

Is the Modern State of Israel Prophetically Significant?

Dr. J. Randall Price

Foreword: Preterists and Historicists have launched a new assault against Futurism in the attempt to counter the influence of the *Left Behind* series on the popular audience that comprises Reformed and Church of Christ congregations (which traditionally hold to one of these prophetic methods of interpretation). Recently popular talk show host Hank (“The Bible Answer Man”) Hanegraff has stated that his aim in publishing his new novel *The Last Disciple* (called by him “an alternative to *Left Behind*”) as well as advancing his form of modified Preterism on his program produced by “The Christian Research Institute”(CRI), is to bring about a “paradigm shift in eschatology.” He means by this he wants to change people’s views about literal interpretation of prophecy which results in Futurism. In May 2005 a new book by Colin Chapman, *Who Owns Jerusalem?* will attack the understanding that Jerusalem, as the central city in Scripture, has a prophetic future. This follows his previous book *Who Owns the Land?* in which he attacked the notion that the Land of Israel continues to have any prophetic significance. The following paper, is a revision of a paper first delivered at the 13th Annual Pre-Trib Research Center Conference in Dallas, TX, December 6-8, 2004. A copy of the tape may be ordered from www.pre-trib.org. The goal of this paper is to present in general the biblical data supporting the continuing prophetic significance of Israel and of the modern State of Israel in particular.

Introduction

In a conversation on religious questions, Fredric II, King of Prussia (1740-1786) asked Joachim von Zieten, General of the Hussars, whom he esteemed highly as a Christian for his plain and uncompromised views, “Give me proof for the truth of the Bible in two words!” To which Zeiten replied, “Your majesty, the Jews!” The General’s statement reflected his understanding of not only the miraculous preservation of the Jewish people, but his belief that their preservation was for the purpose of bringing God’s unfulfilled promises to pass. To Zeiten, the present existence of the Jewish people was proof that God’s Word was true because Scripture had promised that they would remain until all that had been prophesied concerning them was fulfilled. Remarkably, this expression of faith was made in a day when the Land of Israel was desolate of a Jewish population and the majority of Jews were scattered among the nations.

A century before Zieten the famed reformer Martin Luther also struggled with the significance of Jewish existence, but came to a very different conclusion based on his observation of the miserable condition of the Jews in his day (sadly, one largely imposed upon them by the Church). Deciding that such Jews could not be those to whom the Bible referred, he said: “If the Jews are Abraham’s descendants, then we would expect to see them back in their own land. We would expect them to have a state of their own. But what do we see? We see them living scattered and despised.”¹ As a result, he continued to accept the spiritual interpretation of his Augustinian order that the Church is the only heir of the promises to Abraham. I wonder what Zieten and Luther would say if they lived in our day when almost five million Jews have returned to the biblical homeland to regain their independence in a developed Jewish state whose technology and military achievements are the envy of the world? I wonder, too, what they might say to us, their fellow defenders of the truth of the Bible, who almost sixty years after this historic return still must address the question “Is the modern state of Israel prophetically

¹ As cited in Halvor Ronning, *The Land of Israel: A Christian Zionist View,* *Immanuel* 22/23 (1989): 132. In private conversation in 2003, Halvor Ronning told me he no longer refers to himself as a “Christian Zionist” but as a “Biblical Zionist,” since the actual ground for this conviction is biblical rather than Christian.

significant?" Yet, this is the question that has been asked ever since the State of Israel was established and continues to be at the center of controversy, if not conflict, within the evangelical church today.

The Attitude toward the Modern State of State of Israel Among the Churches in Israel

The question of the importance of Israel's renewed existence and dominance in the Land has been of special concern to the historic churches in the Holy Land. The Ecumenical Theological Research Fraternity in Israel, which since its beginning in 1966 has monitored and evaluated developments in Christian attitudes toward Judaism in official documents by churches, has considered the change of attitude in theology and church policy toward the State of Israel. In the view of the Fraternity, the conclusion was that for "the lives of Christians living here, the impact is deep and challenging, shaping personal thinking, study and teaching; elsewhere, however, the very fact of Israel's existence can be a stumbling block for current theological concepts as well as for many churches and their policies."² In the East, both the Chalcedonian churches (Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox), but especially the non-Chalcedonian churches (Syrian, Coptic, Ethiopian, Armenian),³ view the existence of the State of Israel, and especially Judaism, as an intrusion into a religious situation dominated by their ecclesiastical bodies since the early centuries of Christianity. From their shared theological perspective of replacement theology, they are the rightful successors of the ancient church and therefore of the old Israel and consider themselves to be a part of the Land in their own right. Their theological attitude toward the successive governments that have occupied the Holy Land throughout history (Arab Muslim, Crusader, Mameluke, Turk, British) has usually been one of indifference, viewing one invader the same as the other. For this reason the modern rebirth of the Jewish state is seen as of no special importance. This theological attitude is more or less held by churches in the West, who, with churches in the East must enter into conflict with the Jewish state over political and property issues or in protests of the Israeli government's treatment of the resident Christian community, the larger percentage of which is Palestinian Arab.

The Attitude toward the Modern State of Israel Among Churches in the West

There are also Catholic, Protestant, and Reformed churches in the West who, while accepting the political reality of the modern Jewish state, deny any theological importance to Jewish regathering. For example, the Vatican's Commission for the Religious Relations with the Jews has stated "The existence of the State of Israel and its political options should be envisioned not in a perspective which is in itself religious, but in their reference to the common principles of international law: The permanence of Israel ... is an historic fact and a sign to be interpreted within God's design."⁴ In like manner, 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

² Petra Heldt and Malcolm Lowe, "Theological Significance of the Rebirth of the State of Israel: Different Christian Attitudes," *Immanuel* 22/23 (1989): 133.

³ These terms distinguish those churches with respect to their adoption of or rejection of the conclusions of the Council of Chalcedon convened in A.D. 451.

⁴ "Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews: Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church (June 1985)," reprinted in Helga Croner ed., *More Stepping Stones to Jewish Christian Relations* (New York, 1985), pp. 220-232.

is the] State of Israel a geopolitical entity and is not to be validated theologically.”⁵ As a result of adopting this distinction, such churches have placed themselves in an adversarial position to those who advocate a definite theological significance to the establishment of the modern Jewish state. These churches have in particular come into conflict with Christian Zionism, which in its various forms claims more than 90 million adherents. One of the tenets of Christian Zionism is that the Jews are being regathered to the biblical Land of Israel to form a state and reclaim Jerusalem as part of the purpose and plan of God to fulfill prophecy and bring the promised blessings of God and world peace to the ends of the earth. In this regard Christian Zionists assert:

The message which God told the prophet to declare to all nations is that the gathering of Israel is the purpose and achievement of God. The Zionist movement is just His instrument, when acting according to His plans. An anti-Zionistic movement who opposes the return and presence of the nation of Israel in the Middle East, does not oppose only the Zionist movement, but also the impelling power of the return of Israel: the Almighty God Himself.⁶

The growing influence of Christian Zionism and especially the prophetic interpretation of dispensationalism as expressed in such popular literature as Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, *Left Behind* series, have produced a recent counter response. For example, “The Knox Seminary Open Letter to Evangelicals” was posted on the internet to register evangelical (Reformed) opposition to the theological position and practice of evangelical support for Israel. One of the alleged errors it addresses is the “teaching that the Bible's promises concerning the land are fulfilled in a special political region or "Holy Land," perpetually set apart by God for one ethnic group alone. As a result of these false claims, large segments of the evangelical community, our fellow citizens, and our government are being misled with regard to the Bible's teachings regarding the people of God, the land of Israel, and the impartiality of the Gospel.”⁷ Among the theological propositions of this Open Letter are the following:

- (1) “These promises do not apply to any particular ethnic group, but to the church of Jesus Christ, the true Israel” (Proposition VI).
- (2) “Peter, the Apostle to the Circumcision, says nothing about the restoration of the kingdom to Israel in the land of Palestine” (Proposition VIII).
- (3) “The entitlement of any one ethnic or religious group to territory in the Middle East called the "Holy Land" cannot be supported by Scripture. In fact, the land promises specific to Israel in the Old Testament were fulfilled under Joshua. The New Testament speaks clearly and prophetically about the destruction of the second temple in A.D. 70. No New Testament writer foresees a regathering of ethnic Israel in the land, as did the

⁵ “A Theological Understanding of the Relationship between Christians and Jews: A Paper Commended to the Church for Study and Reflection by the 199th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 1987,” as cited in *Immanuel* 22/23 (1989): 137.

