

Israel: Prophecy and Fulfillment

Absolute Proof that the Bible is the Word of God

(An Expanded Version of a Sunday School Presentation
At the Rocky Mountain Bible Church on May 8, 1988)

Thank you Pastor. I hope you have all been learning as much from our current Sunday School series as I have. It is a wonderful thing to study the whole Bible from start to finish, to see how it all fits together to form a single whole. A study like this helps us to see the whole picture of God which He wants us to see in this life. Also, we get to view His marvelous works over the course of time - past, present and future. We learn that our God is sovereign, and is directing history for His purposes. We learn that our God makes prophesies and then fulfills every one of them in due time. This gives us renewed faith and trust in Him every day, and renewed confidence that He will indeed keep every promise He has made to us. This means especially His promise of eternal life with Him in heaven because we have trusted in Jesus Christ, God in human form who died for all our sins on Calvary's cross, was buried, and rose again on the third day.

The subject of prophecy and fulfillment is especially exciting in the case of Israel. I want today to show you some of the great prophesies of the Old Testament concerning the long-range future of Israel stretching far beyond the Biblical events which culminated with the first coming of Christ. I want then to show how these prophesies have been fulfilled in the actual events of Israel's history over the past 2,000 years. But before I do these things, I must go back with you and review the basic covenants made by God with Israel, the purposes of those covenants, and the way God carried out the covenants in the events recorded in the Bible. The longer-range, post-Biblical events are merely the continuation and intensification of what the Bible itself records.

Pastor has outlined for us three great covenants made by God with Israel: the Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic covenants. These terms aren't as difficult as they sound: they simply refer to the promises made by God to Abraham, then to the nation of Israel through Moses, and then to David and David's descendants.

The Abrahamic covenant is first stated in Genesis 12:1-3, and then is repeated in a number of places. Here are some of the leading passages:

Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee:

And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:

And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. (Genesis 12:1-3.)

And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:

For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.

And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.

Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee. (Genesis 13:14-17.)

And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.

And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.

And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying,

As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.

Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.

And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.

And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.

And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. (Genesis 17:1-8.)

And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed... (Genesis 22:18.)

As Pastor has pointed out, the first thing that strikes us about the Abrahamic covenant is its unconditional nature. God simply appears to Abraham out of the blue, and announces that He is going to do great things for Abraham. There are many elements in this covenant, but the three main ones are a seed (meaning lines of descendants which will last forever), a land (meaning the promised land, the land of Canaan, which in its narrowest borders corresponds roughly to the territory now occupied by the State of Israel), and a blessing (meaning that, in some mysterious way, a great blessing to the whole world will come out of the seed of Abraham).

The Mosaic covenant is the series of religious, moral and civil laws given by God to Israel through Moses on Mt. Sinai, beginning with the ten commandments in Exodus chapter 20 and stretching through the rest of Exodus and on into Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The Mosaic covenant is what the New Testament calls "the law", in familiar passages like "...by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified" (Galatians 2:16) and "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (Romans 3:28). The Mosaic covenant is introduced by the following passage in Exodus chapter 19:

And Moses went up unto God, and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel;

Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself.

Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine:

And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the Lord commanded him.

And all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the Lord. (Exodus 19:3-8.)

Unlike the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant is very conditional. God tells the children of Israel that if they obey the law - meaning, as many passages tell us, all of the law, not just part - then He will confer a tremendous range of blessings on them. But God also says that if the Israelites do not obey, then He will bring upon them a tremendous range of curses (including temporary suspension of the benefits of the Abrahamic covenant in regard to the promised land). Last week, Pastor led us through Deuteronomy chapter 28, which is a typical long list of the blessings which will follow from obedience to all the law and the curses which will follow from disobedience.

The Davidic covenant is found initially in II Samuel 7:12-16, where the Lord speaks the following words to King David through the prophet Nathan:

And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom.

He shall build an house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever.

I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men:

But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee.

And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever. (II Samuel 7:12-16.)

