTORY

In 1947, when Israel was given a charter as a nation, there were about 500,000 Jews in the land. They didn't have any weapons to speak of or ammunition; they made their own weapons and improvised them. They were surrounded by six million Arabs that were dedicated to the proposition that they going to drive Israel into the sea. But they didn't. Israel won her war of independence in 1948.

In 1967 the Syrians and the Egyptians were saying over the radio and in the newspapers that they were going to blast Israel off the face of the earth. They were going to drive them into the sea. They were going to annihilate them. Then they began to move. They closed the Gulf of Aqaba; they closed the canal and they moved into the Gaza Strip.

Then one morning they got up and found out Israel had wiped out their Air Force and it was just about over. The world couldn't believe what

had happened. In *six days* the war was over and the Syrian and Egyptian representatives to the UN meeting were singing a different tune. Now they were saying, "Stop them!" They are shooting at us. They need to be stopped. They are going to bomb Cairo!

This was the fulfillment of prophecy again. God had delivered the little band of people He had restored just as He said He was going to do. I'm not against the Arab but I'll tell you one thing, I'm for the Jew, and I'll tell you why. God told Abraham a long time ago, "I'm for those that are for you, and I'm against those that are against you." Gen. 12:2-3. And I can't find anywhere in scripture that indicates He has changed His mind. Quite the contrary is taught.