⁶ Ulla Jaervilehto, “Whose Land: Can Christians Be Neutral or Non-Aligned?” in *Christian Zionism and Its Biblical Basis* (Jerusalem, 1985), p. 19.

⁷ “An Open Letter to Evangelicals and Other Interested Parties: The People of God, the Land of Israel, and the Impartiality of the Gospel,” drafted by R. Fowler White and Warren A. Gage, Knox Theological Seminary (Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, 2002): 1.

prophets of the Old Testament after the destruction of the first temple in 586 B.C.” (Proposition IX).

(4) “Bad Christian theology regarding the "Holy Land" contributed to the tragic cruelty of the Crusades in the Middle Ages. Lamentably, bad Christian theology is today attributing to secular Israel a divine mandate to conquer and hold Palestine, with the consequence that the Palestinian people are marginalized and regarded as virtual "Canaanites." This doctrine is both contrary to the teaching of the New Testament and a violation of the Gospel mandate. In addition, this theology puts those Christians who are urging the violent seizure and occupation of Palestinian land in moral jeopardy of their own blood guiltiness” (Proposition X).

In the year following the “Open Letter” the 216th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA, with 2.5 million members, 11,200 congregations, and 21,000 ordained ministers, disavowed Christian Zionism as a legitimate theological stance, condemned the modern State of Israel for its treatment of the Palestinians, and insisted on the Palestinians’ right of return to Israel proper.⁸ Victor Makari, Presbyterian mediator for the Middle East, praised the assembly for equating Israel’s behavior toward the Palestinians as apartheid and for issuing an economic boycott, calling for multinational companies to stop doing business with Israel. Mitri Raheb, a Palestinian Lutheran minister from Bethlehem, praised the Presbyterian assembly’s resolution stating, “The churches have stood by far too long and done nothing against Israel’s illegal behavior toward the Palestinians.” However, Israeli believer Aviel Schneider, editor of *Israel Today* magazine noted: “The hardship inflicted by Moslems on their Arab Christian neighbors was never mentioned. Well aware that criticizing the Palestinian Authority or terrorist groups could endanger the lives of Christians back home, the Palestinian reverend was careful to point the finger at Israel alone.”⁹

This opposition is not only to theological and social concerns, but also to political concerns. Timothy Webber, President of Memphis Theological Seminary, in his book *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals became Israel’s Best Friends*, articulates this concern especially with respect to dispensationalists:

Before the founding and expansion of Israel, dispensationalists were more or less content to teach their doctrine, look for signs of the times, and predict in sometimes great detail what was going to happen in the future ... In essence, they sat high in the bleachers on history’s fifty-yard line, watching as various teams took their positions on the playing field below and explaining to everyone who would listen how the game was going to end. For the first one hundred years of their movement, then, they were observers, not shapers of events. But all that changed after Israel reclaimed its place in Palestine and expanded its borders. For the first time, dispensationalists believed that it was necessary to leave the bleachers and get onto the playing field to make sure the game ended according to the divine script. As the world edged closer and closer to the end, dispensationalists became

⁸ As reported by Elwood McQuaid, “Presbyterians Come Out of the Closet,” *Israel My Glory* (November/December 2004): 12.

⁹ Aviel Schneider, “Presbyterians Adopt Anti-Israel Agenda,” *Israel Today* (September 2004): 20.

important players in their own game plan. When they shifted from observers to participants, they ran the risk of turning their predictions into self-fulfilling prophecies.¹⁰

Although by his conclusion Webber admits that “It would be too easy – and completely unwarranted – to conclude that American prophecy believers are responsible for the mess the world is in, that their beliefs have produced the current quagmire in the Middle East,”¹¹ nevertheless, his book has painted a picture of dispensationalism as “an ambivalent eschatology, “ offering “uncritical evangelical support for modern-day Israel’s most uncompromising hard-line groups and their explosive agenda ... anticipating Israel’s glorious future while also foreseeing either conversion or annihilation as the fate of the Jewish people ...”¹² Timothy Webber, Paul Boyer, Stephen Sizer, Colin Chapman, and a host of others approach the subject of the modern State of Israel from the perspective of social justice, human rights, the mission of the churches and their survival in the East, rather than with an interest in eschatology.¹³

While critics of Christian Zionism link it with dispensationalism, dispensationalists, especially outside the U.S., are a minority in the movement.¹⁴ In fact, the roots of modern Christian Zionism are with non-dispensationalists and began some 250 years before dispensationalism was developed as a system.¹⁵ It was the English Puritan movement that gave the initial impetus for Jewish Restorationist doctrines. Barbara Tuchman, author of a major work on Britain’s relationship with Israel, notes, “Starting with the Puritan ascendancy the movement among the English for the return of the Jews to Palestine began.”¹⁶ One of the greatest of the English Puritan theologians was Postmillennialist John Owen (1616–1683) who wrote, “The Jews shall be gathered from all parts of the earth where they are scattered, and brought home into their homeland.”¹⁷ Other key figures during this period (many Postmillennialists) who published works (dates are dates of publication) arguing for the restoration of the Jews to the Land of Israel on a biblical basis were Francis Kett (1585), Edmund Bunny (1584, 1588), Thomas Draxe (1608), Thomas Brightman (1609), Joseph Mede (1627), Giles Fletcher /Samuel Lee (1677), Henry Finch (1621) John Milton, John Bunyan, Roger Williams, John Sadler and Oliver Cromwell.¹⁸ According to Carl Ehle, Jr., “The doctrine of the restoration of the Jews continued to be expounded in England, evolving according to the insight of each exponent and finally playing a role in

¹⁰ Timothy P. Webber, *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel’s Best Friend* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), p. 15

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 266.

¹² Paul S. Boyer, book endorsement back of dust jacket.

¹³ In this regard see Colin Chapman, “One Land, Two Peoples – How Many States,” *Mishkan* 26:1 (1997): 4-15,

¹⁴ For example, David R. Parsons, Public Relations Officer with the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem, argues that covenant theology, not dispensational theology, is the proper foundation for Christian Zionism, “Swords into Plowshares: Christian Zionism and the Battle of Armageddon,” *The Good Steward Series* (Jerusalem: ICEJ, n.d.), pp. 18-35.

¹⁵ See, for example, Peter Toon, “The Latter-Day Glory,” in Toon, editor, *Puritans, the Millennium and the Future of Israel: Puritan Eschatology 1600 to 1660* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1970), Douglas J. Culver, *Albion and Ariel: British Puritanism and the Birth of Political Zionism* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), and Thomas Ice, “Lovers of Zion: A History of Christian Zionism,” *The Gathering Storm*, edited by Mal Couch (21st Century Press, 2004), pp.