The Davidic covenant is God's promise that David's kingdom will be established forever, with a descendent of David (and of David's son Solomon) on the throne.

The historical background of the Davidic covenant is interesting. In I Samuel, the people of Israel cry out for a king and are given one, Saul. But Saul doesn't work out well, and he dies in a battle with the Philistines near the end of I Samuel. II Samuel begins with a rebellion of the northern tribes against Saul's logical heir to the throne, David, but the rebellion comes to an end. At that point, all the elders of all Israel anoint David as king over the entire nation, David takes Jerusalem from the Jebusites (a Canaanite people who had been occupying it until then), and he brings the ark of the covenant of the Lord to Jerusalem. It is just then, when events have come together to establish David's position so strongly, that the Lord announces to David His promise to establish David's house, kingdom and throne forever.

At first glance, God's dealings with Israel may seem confusing. There are covenants of different kinds, some conditional and some unconditional, there is talk of kingdoms and other things, leaving the reader uncertain as to what is really the point of it all. Yet I suggest that on closer reading, the basic purposes of the Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic covenants are not hard to discern. These covenants are concentrated applications of God's basic approach to the whole human race since the fall of man.

It is useful to identify three purposes, one for each of the three covenants. To understand these purposes, let's step back and look at the bigger picture. God, the Almighty, all-loving God, made the universe and life in perfect form, so that men and women could enjoy the natural world and the blessings of direct personal fellowship with God. In His sovereignty, God also gave men and women free will, including the ability to choose whether to accept the blessings of God or instead to go their own way as though they were independent, self-created creatures. Unfortunately, Adam and Eve made the wrong choice, with the result that humanity became separated from God, and sickness, pain, suffering, injustice and death came into the world.

At that point, God had no further obligation to any of us. He could have let us all go the way of eternal separation

from Him, eternal damnation, with everything terrible which this implies. But God in His infinite love still wanted (and still wants) to have fellowship with us. So He devised a long-term plan to reconcile us to Himself (if we are willing to be reconciled).

There are three elements in God's plan of reconciliation with humanity. The first is to make us aware of God, to make us notice Him and pay attention to Him as the all-powerful Creator who is there, who is in control, and whom we have offended and need to come to terms with in some way. The second is to show us the depth and extent of our sin which separates us from Him, the complete futility of our trying to do anything on our own to earn our way back into His good graces. He is perfectly holy, we are perfectly unholy, and we can't make ourselves holy enough to enter into His presence. The third is to find a solution which will succeed in overcoming the sin problem, so that He can accomplish His goal of bringing in His kingdom and reigning forever over a spiritually purified human race.

The Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic covenants reflect the three elements of God's plan of reconciliation with men and women of all nations. First, by coming to Abraham almost arbitrarily, making extraordinary promises to Abraham and then carrying every one of them out over the course of history, God dramatically calls attention to Himself as the one and only ruler of the universe. Who else but God would have the power and the faithfulness to act in this manner? Second, by giving Israel (through Moses) a set of holy standards to adhere to, God gives the Israelites an opportunity to earn their way into His favor by their good works. But Israel's complete failure to live up to its part of the Mosaic covenant demonstrates to Israel and everyone else the depravity of mankind, and the consequent inability of any system of good works to overcome the sin problem. Now God was surely not playing games or trying to deceive anyone when He gave the law to Moses. God would have been very, very glad to have Israel obey the law and thus earn its rewards. But He knew in advance that Israel would not do this, and so He used the law for the holy purpose of curing mankind of its illusions concerning itself. This was necessary in order for people to realize their need for the grace of God which alone can save. Without the realization of this need, people would be unable to believe in the grace of God when it ultimately came. "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Galatians 3:24). Finally, the Davidic covenant signifies God's intention to find an effective solution to the sin problem, as He must in order to bring in an everlasting kingdom governed through the house of David. We'll say more about this later.

