

Since AD70, with the exception of a few months in 135, Jerusalem has never been under sovereign Jewish government until 7 June 1967 when the Israeli Defence Forces recaptured the Old City.

Without developing the implications of this event in terms of where we are in the run up to the return of Jesus Christ, it is clear that Jesus implied in his prophetic words the re-emergence of Jewish sovereignty and therefore of a state of which Jerusalem would again be a Jewish capital.

JESUS AT HIS SECOND COMING IS GOING TO RETURN TO A SPECIFIC PLACE - and that place is Jerusalem (Acts 1:11; cf. Zechariah 12:10).

The non-existence of a Jewish state (perhaps replaced by an Arab/Palestinian state!) makes this prophecy absurd.

In the most significant passage, Romans 9-11, Paul answers the question, "***Did God reject His people?***" with an emphatic "***No***" (11:1,2). Paul is clearly speaking of the Israelites, the descendants of Abraham.

The whole chapter describes a rejection, then a restoration, of the Jewish people, quite distinct from the gathering in of Gentiles during the period of Israel's hardening (v.11,12, 15, 25-29).

A fitting conclusion comes in the words of v.29 "***For God's gifts and his call are irrevocable***". Despite their backslidings, God's covenant promises to the Jewish people will never be revoked, and this includes his eternal covenant with them as a people and their eternal possession of their land.

Derek White

(This article was first published in Today magazine January 1983)

CFI Communications, PO Box 2687, Eastbourne, BN22 7LZ

Tel: 0845 230 3067 (local rate) or 01323 410810 • Fax: 01323 410211

Prayerline: 0845 230 3068 (local rate) or 01323 439840

email. info@cfi.org.uk • website. www.cfi.org.uk

Registered Charity no. 1101899

ISRAEL TODAY – PROPHECY FULFILLED?

Some orthodox Jews refuse to recognise the modern State of Israel because, in their view, this cannot be truly established until the Messiah comes and himself restores their nationhood. Some Christians concur with this view, asserting the present State is a counterfeit of the re-gathering promised by God and the work of human zeal and political manipulations alone.

Other Christians go further and assert that all the promises and prophecies in the Old Testament concerning Israel have been fulfilled in Jesus and in the church. There is now no future for the Jewish people, and it is therefore impossible for the State of Israel to be the fulfilment of God's prophetic Word.

Some Israelis, on their own admission, idolise and worship the State, to which they look rather than to the Lord their God. Certainly there is much that is secular and unbelieving about present day Israel.

SO WHAT DOES SCRIPTURE SAY?

GOD HAS MADE AN ETERNAL COVENANT WITH THE JEWISH PEOPLE (e.g. Genesis 17:7; Jeremiah 31:35-37; Romans 11:28-29).

The preservation and continuity of the Jewish people to this present day is an outstanding and inexplicable miracle of world history. God gives as the reason for this miracle his own, eternal, unchanging covenant and nature (Malachi 3:6). When God says 'everlasting' he means just that.

The unchanging character of his Word and being is the bedrock of Christian faith.

GOD HAS GIVEN THE LAND OF ISRAEL AS AN ETERNAL POSSESSION TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE, THE DESCENDANTS OF JACOB (e.g. Genesis 17:8; 26:3-4; 35:12).

This is summed up in Psalm 105:8-11 where the Psalmist uses a powerful list of words - covenant, word, oath, decree, everlasting covenant - to express God's unchanging commitment to Abraham and his descendants. This emphasis centres round one issue: the ownership of the land of Canaan.

The prophetic passages predicting Israel's end-time restoration stress Israel's ownership of the land. The biblical emphasis on Israel's ownership does not diminish, but rather increases with the passage of time. (See Jeremiah 30:3; Ezekiel 36:24; Amos 9:15.) God refers to Israel as his land.

He calls Israel "my people" and their land "my land" (Ezekiel 38:16; Joel 3:2) in the context of "the latter days".

GOD PROMISES A SECOND REGATHERING OF HIS PEOPLE TO THEIR LAND (e.g. Isaiah 11:11-14).

Well before the Babylonian captivity, Isaiah foresaw the Jewish people scattered from their land and then regathered to it, not once, but twice. The places from which the second regathering will take place are Assyria (now mainly Iraq), lower and upper Egypt (modern Egypt), Cush (sometimes identified as Ethiopia), Elam (now Iran, or Persia), Babylonia (mainly Iraq), Hamath (Syria); and the islands (or coastlands) of the sea, which can be understood as other areas bordering on the ocean or continents.

Some of these are areas from which no Jews returned from the first Babylonian captivity, so that this promised second regathering was not fulfilled at that time. It is difficult to honestly spiritualise this statement and apply it to the Church.

Such a second regathering (after the second scattering in AD70) certainly never took place before this century, and the remarkable return of Jews to Israel this century is a clear fulfilment of this prophecy.

Many other Scriptures prophecy the same return, notably Jeremiah 16:14-16 where God promises a 'second exodus' on a scale surpassing that out of Egypt.

When we consider the magnitude of the movements and crises God has used to bring this about and also to preserve the present State of Israel, we may well consider this Scripture as fulfilled.

Finally God has made a remarkable promise in Amos 9:14-15 concerning a return to their land from which they will never again be uprooted, a promise which has never been fulfilled before. Twice in past history the people of Israel have entered and settled in the land - the first under Joshua and the second under Zerubbabel - and twice they have been uprooted.

Now for the third time they are back, and if the Bible is a reliable book we may well

conclude that they are back to stay.

WHEN THIS RETURN TAKES PLACE THE JEWISH PEOPLE WILL BE RE-ESTABLISHED IN UNBELIEF, THEIR RETURN TO THEIR OWN LAND BEING A PRECONDITION FOR GOD TO POUR OUT HIS SPIRIT UPON THEM. God will pour out his Spirit upon them in the land (see Ezekiel 36:24-28; 37:12-14; 39:25-29).

Christians and Jewish scholars agree that there was a national transgression on the part of the Jewish people which led to political, territorial as well as spiritual loss.

Since the loss included all three elements, it is logical to take it that their restoration - the 'fullness' of which Paul speaks in Romans 11:12 - will also include all three.

And, since the order of loss was spiritual, political and territorial, is it not also logical that their fullness will follow the reverse path of recovery, territorial, political and finally spiritual.

Certainly God declares that the ultimate purpose of their restoration to the land and statehood is restoration to the land and statehood is restoration to full fellowship with God and this the prophets show clearly (e.g. Ezekiel 36:28; 39:29; Zechariah 12:10).

The melting of the hearts of the Jewish people towards Christians and Jesus, especially since 1967 and unprecedented in 1900 years of history, is evidence of the certain unfolding of God's plan for his people.

Jesus, speaking with his disciples before his ascension in Acts 1 tells them that their immediate concern is not to be the restoration of national sovereignty to Israel, but rather the preaching of the Gospel (v.8). However his reply certainly implies a future restoration of national sovereignty in God's good time. His words on this occasion are consistent with those records in Luke 21:24.

During a crucial discourse concerning the end of the age, and having just foretold the dispersal of the Jewish people to all the nations, Jesus states that "***Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.***" (Luke 21:24) It is difficult to spiritualise 'Jerusalem' here and make it apply to anything other than the city of that name.

Jesus is clearly stating that the city of Jerusalem will be governed by Gentile powers until some point near the end of the present age when its government will once again pass into the hands of the Jewish people.