¹⁶ Barbara W. Tuchman, *Bible and Sword: England and Palestine from the Bronze Age to Balfour* (New York: Ballantine Press, 1956), p. 122.

¹⁷ Martha Lou Farmer, “They Believed the Scriptures—The Story of Christian Zionism,” Bridges For Peace website, May 21, 2004, p. 2; see also Ehle, “Prolegomena,” p. 79.

¹⁸ Saddington, “Prophecy and Politics,” pp. 34–38.

Christian Zionistic activities in the latter part of the nineteenth and in the first of the twentieth centuries.”¹⁹ Many of these early advocates of Jewish restoration to the Land of Israel, especially in England, significantly influenced the social and political events that led to the Balfour Declaration as well as other political support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. From this brief glimpse at the historical beginnings of Christian Zionism it is obvious that non-dispensationalists, and particularly those who were Reformed, contributed a social and political sway.

However, it is our purpose to understand the biblical basis for the prophetic significance of the State of Israel, which as a result has prompted evangelical support of this modern political reality.

The Attitude toward the Modern State of Israel Among Evangelical Christians

Focusing on the response of the evangelical church to the question “Is the modern state of Israel prophetically significant?” we find, as expected, two opposing positions: (1) a decided rejection of the proposal in keeping with established views of Christian supersessionism and (2) an acceptance of the proposal, although with varying degrees of acknowledgment as to what extent and when the modern Jewish return and establishment of a state can be understood to fulfill the prophetic text. Let us consider each of these in turn, beginning with the negative response.

The first position with respect to the modern State of Israel is that there is

(1) No prophetic significance whatsoever!

The rejection of theological significance for the modern State of Israel among evangelical churches has been motivated by their eschatological system of Covenant Theology. Covenant Theologians understand there to be only one people of God, the Church, which was represented as “the church of Israel in the wilderness in the Old Testament and as the Israel of God in the New Testament,” whose only kingdom is heavenly, and for whom all of the covenant promises have already been fulfilled in Christ. O. Palmer Robertson is typical of Reformed writers concerning the changed meaning of the Land after the coming of Christ: “The Land which once was the specific locale of God’s redemptive working served well within the old covenant as a picture of Paradise lost and promised. Now, however, in the era of new-covenant fulfillment, the land has expanded to encompass the cosmos.”²⁰ Likewise, Colin Chapman states the position that the literal promise of the Land to Israel ceased with Jesus, and certainly with the apostles:

Is there anything to suggest that after the ascension of Jesus his disciples continued to look forward to a restored Jewish state in the Land? Given the political situation in first-century Palestine, the writers of the New Testament had every reason to hope for a

¹⁹ Carl F. Ehle, Jr., “Prolegomena to Christian Zionism in America: The Views of Increase Mather and William E. Blackstone Concerning the Doctrine of the Restoration of Israel,” Ph.D. Dissertation at New York University, 1977,” p. 61.

²⁰ O. Palmer Robertson, “A New Covenant Perspective on the Land,” in Philip Johnston and Peter Walker, Eds. *The Land of Promise: Biblical, Theological and Contemporary Perspectives* (Leicester: Apollos, 2000), p. 139.

national restoration for the Jewish people. But did they in fact do so? There is nothing whatsoever to suggest that they held onto these hopes.²¹

For this reason there can be no prophetic fulfillment for the Jewish people as an ethnic people distinct from the Church or fulfillment in an earthly place such as the Land of Israel. In the words of the “Open Letter:” “The promised Messianic kingdom of Jesus Christ has been inaugurated ... The present secular state of Israel, however, is not an authentic or prophetic realization of the Messianic kingdom of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, a day should not be anticipated in which Christ's kingdom will manifest Jewish distinctives, whether by its location in ‘the land,’ by its constituency, or by its ceremonial institutions and practices.”²² Those who insist to the contrary, such as dispensational theologians, are regarded, for example by British author Stephen Sizer, as threatening the very unity and security of the church in the Middle East. He says, “among the indigenous Christians of the Holy Land especially, dispensationalism is regarded as a dangerous heresy, an unwelcome and alien intrusion, advocating an exclusive Jewish political agenda and undermining the genuine ministry of justice, peace and reconciliation in the Middle East.”²³ Indeed, the Middle East Council of Churches, which represents Catholic, Orthodox, Oriental and Protestant Christian communities, has issued the following statement concerning the attitude of Christian Zionism toward the modern Jewish State:

[They] force the Zionist model of theocratic and ethnocentric nationalism on the Middle East [rejecting] the movement of Christian unity and inter-religious understanding which is promised by the churches in the region. The Christian Zionist programme, with its elevation of modern political Zionism, provides the Christian with a worldview where the gospel is identified with the ideology of success and militarism. It places its emphasis on events leading up to the end of history rather than living Christ's love and justice today.²⁴

Therefore, having the conviction that no regathering or restoration of the Jewish people to their ancient homeland has biblical warrant, such an historic event can only be interpreted in political terms as occupation and in social terms as oppression. The Jewish State is no different than any other ethnic group in the region seeking to dominate a particular territory. Since there is no recognition of Israel as part of God's program, it is considered as a persecutor of the church, and particularly of Palestinian Christians, however, with little or no recognition of the Palestinian Authority's Islamic agenda in Palestine and its overt persecution of Palestinian Christians in the areas under its autonomy.²⁵ Let us now proceed to the opposite conclusion and examine the various views that accept a prophetic significance for the modern State. The first view states that with respect to the State of Israel there is

(2) Possible prophetic significance, but cannot know for sure.

²¹ Colin Chapman, *Whose Promised Land?: The Continuing Crisis over Israel and Palestine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Co., 2002), pp. 161-62.

²² “Open Letter,” p. 2,

²³ Cited in Colin Chapman, *Whose Promised Land?: The Continuing Crisis over Israel and Palestine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Co., 2002), p. 265.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ In addition there should be recognition that Palestinian Christians, many as Muslim-background believers (MBB's), support the militarism and injustice of the Palestinian Authority adopting the Islamic anti-Semitic stance against Jews as well views of supprecessionism and the myth of Palestinian revisionist history. For details see Ergun Caner, “The MBB's Dirty Little Secret,” *Israel My Glory* (November/December 2004): 8-10.

This view accepts the proposition that a return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel has prophetic significance, but remains agnostic to the conclusion that this applies to the modern State of Israel because it is a secular rather than spiritual state and because the majority of Israelis continue to reject Jesus as their Messiah. This is the predominate position of evangelical academics who hold a dispensational theology, regardless of whether they are Classical or Progressive Dispensationalists. Classical Dispensationalist, Mark Bailey, President of Dallas Theological Seminary, states this position when he says,

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.²⁶

This hesitancy to attribute definite prophetic significance to the modern Jewish State, however, does not exclude Christians supporting Israel's claims to the Land on historic grounds, nor from seeing the hand of God at work in bringing unbelieving Jews into the Land prior to the coming of the Messiah as the prophetic texts indicate. However, it argues that Jewish unbelief (or covenant disobedience) or the mistreatment of "aliens and strangers" in the Land (Exodus 22:21) or failure to treat them as equals (Ezekiel 47:21-22) has disqualified the present generation of Israelis from possessing the Land granted to them in the divine covenants.