As the Old Testament unfolds, it shows God at work carrying out the Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic covenants. In Genesis, the early chapters after the giving of the Abrahamic

covenant trace very meticulously the development of Abraham's seed. Abraham has a son Isaac, born by supernatural means after a long period of promise. Isaac has a son Jacob, and Jacob has twelve sons who are the founders of the twelve tribes of Israel. Jacob, his sons and their families, 70 people in all, go down to Egypt for a long period of what Pastor has aptly called "incubation": the 70 people become a large nation, so that according to some historians, as many as two million people left Egypt at the time of the exodus 430 years later. The long genealogies in many parts of the Old Testament, the long listings of the numbers of soldiers in each of the twelve tribes in the Book of Numbers, and similar listings which we often find boring or incomprehensible, show God carrying out His promise to preserve and multiply the seed of Abraham. Nations arise from Abraham's son Ishmael, and from Isaac's son Esau, in fulfillment of God's promise to bring many nations out of Abraham's seed.

Genesis portrays Abraham, Isaac and Jacob doing various things to establish ties with the promised land. They build altars to the Lord in different places, they dig wells, they obtain water and grazing rights, often by formal concessions from the local leaders or by treaties. Abraham buys a burial place near Hebron for his wife Sarah, where he and other patriarchs of Israel are eventually buried as well. These actions create a legal basis for Israel's ultimate claim to the land, so that in the future Israel's representatives can say to the world: "Our forefathers were there long ago, they worshipped there, they watered and fed their cattle and flocks there, they established legal rights there, they buried their dead there, etc."

More important than the legal connection is the sentimental one. This is a little difficult for Americans, even those who are patriotic, to understand. We are a pragmatic, not a sentimental, people. But for many other nations, including Israel, the tie of the people to its land is a deep, emotional, almost mystical tie, a profound psychological phenomenon. The bond between the Jewish people and the promised land has been an important force in history. It began with the connections of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to the land, connections which God brought about in early Old Testament times as initial steps in His long-term fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant.

Militarily, Israel's first conquest of the promised land occurs after the return from Egypt. The nation reaches the Jordan River under the leadership of Moses, then crosses the river and conquers most of the territory under the leadership of Joshua. Israel's control over the territory reaches its greatest extent and longest period of stability in the time of the united kingdom, ruled by David and Solomon. Always God's guiding hand is responsible for Israel's military successes. "...[F]or the Lord fought for Israel" (Joshua 10:14).

God makes no secret of His purpose for doing the things He promised Abraham He would do. His purpose is to show Abraham,

Abraham's descendants, and all of humanity, that He is the one and only God, who needs to be recognized and reckoned with as such. Thus, in Exodus, God explains why He is going to deliver the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt and lead them back to the promised land. The explanation includes this statement: "And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch forth mine hand upon Egypt, and bring out the children of Israel from among them" (Exodus 7:5). Now Egypt was at this time the leading civilization of the world, in terms of military and economic power, arts and sciences, and all the refinements of civilized living which the world holds dear. When God says He intends to show the Egyptians that He is the Lord, this is like saying He intends to show the world, meaning the gentile, non-Jewish world, that He is the Lord. This way of demonstrating Himself to the world is very effective, as shown by the non-Jewish individuals who become believers in Him as a result of seeing or hearing what He has done for Israel. Examples are Jethro in the Book of Exodus, Rahab in the Book of Joshua, and Ruth in the Book of Ruth.

The positive and negative fulfillments of the Mosaic covenant are displayed in the books of the Old Testament after the law is given. When the Israelites obey the law, as they do for a time, they enjoy the promised blessings, for a time. But the whole thrust of the Old Testament saga is to show how the sin nature, at both the national and the individual levels, inevitably gets the better of Israel and leads to more and more disobedience to God. The promised curses are the result.

At the national level, King Solomon's sin leads to the divided kingdom: ten tribes in the north and two in the south. The nation turns further and further away from God's holy standards. God sends prophet after prophet to warn Israel to return to Him or face the dire consequences He predicted so clearly in the past. But the nation and its leaders mock, persecute and kill the prophets, becoming ever more dissolute, morally and spiritually. Finally, God brings judgment on them in the form of conquering armies from Assyria and then from Babylon which overwhelm the land, annex the north to Assyria and then the south to Babylon, and take most of the people into exile.