However, as to this latter concern for acts of social injustice toward the Palestinian population based on the Mosaic Law, it is necessary to distinguish between "aliens and strangers" who wish to live peacefully under Israeli authority (such as the Israeli Arabs) and those who do not wish to live under Israeli rule and have declared war against the Jewish State (such as those under the Palestinian Authority who are waging the Al-Aqsa Intifada or Oslo War and employ acts of terrorism against civilians). In this case of the Israeli Arabs Israel *has* treated them as equals, giving them Israeli citizenship, which includes public education, socialized medical benefits, the right to vote, and the freedom to live and work alongside (and even marry) Israeli Jews. In the case of those who have declared war on Israel, they must rightly be construed, as enemies and Israel must be recognized to have the right to maintain its national security and defend its citizens against terror attacks. Moreover, Ezekiel 47:21-22 is a millennial restoration context that presumes Israel's spiritual regeneration and ability to obey this condition of New Covenant legislation.

With regard to the issue of covenantal failure, Classical Dispensationalist Charles Dyer, Dean of Moody Bible Institute, explains:

Judged on biblical grounds, the nation today does not pass divine muster as a nation living in covenant obedience to God. The promise to possess the land is directly tied to the nation's response to Messiah. Though its international right to the land can be well defended, Israel's divine right by covenant to possess it today has only sentiment in its favor.²⁷

²⁶ Mark Bailey, "The Lord's Land Policy in Israel," *Veritas* 2:3 (July 2002): 4.

²⁷ Stanley Ellisen, *Who Owns the Land?* Revised and updated by Charles Dyer (Chicago: Moody Press, 2003), p. 137.

However, Israel's "divine right" to the Land is not based on its own conditional possession but on God's unconditional promise. The territorial grant in the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:1-7; 17:1-21; 26:3-4; 28:13-15), which is expanded in the Land Covenant (Deuteronomy 28-30), is grounded on God's unconditional promise (Genesis 15:8-17) to a graciously chosen people (Deuteronomy 14:2). From its inception as a nation, Israel's possession of the Land was not because of its merited performance as a people but because of its unmerited position as God's people (Psalm 111:6). God Himself explained this in Deuteronomy 7:8: "The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath He swore to your forefathers ..." This oath included the promise of the Land of Canaan to Israel. To be sure the Israelites possession of the Land depended on their obedience to the conditional provisions of the Mosaic Covenant, but the promise of the Land remained despite the nation's disobedience.

Israelite history was one of regular disobedience to the Mosaic legislation, yet Israel continued to possess the Land (except for a 70 year exile) from 1406 B.C. until A.D. 70, a period of some 1,400 years. Can this long possession be explained as a result of the nation's imperfect practice or because of God's perfect promise? The answer to this may be seen at the time of Israel's first exile for national idolatry. At the climax of Mosaic violation and the enactment of the covenantal curses, the prophet Jeremiah nevertheless affirmed that no matter what Israel might do, God's covenantal promise would not be affected (Jeremiah 31:25-27). Daniel also recognized that the basis for Israel's return to possess the Land after the exile was God's loyal love toward His chosen people, and not their own ability to obey (Daniel 9:18-19). In like manner, even after the national rejection of Jesus as Messiah, the climax of the prophetic hardening pronounced on the nation through Isaiah (Isaiah 6:9-13; cf. Matthew 13:13-15; Mark 4:11-12; Luke 8:10; John 12:37-40; Acts 28:26-27; Romans 11:8-10), which was punished by a second exile (the post-A.D. 70 Diaspora) in keeping with Israel's position of greater accountability (Amos 3:2) and the judicial sentence of the covenantal curses, Paul still affirmed that the covenantal promise remained intact for the Jewish people as the Jewish people and also for the Jewish people as unbelieving and Christ-rejecting Jewish people (Romans 11:28). Again, the basis for this unprecedented promise was the unchanging character of God who made an unconditional covenant (Romans 11:29). The reason for this rest in the nature of unconditionality, which means that God Himself will fulfill the terms of the covenant. With respect to possession of the Land, history attests that Israel never completely obeyed and therefore has never completely possessed all of the Land. Yet, in order for the promise to be fulfilled it must one day do so. Therefore, Israel will obey completely and possess the Land completely when God has sovereignly affected the national repentance and regeneration of Israel (Romans 11:25-27) and restored them to the Land and the LORD in the Millennial Kingdom (Ezekiel 36:25-27; 37:25-28).

As a further corrective to the view that possession of the Land may be postponed or even removed, is the understanding that the Land is an eternal possession of the Jewish people. This aspect of the Land promise is seen in Genesis 13:15-18 and 2 Chronicles 20:7 where the Land of Israel is said to have been given by God to the Jewish people "forever." The word "forever" translates the Hebrew term *olam* ('*olam*), which has been thought to mean only "an indefinite period of time." For example, in Exodus 21:6 it is used of an Israelite slave who has his ear pierced in token of his pledge to serve his master "forever." Because his duration of service may be terminated by his or his master's death or by the year of Jubilee, it demonstrates that '*olam* may indicate a long period of time, but not "time without end." On this basis the Land promise has been seen to have been granted to Israel for a time, but not for all time.

However, Messianic Rabbi David Friedman in his doctoral dissertation examined the use of more than 80 biblical uses of *'olam* and concluded that it expresses the time element of “as long as the present heaven and earth exists.”²⁸ This understanding of the term also takes into account duration for a period of time but the time is until this present world has run its course. On this basis the Land promise is extended to Israel for “all time.”

Still, there is another construction of *'olam* that does extend the duration of the term to an infinite degree. The phrase *le'olam duw le'olam /m (min 'olam v'ad 'olam)*, translated “from everlasting to everlasting” or “forever and ever,” is usually almost exclusively of God with respect to His eternal nature or rule. However, in two cases it is used explicitly to describe Israel’s possession of the Land of Israel. Jeremiah 7:7 states in a conditional context concerning Israel’s obedience: “then I will let you dwell in this place, in the Land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever.” Notice that while the privilege of possession of the Land is conditional, the promise of possession is not. Rather, it is as eternal as the God who gave it since it is based on His unconditional character. Again, in Jeremiah 25:5, in a similar conditional context, the prophet makes the imperative statement: “dwell on the Land which the LORD has given to you and your forefathers forever and ever.” In this context it is the fact that Israel has received an unconditional and eternal promise of the Land that should motivate them to obedience so that they may possess it as God intended (Deuteronomy 8:6-18).

A second view of the positive position is that with respect to the State of Israel there is

(2) Prophetic significance in the fulfillment of prophecy.

This group of evangelicals, most often characterized as Zionist, charismatic and non-dispensationalist, hold that the modern return of the Jewish people to form the Jewish State is a direct fulfillment of prophecy.²⁹ Some even ascribe special prophetic significance to the dates of 1948 and 1967, but in any case believe that the messianic era has arrived and will be soon climaxed by the return of Christ to set up His messianic kingdom in Israel. For many in this group, the concept of dual covenant (salvation for the Jews under the Abrahamic Covenant and for Gentiles under the New Covenant) allows them to accept a secular Jewish state as a fulfillment of the end time prophecies of national restoration. Therefore, Jews do not need a national repentance or conversion nor do they need to experience a future judgment. They have suffered enough in past tribulations, especially the Holocaust, which is often considered as having fulfilled the “time of Jacob’s (Israel’s) trouble” (Jeremiah 30:7) and Jesus’ prediction of a “great tribulation” (Matthew 24:21). For example, David R. Parsons, Public Relations Officer and Head of the Media Department of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem declares:

The Jewish people have not returned to Israel for another appointed time of God’s wrath whereby two-thirds die in the Tribulation so that one-third will call on the name of the

²⁸ David Friedman, “Israel from the Eyes of a Messianic Jew Living in the Land,” *Kesher* 13 (Summer 2001): 17.

²⁹ In Israel organizations such as the International Christian Embassy and Christians United for Israel would fit this classification. The Bridges for Peace organization, which also exists to promote Christian support for Israel, has been thought to be dual covenant because of its policy against evangelizing Jews. However, its international director Clarence Wagner insists that it is not dual covenant and that he does not prohibit his staff or volunteers from personally witnessing to Jews outside of their official duties. He says that the organization continues its non-evangelistic policy adopted by founder Douglas Young because the purpose of Bridges is educational, rather than missionary and because this policy protects it (usually) from the Israeli Ministry of Interior, which has often worked against Christian organizations in the Land.

Lord, but for an incredibly life-giving repentance and revelation of the Messiah first promised to them. Therefore, we encourage our long-suffering Jewish brothers and friends not to lose heart in the midst of the current struggle over the land of Israel, nor be fearful or reticent as to the comfort and support offered by sincere Christians ...³⁰

Those who adopt this viewpoint have no difficulty financially supporting and serving in Orthodox Jewish organizations, such as the Temple Mount Faithful (whose financial base is Christian and whose work has been advanced largely by Christian workers and volunteers), even though such organizations reject Jesus, Christian doctrine, and consider Jewish believers to be worse than the terrorists! They consider such Jewish leaders, especially those in the Temple Movement, as doing the work of God and as being prophetic voices in this day calling God's people home so that the blessing of the world can be affected through the Jewish people. Because they view the government of Israel as God's government, they may uncritically support policy decisions, although they stand against policies that compromise the Zionist agenda, such as the Oslo Accord. They are often the most demonstrative Christian voices against the Arab and Palestinian residents of the Land, usually considering them as enemies of Israel who have no rights to territory (the original land grant) promised to Israel in the Abrahamic Covenant. In addition, they consider countries, churches and individual Christians who do not support Israel to be against God and under His curse (based on Genesis 12:3). Moreover, they would accuse Jews who do not leave their countries outside the Land and immediately immigrate to Israel as violating God's covenant. Such convictions stem primarily from their confusion of the present return with the final restoration preceding the Millennial Kingdom.

A final view of the positive position, and that defended in this paper, is that there is, with respect to the State of Israel

(3) Prophetic significance in preparation for fulfillment.

This last group accepts the prophetic significance of the modern State but sees its present importance in its role of preparing for the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the Jewish people in the Land commencing with the seventieth week of Daniel. Since God has stated that He has not yet completed His purpose for Israel (Jeremiah 31:35-37; 33:7-26; Acts 3:19-21; Romans 11:25-29) and since God controls history and is directing it toward the fulfillment of His program, events throughout history related to the Jewish People and their Land must have prophetic significance, even if these events do not yet completely fulfill any specific prophecy. Present prophetic *significance* does not require present prophetic fulfillment, but only present preparation for future prophetic fulfillment. In this light, the return of the Jewish people to the Land today is making possible the final regathering and restoration tomorrow. It is not a present fulfillment of prophecy; rather it is the means to the ultimate fulfillment of prophecy. To explain how this view understands the prophetic significance of modern Israel it is necessary to consider five propositions that argue for this affirmative position.

(a) Israel will be regathered to the Land before the Tribulation in unbelief.

³⁰David R. Parsons, "Swords into Plowshares: Christian Zionism and the Battle of Armageddon," p. 46.

The Book of Ezekiel contains a number of prophecies that indicate that Israel would be regathered in a state of unbelief. Ezekiel 36:24-28 reveals that the temporal and logical order of Israel's return in the process of restoration:

24For I will take you from the nations, and *I will gather you from the lands*, and *I will bring you back into your Land*. 25**Then** I will sprinkle on you clean water, and you will be clean; I will purify you from all your defilement and from all your idols. 26I will give you a new heart and put within you a new spirit, and I will remove the stony heart from your flesh and give you a fleshy heart; 27and I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my decrees, and you will faithfully obey my laws. 28And you will dwell in the Land which I gave to your forefathers; and you will be My people, and I will be your God (*author's translation*).

Note that in this passage the regathering is first *physical* (to the Land), verse 24, and then *spiritual* (to the LORD), verses 25-28. Therefore, the initial return to the Land must necessarily be in a state of unbelief since in the Land Israel is changed from a state of unbelief to a state of belief. The prophetic chronology of these events are given in Ezekiel 20:33-38.

In this text a future judgment of Israel is predicted that will lead a Remnant of Israel to national repentance and restoration. That the time of fulfillment is in the future (eschatological) age rather than in the near return from Babylonian Captivity in the Persian period can be seen from the description of the events of redemption and restoration in verses 40—44 where the redemption is universal (“the whole house of Israel,” not a portion as in the return to Jerusalem) and the regathering is worldwide (“from the peoples and from the lands,” not localized as from Babylon). Moreover, the deliverance here is not effected by a human king (such as the Persian kings Cyrus or Darius), but directly by God Himself. The historical pattern for this event is the divine deliverance from Egypt, verse 36 (cf. Exodus 6:6-7; Haggai 2:5-9), with its climax in the possession of the Land of Israel, verse 42 (cf. Exodus 6:8). However, Israel's failure of obedience to enter the Land, verse 38 (Numbers 14:22-23), resulted in a judgment, verses 35, 37 (cf. Numbers 14:29) in “the wilderness,” verse 36 (cf. Numbers 14:3, 29, 32-35) which purged the nation of its “rebels,” verse 38 (cf. Numbers 14:9-11) so that a new, faithful, generation could enter into possession of the Land, verses 41-42 (cf. Numbers 14:31).

Following this predicted pattern, modern Israel has been brought out from the nations (verse 34) *in unbelief*,³¹ and therefore into divine judgment (verse 35). However, this experience will result in national repentance (verses 43-44), and inclusion in the “bond of the covenant” (New Covenant), verse 37, and because Israel is now *in belief* (verse 42a), they will experience national restoration to the Land (verses 42b), cf. Romans 11:25-27. While some dispensational commentators³² place this “purging of the rebels” (verse 38) after the Second Advent at the time of the judgment of the nations (Matthew 25:32), the proper timing for this according to Ezekiel is in the Tribulation before the Second Advent of Christ. This judgment cannot take place within the Land of Israel (where Christ returns and reigns) because

³¹The “unbelief” from an Orthodox Jewish perspective is that the regathering was a secular, rather than spiritual return. From a Christian and Messianic perspective it is the condition of unrepentant heart toward Yeshua as Messiah (see Acts 3:17-26).

³²For example see Ryrie's note on Matthew 25:32: “This is a judgment of those Gentiles who survive the tribulation ... Surviving Jews will also be judged at this same time (Ezek. 20:33-38),” *Ryrie Study Bible* (The Lockman Foundation, 1976), page 1493.

these “rebels” are not allowed to enter the Land (Ezekiel 20:38). Therefore, the historical and eschatological fulfillment of this prophecy would be a regathering of Israel in unbelief to the Land of Israel followed by “the time of Jacob’s (Israel’s) trouble” (Jeremiah 30:7), during which the rebels would be purged from the faithful who will repent at the end of the Tribulation (Zechariah 12:10-13:1), followed by the faithful Remnant’s regathering (Zechariah 8:7-8) and restoration to the Land during the Millennial Kingdom (Zechariah 8:11-23).

Ezekiel 22:17-22 likewise describes a regathering in unbelief for judgment, in this case to the city of Jerusalem. That this is again has in view a far, rather than near fulfillment, can be seen in the fact that the near return in 538 B.C. was in belief, not unbelief, and was restoration, not judgment. Ezra 1:5 makes it clear that those 49, 897 Jews that joined in the return were those “whose spirit God had stirred to go up and rebuild the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem.” However, in Ezekiel 22:20-22 it is stated that the LORD will gather them in “anger” and “wrath” and will “pour out His wrath” on them. The purpose of this judgment, described in the imagery of smelting ore, is for national repentance and regeneration, as seen in the words “you will know that I am the LORD” (verse 17, cf. verse 22). The specific time for this may be the last half of the Tribulation following the invasion of Jerusalem by the international armies of Antichrist (Revelation 11:2; Zechariah 12:2-3, 9; 14:2a) and the battle for the city in which half of its Jewish population will be exiled and the rest remain in a condition of siege (Zechariah 14:2b-c). As a result of this purifying experience (cf. Zechariah 13:1), the Jews in Jerusalem will join in the national repentance of Israel (Zechariah 12:10-14).

A final passage that indicates that Israel will be regathered before the Tribulation in unbelief is Zephaniah 2:1-2:

Gather yourselves together, yes, **gather**, O nation without shame,
before the decree takes effect – the day passes like chaff –
before the burning anger of the LORD comes upon you,
before the day of the LORD’s anger comes upon you.

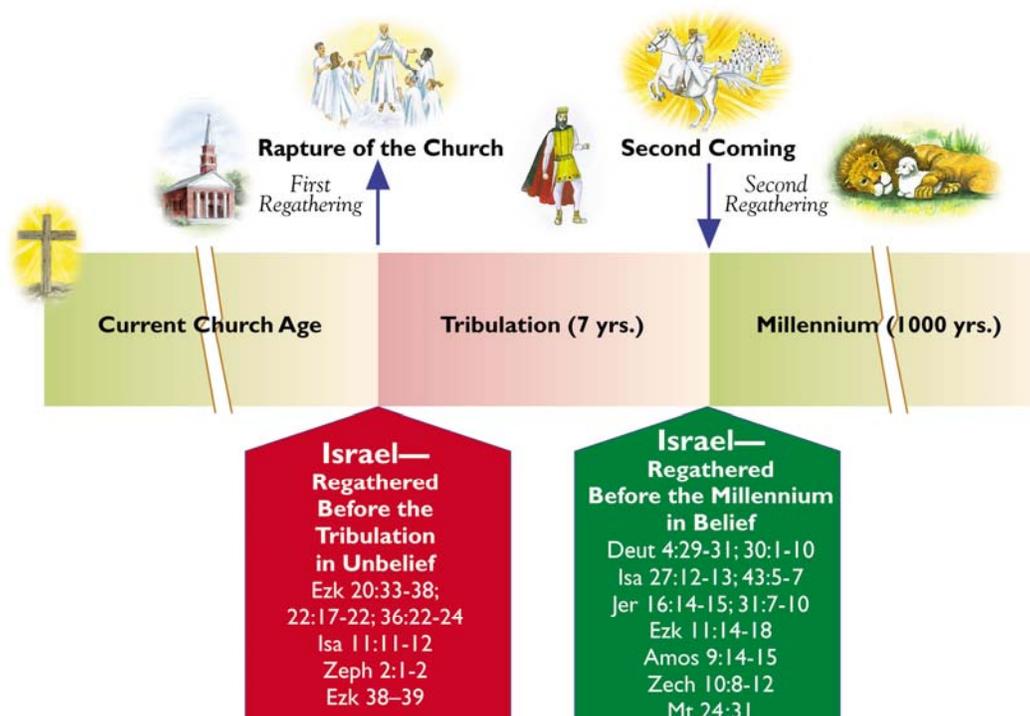
It is clear from verses 2 and 3 that time of the regathering is *before* the Tribulation or “the day of the LORD’s anger.”³³ It is also evident that the nation is in unbelief since they are described as a “nation without shame” (verse 1), meaning they have not yet repented. For this reason they are threatened with judgment when the Day of the LORD arrives (verses 2-3). Therefore, this passage shows a regathering of the nation in unbelief prior to the Tribulation through which it will be brought to national repentance and its shame will be removed.³⁴

Therefore, if Jews have been regathered to the Land of Israel for the first time in history since their dispersion among the nations and have returned in unbelief to form the modern secular State of Israel, just as these texts have predicted, how can we not say that the modern State of Israel is prophetically significant?

³³ The preceding chapter defined this day as the eschatological “Day of the LORD” by using this term (Zephaniah 1:7) and numerous other synonyms: 1:8 “day of the LORD’s sacrifice”(1:8), “the great day of the LORD” (1:13), “day of wrath, trouble and distress, day of destruction and desolation, day of darkness and gloom, clouds and thick darkness” (1:15), “day of trumpet and battle cry” (1:16), “day of the LORD’s wrath” (1:18).

³⁴ Note that Zephaniah 3:11 says “In that day you will feel no shame ...” and parallels Ezekiel 20:38 in the removal of the rebels from Israel prior to Israel’s national repentance

Israel's Two End-Time Gatherings



(b) Israel will be regathered to the Land through persecution and for judgment.

Jeremiah 16:15-16 predicts a worldwide regathering of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel through the means of persecution. In verse 16 this means is metaphorically described as “fishermen” and “hunters” who will pursue the Jewish people back to their Land. These pursuers, said to be sent by God, have been used to force the Jewish people back to their Land in preparation for the events that will result in their final restoration. The modern history of Israel reveals that persecution has been the leading cause of the Jewish return to the Land. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries czarist pogroms and Polish economic discrimination in Eastern Europe motivated the creation of the Zionist Movement. During the Second World War, the attempted genocide of Jews during the Nazi holocaust encouraged international sympathy for the Jewish plight and led to the creation of the State of Israel. The Arab-Israel war of 1948-49 then forced Jews from Arab lands and later Soviet repression forced over a million Jews to immigrate to Israel. Over fifty years Israel has had to fight five major wars with its Arab neighbors for its survival and wage an on-going war of attrition with the Palestinians that during last decade Jews has resulted in a growing hostility in the international community toward Israel and provoked a renewed anti-Semitism in Europe. These “fishermen” and “hunters” continue to drive otherwise complacent Jews from the Diaspora to find safe haven in the Jewish State. If this modern history of events has occurred

as these prophetic texts have predicted, how can we not say that the modern State of Israel is prophetically significant?

(c) Israel will be regathered to the Land in stages.

It is often objected that the modern return of the Jewish People has been only partial (part of the Jewish People to part of the Land) and is secular, not spiritual, in nature. However, it is a misconception that all of the Jewish People would return to the Land at once when the process of national regathering was commenced, and that the regathering is singular and would be spiritual in character. The prophetic texts reveal that the regathering would be in two stages – one before the Tribulation and one before the Millennium. The account of Israel’s restoration in the vision of the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel 37 depicts a progression from the physical to the spiritual. As Moody professor and author Michael Rydelnik notes:

The bones come to life in stages: first sinews on the bones, then flesh, then skin, and finally, breath of life (37:6-10). Then God told Ezekiel that “these bones are the whole house of Israel” (verse 11) and their restoration is a picture of the way God will bring them “back to the Land of Israel” (verse 12).³⁵

As with the previous chapter of Ezekiel (36:24-28), the pattern of successive stages in the process of restoration is first a physical regathering to the Land, followed by a spiritual regathering to the LORD. If this first regathering is in spiritual *unbelief*, then it would be expected to be a secular and political movement, such as is the modern Zionist movement that led to the establishment of the secular Jewish State. Too, the lack of a spiritual motive to return to the biblical Land would produce only a *partial* physical return from the Diaspora, that is, mostly among Jews in lands experiencing persecution and forced exile, as the majority of Jewish immigrants to Israel have experienced. This would leave the remainder of Jews outside the Land to experience the second regathering at the end of the Tribulation. However, even the limited extent of this first stage of regathering can be said to be geographically from “the four corners of the earth” in harmony with the worldwide pattern of prophetic return. The second regathering, then, which would follow a time of worldwide Jewish persecution in the Tribulation will result not only in Israel’s seeking deliverance physically but also spiritually in a time of national repentance (Luke 21:25-28). Therefore, just as the Jewish dispersion occurred in successive stages over time (722 B.C., 586 B.C., A.D. 70, A.D. 115, et. al), so the Jewish regathering can be seen to occur in stages modern and future (before the Tribulation, e.g. 1897, 1948, 1967, and at the end of the Tribulation). If the regathering is in stages, and the first regathering of the Jewish people to their Land is the historic modern regathering, how can we not say that the modern State of Israel is prophetically significant?

(d) Israel’s two regatherings will be sequential and without interruption.

The common hesitation of futurists in ascribing prophetic significance to the modern Jewish State is the uncertainty that the modern State of Israel is the *same* Israel of prophet’s predictions. In other words, “How do we know that the modern Jewish State might not be wiped out by its many enemies and the Jewish people again driven out of the Land and scattered among the nations to be brought back sometime in the future to fulfill these prophecies? However, there is no example in the

³⁵ Michael Rydelnik, *Understanding the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2004), p. 119.

modern age of dislodging a nation such as the State of Israel. With a population of some six million, political, military, and economic ties with the world's democratic superpowers, and an arsenal that includes an estimated 200 nuclear weapons, it appears historical implausible that such a state could cease to exist. Nevertheless, if we grant the possibility of another dispersion of the Jewish people from the Land, we would have to conclude that if this were to happen, it would make it impossible to know that a future return to the Land was the return that would fulfill prophecy. If a dispersion could occur again, there is nothing to prevent it from being repeated many times more, making prophetic significance continually uncertain. Based on the previously defined position of eschatological agnosticism, this point is valid: no one can know if a return to the Land is prophetically significant until *after* prophecy has begun to be fulfilled. Therefore, no one in the age of the Church will ever be able to know if modern Israel is prophetically significant because prophecy will not begin to be fulfilled until after the Church has been Raptured and the seventieth week of Daniel (and prophetic fulfillment) commences.

An answer to this dilemma may be found in understanding the uninterrupted temporal sequence of prophetic regathering. This is in harmony with the forward movement of progressive revelation, and particularly of prophetic events that occur in stages (such as the messianic advent) that fulfillment, though temporally postponed, is uninterrupted with respect to the order of fulfillment. In such cases, the sequential order of fulfillment in prophetic regathering would require that the Israel that experiences an initial regathering would be the same Israel that would remain in the Land to experience prophetic fulfillment in a final regathering in the end time. An example of this is found in Isaiah 11:11-12.³⁶ This passage reads:

11Then it will happen on that day that the LORD will again the second time³⁷ *regather* with His hand the remnant of His people [the Jewish People] who remain from Assyria (Greater Syria), Egypt, Pathros (Upper Egypt), Cush (Ethiopia), Elam (Iran), Shinar (Iraq), Hamath (Middle Syria), and from the islands of the sea (Mediterranean coastlands). 12And 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.

The context of this passage is clearly eschatological (cf. verses 1-10), as the prophetic formula *awhh* <wyb ("on that day"), a temporal prophetic marker (cf. Isaiah 7:18-25; 10:20-23) indicates. The

³⁶ I am indebted to Arnold Fructenbaum for this observation and interpretation, see Radio Manuscript #189 "The Modern State of Israel in Bible Prophecy" (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries), p. 6.

³⁷ It should be noted that although the Massoretic text clearly reads *tynv* ("the second time"), most critical commentaries along with BHS have argued it is a scribal error (because it is superfluous with [*yswy* , "happen once again"). They have emended *tynv* ("the second time") on the basis of the Arabic *saniya* ("be high"), even though there is no evidence for this meaning in Hebrew. With this change the text then reads *twnc* ("lift up") and with *dy* ("hand") to read *wdy twnv* ("lift up His hand"). There is some support for this from the LXX which reads *prosqhvsci kuvrios tou` dei`xai thvn cei`ra au?tou`* ("the Lord will stretch forth His hand again") and in comparison with Isaiah 49:22 which reads *wdy tac* ("raise high his hand"). However, there is no warrant for this emendation and the Aramaic Targum clearly supports *tynv* ("a second time") with its paraphrase: "the Lord shall display His might a second time." While one anticipates that there should be a verb before *wdy* ("His hand"), it may be implied from the context. However, even if one were to accept the emendation, the term "again" implies the idea that this is a second deliverance. However, it is my opinion that the redundancy ("again ... second time") is intentional to make the point of two regatherings and for this reason in my translation I have supplied as the implied verb "regather."

setting then is the ultimate period of prophetic fulfillment in the Messianic Kingdom, with verses 1-5 describing the Second Advent of Messiah in judgment to rule the earth, verses 6-9 depicting the peaceful conditions of restoration under the New Covenant, and verse 10 introducing Israel's national repentance toward and return to the Messiah. Verses 11-12 continue this theme, revealing the time and extent of the end time regathering. Notice that the universal regathering to the LORD is said to occur when "the LORD again recovers *the second time* with His hand." This "second time" has been thought by commentators to be either the return from Babylon at the beginning of the Persian period or subsequent to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. However, given the eschatological context, it is evident that the "second time" will be the "last time," since this restoration is the final one for Israel characterized by the end of hostilities with Israel's enemies, the agents of its prior dispersions (verses 14-16; cf. Isaiah 2:3-4). If then, the "second time" is the "last time," when is the "first time" implied in the text? Like the "second time" it too must be a time of international regathering to Israel by God's hand. If we go back into Israel's history of regathering we find an exodus from Egypt and a restoration from Babylon.

However, neither of these regatherings can satisfy the specific geographic and temporal conditions of this prophetic text because they were regatherings from only one place (Egypt, Babylon=Persia), and not from "the four corners of the earth." Also, each of these historic regatherings had a subsequent exile follow their return. But, how many exiles and returns can you have between a "first time" and a "second time"? How many numbers are there between one and two? The answer is none! According to Matthew 24:30-31 the last regathering of Israel to the LORD will be in national repentance at the time of His coming at the end of the Tribulation. This "last time" or "second time" regathering (according to Isaiah) is followed the establishment of the Kingdom for Israel and the judgment of the nations (Matthew 25:31-46), ending forever Israel's fear of exile. Notice that the "second time" regathering as a time of repentance indicates that national Israel existed in a state of unbelief prior to this (cf. Zechariah 12:10-14; 14:4; Romans 11:25-27). Moreover, the context makes it apparent that the Nation was already in the Land of Israel. Therefore, the "first time" regathering must be sought immediately before this in a time in which Israel has returned to the Land in unbelief. The "first time" regathering of Jews to the Land of Israel is the modern one, and since there cannot be another dispersion before the "second time" regathering, the modern State of Israel will remain in possession of the Land to fulfill end time prophecy just as the Jewish people will remain in existence among the nations for the "second time" regathering, according to prophecy. In addition, the acceptance of this interpretation requires us to accept that the modern return of Israel to the Land (even in unbelief) is a divinely ordained event ("by His hand") and therefore part of God's prophetic program. If the second regathering is the last one, and follows the first regathering without interruption, and the first regathering can be identified with the modern regathering of Jews to the Land of Israel, how can we not say that the State of Israel is prophetically significant?

(e) Modern Israel parallels the Israel predicted to exist in the End time.

In order for the prophetic texts concerning Israel to have a literal fulfillment, futurists in the past expected that at some point in history (1) the Jewish People would have to return to their ancient homeland, "the Land of Israel," (2) they would have to regain their national status as "the people of Israel," and (3) they would again be in an adversarial position with the Gentile nations. The prophecy of Gog and Magog in Ezekiel 38-39 describes a situation and condition that fulfills this predicted pattern. Set in an eschatological context (Ezekiel 33-48), the text specifically states that its fulfillment "will come about in the last days" (38:16). At this time "the people of Israel" are described as living in "the

cities of Israel” in “the Land of Israel”(38:14, 18-19; 39:9). According to Ezekiel 37:25 this Land is “the land that I [God] gave to Jacob (Israel) My servant, in which your fathers lived.” Ezekiel 38:8 also states that the Jewish People who had returned to the Land had been “gathered from many nations” (a worldwide regathering). The regathering of Jews from exile in 538 B.C. had only been from one nation (Babylon). Only in our modern period have we witnessed a regathering of Jews to Israel from “many nations” in accord with this prophecy.

Ezekiel’s Gog and Magog prophecy also speaks of “the mountains of Israel”(39:2, 4, 17). This mountainous region that extends the length of the country did not become a part of the modern State after the Six Day War of 1967. Only then could this region again be properly called “the mountains of Israel.” Before this date it was under a succession of foreign rulers until wrested from Jordan (who last controlled it from 1948-1967). This is in harmony with Ezekiel 38:8, 12 which states that this mountainous land before being restored to Israel had been under “the sword” (foreign dominion). The text further states that the Land had been “a continual waste.” History affirms that under foreign domination, and especially under the 400 years of Ottoman Turkish domination, the once fertile mountain region (particularly in the north) had been denuded and had eroded into a wasteland.

It is also significant that this territory of biblical Judea and Samaria, known today as “the West Bank,” is, like the rest of the modern State, in a state of contention with the surrounding nations and even the nations of the world. Ezekiel 38-39 is a prophecy that uniquely details a future invasion of Israel by a huge alliance of foreign nations (38:3-13). Interestingly, Ezekiel’s prophecy also provides the detail that at the time of this invasion the people of Israel are living “securely, all of them” in a “land of unwalled villages” (38:8, 11). This would not have been true of ancient Israel where cities were typically surrounded by a defensive wall, but only in the modern era in which Israel’s military has afforded the Nation unparalleled security and modern methods of warfare have made walled cities unnecessary. Therefore, Ezekiel 38-39 demonstrates that an Israel with the conditions presently experienced by the modern State was predicted to exist before final prophetic fulfillment would be possible.

Other texts also reveal that the Israel of the end time will have conditions that parallel those existing in the modern Jewish State. Daniel 9:27 depicts Israel in the Land, in possession of the Land, and in the city of Jerusalem when the seventieth week of Daniel starts. It also speaks of a “covenant” being made between the Jewish leadership (“the many”) and a foreign leader (“the prince that shall come,” verse 26). In order for any covenant to be legally binding and enforceable both parties must be recognized entities that have the authority and power to fulfill the terms of the agreement. Since this verse implies that the covenant has something to do with the restoration of the Temple and the sacrificial system, it is understood that the Jewish leaders have a control in the city that qualifies them as partners in the contract. Matthew 24:16 likewise implies that Jewish law (the Sabbath) is being observed in the Land, another factor that indicates Jewish control of the city or at least freedom from foreign rule that would restrict the free exercise of the Jewish religion. Today, the modern Jewish State fulfills all of these conditions, including having sovereignty (whether fully exercised or not) over the Temple Mount.

If the modern State of Israel parallels the Israel for the end time, how can we not say that the modern State of Israel is prophetically significant?

A Final Note

It may still be asked, how do we *know* that the establishment of the modern Jewish State in 1948 was prophetically significant? In response it may be asked, how do we know that the dispersion of the Jews and the destruction of the Jewish State in A.D. 70 was prophetically significant? The event of dispersion and destruction was certainly prophesied, but no date was given when this would occur. After A.D. 70 Jews continued to live in the Land and even marshaled sufficient forces to wage a second Jewish revolt against Rome. Yet, both Jewish and Christian historians have accepted the Roman dispersion and destruction in A.D. 70 as the prophetic fulfillment of divine judgment against the Jewish nation? One reason for this was that this judgment was the *first* experience of Jewish exile from the Land since the Babylonian Captivity, and being *like* that judgment (with the destruction of the city and the Temple), it was evident that A.D. 70 marked a pivotal point in Jewish history.³⁸

The parallels between the end of Jewish independence in the Land of Israel marked historically by the date of A.D. 70 and the reestablishment of Jewish independence in the Land of Israel marked by the date of 1948 should be observed. Just as with the event of Jewish dispersion, the event of Jewish regathering to the Land was certainly prophesied but no date was given. The Zionist movement and waves of Jewish immigration to the Land of Israel in the 19th and early 20th centuries, after nearly 2,000 years of dispersion from the Land, called attention to a new direction in God's movement of history, but 1948 was the time when the existence of the Jewish State began and ended the *necessary condition* of Diaspora. Jews may have continued to live in the Diaspora after 1948, just as Jews continued after to live in Israel after A.D. 70, but in either case this does not change the fact that an event of prophetic significance took place. Therefore, just as the dispersion of the Jewish people among the nation from the Land of Israel (the Diaspora) was deemed prophetically significant (of God's judgment), so the return of Jewish People from the Diaspora to the Land of Israel must also be considered prophetically significant (of God's restoration). For this reason, the creation of the modern Jewish State in 1948 has the prophetic significance of beginning the process of regathering from the nations (in unbelief) that will be followed by a further regathering (in belief) in preparation for the time of Israel's restoration in the Millennial Kingdom.

Conclusion

Evangelicals, and especially Christian Zionists and dispensationalists, are deeply divided over how to interpret the question of the prophetic significance of the modern State of Israel. Opponents of ascribing any theological significance to the Jewish State contend that those who do exercise a flawed exegesis of Scripture and that their beliefs, and particularly their influence in the political arena in support of Israel, is having disastrous political and human consequences. Moreover, they claim, as has Colin Chapman, that:

... The case against Christian Zionism has been expressed more strongly in recent years than the case supporting them, and it has been supported by new scholarship, as for example, in the excellent volume of papers in *Jerusalem, Past and Present in the Purposes of God* (edited by P.W.L. Walker (Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1992). Can

³⁸ It was also recognized that since both the destruction of the First and Second Temples occurred on the same day (the 9th of the Hebrew month of Av), that the destruction was a divinely ordered judgment.

work of this quality be matched by Christian Zionists, or are they simply – dare I say it – repeating the same old arguments that have been put forward in the past?³⁹

From my perspective, dispensational scholarship has, since Chapman made this challenge, produced important works matching the “excellence” of its opponents (although this is not to admit that *before* this time dispensational writings did not also do so). However, dispensational arguments must, by virtue of their source in the prophetic Scriptures, be “the same old arguments.” Even so, these old arguments applied to the modern reality of the Jewish State have stimulated new evangelical response. It is only hoped that every student of the Bible will consider the historical events happening in the Middle East with the on-going Jewish return to Israel, the development of the Land, the belligerence of the Arab world, the current rise in Anti-Semitism and opposition to Israel in the international community in light of the prophetic scriptures that give meaning to their significance.

³⁹ Colin Chapman, “One Land, Two Peoples – How Many States,” *Mishkan* 26:1 (1997): 14.