At the individual level, the situation is no different. Biblical biographies show us that even the greatest heroes of faith in the Old Testament are sinners who disobey God. Noah and Abraham before the law, Moses, David, Solomon and Isaiah under the law - the Bible records how each commits sin, revealing himself to be unable to meet God's requirement of obedience to all His commandments. The consequences of each act of disobedience to the law are very severe. For example, Moses' one-time disobedience at Kadesh Barnea prevents him from entering the promised land during his lifetime, and David's one-time sin with Bathsheba leads to terrible personal disasters which last for the rest of his life. The law exposes with special clarity

the sin nature of mankind, which is the cause of the curses we all must bear.

God's faithfulness in regard to the Davidic covenant is seen in the unbroken succession of David's descendants as kings. David's son Solomon rules over the united kingdom, and descendants of Solomon rule over the southern kingdom, called Judah, until the deportations from Judah to Babylon nearly 400 years after the end of David's reign. (In contrast, the kings of the northern kingdom, called Israel, come from four different families.) After the deportations, David's descendancy through Solomon continues in an unbroken line during the time of exile and of gentile dominion over the promised land.

The last item in the Old Testament chronology is the return of small groups of Israelites from Persia (Babylon's successor) to Jerusalem to rebuild God's temple and the city's walls in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. This return signifies God's continuing intention to carry out at some future time His covenant with Abraham concerning Israel's full possession of the promised land. The carrying out of His covenant with David concerning the eternal kingdom must also await longer-term developments. A remnant of Israel will be saved and purified so the kingdom can be established - but salvation and purification will be by a method quite different from obedience to the law of Moses or any other system of good works.

With that background, let's read together some of the longer-term Biblical prophesies about Israel. I have chosen passages from five widely-separated books: Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Zechariah. These passages are not at all isolated, but reflect major themes which recur throughout the Old Testament.

First, let's read Leviticus 26:33-39 and 44-45. Chapter 26 of Leviticus is one of those chapters, like Deuteronomy 28, which starts with a long list of the blessings to follow from obedience to the law of Moses, and then lists the curses to follow from disobedience. I'd like to study the whole chapter with you, but constraints of time oblige me to begin in the middle of the curses:

And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste.

Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies' land; even then shall the land rest, and enjoy her sabbaths.

As long as it lieth desolate it shall rest; because it did not rest in your sabbaths, when ye dwelt upon it.

And upon them that are left alive of you I will send a faintness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies; and the sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them;

and they shall flee, as fleeing from a sword; and they shall fall when none pursueth.

And they shall fall one upon another, as it were before a sword, when none pursueth: and ye shall have no power to stand before your enemies.

And ye shall perish among the heathen, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up.

And they that are left of you shall pine away in their iniquity in your enemies' lands; and also in the iniquities of their fathers shall they pine away with them. (Leviticus 26:33-39.)

And yet for all that, when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them: for I am the Lord their God.

But I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the heathen, that I might be their God: I am the Lord. (Leviticus 26:44-45.)

Now let's turn to Deuteronomy chapter 28, picking up just after where Pastor ended last week. I'll read verses 63 through 67:

And it shall come to pass, that as the Lord rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the Lord will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it.

And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone.

And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the Lord shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind:

And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life:

In the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were even! and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning! for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see. (Deuteronomy 28:63-67.)

Now let's turn to Jeremiah, and read chapter 30, verses 1 through 3, and chapter 31, verses 7 through 10 and 31 through 34:

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying,

Thus speaketh the Lord God of Israel, saying,
Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book.

For, lo, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the Lord: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it. (Jeremiah 30:1-3.)

For thus saith the Lord; Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations: publish ye, praise ye, and say, O Lord, save thy people, the remnant of Israel.

Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her that travaileth with child together: a great company shall return thither.

They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.

Hear the word of the Lord, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock. (Jeremiah 31:7-10.)

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah:

Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord:

But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. (Jeremiah 31:31-34.)

Let's turn next to Ezekiel chapter 36, verses 16 through 28:

Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying,

Son of man, when the house of Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by their own way and by

their doings: their way was before me as the uncleanness of a removed woman.

Wherefore I poured my fury upon them for the blood that they had shed upon the land, and for their idols wherewith they had polluted it:

And I scattered them among the heathen, and they were dispersed through the countries: according to their way and according to their doings I judged them.

And when they entered unto the heathen, whither they went, they profaned my holy name, when they said to them, These are the people of the Lord, and are gone forth out of his land.

But I had pity for mine holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen, whither they went.

Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went.

And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes.

For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land.

Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.

A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.

And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.

And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. (Ezekiel 36:16-28.)

Finally, let's read Zechariah chapter 12, verse 10:

And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. (Zechariah 12:10.)

Time won't allow us a verse-by-verse analysis of these passages, but you'll be able to tell with just a little study that they contain five major lines of prophecy (along with many other lines). First, as a result of disobedience to the law of Moses, the nation of Israel will be physically removed from the promised land and scattered among the heathen throughout the

whole earth (meaning divided into small groups each of which will dwell in a different gentile country). Second, during its exile in the gentile world, Israel will suffer continual, brutal persecution, including large-scale physical massacres which will cause the Israelites to become few in number and to develop a psychology of persecution (meaning they will fear persecution even when there isn't any). Third, despite these very adverse conditions, the Israelites will be preserved as a nation, a distinct people or ethnic group. Fourth, at an unspecified future time, the surviving remnant of Israel will be brought back from exile among the heathen nations and resettled in the promised land. Fifth, the remnant will be spiritually purified and made into children of God, so they will know Him and turn away from their sin and walk in His ways.

These five major lines of prophecy might be grouped into five one-word categories as follows: dispersion, persecution, preservation, ingathering and salvation. These categories correspond to the three covenants between God and Israel which we have been discussing. Dispersion and persecution are the results of Israel's disobedience to the law of Moses: curses which God said would follow from disobedience. Preservation and ingathering are the fulfillment of two fundamental points in the Abrahamic covenant: the eternal duration of the seed of Abraham, and the gift of the promised land to Abraham's seed. Salvation is the prelude to the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant. Israel needs to be spiritually purified before God can carry out His promise to create an eternal kingdom centered on Israel, with a descendant of David as the king.

Now we come to the heart of what I want to tell you about today. It is that the actual course of Israel's history since the first coming of Christ has fulfilled to an astonishing extent these major lines of Biblical prophecy. One can easily see that all these prophecies are being fulfilled in their proper chronological sequence as set forth in the Bible.

Let's begin with dispersion. Israel's history includes three great exiles from the promised land: the exile to Egypt in the time of Joseph; the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities; and the longest exile of all, beginning just after the crucifixion of Christ and continuing down to the present day. Let's look at the origin and nature of the great, long, third exile.

Jesus Christ came to Israel nearly 2,000 years ago, in complete fulfillment of the law of Moses. He fulfilled the law in three main ways: he was the only human being who ever obeyed all its tenets; he gave his life as the perfect sacrifice required by the law for the removal of sin; and by his sacrifice he brought the righteousness of the law to all who believe in him, without their having to obey the law themselves. When Israel rejected Christ, causing him to be crucified, Israel reached the ultimate level of disobedience to the law and to God.

The consequences of Israel's rejection of Christ were swift in coming. An army under the Roman general Titus entered Jerusalem in 70 A.D., destroyed the second temple, sacked the city, killed vast numbers of Jews (thousands of them were crucified), and drove the survivors into exile. The survivors then began a process of scattering through the rest of the Roman Empire and the rest of the world, so that now for nearly 2,000 years the world has witnessed the extraordinary phenomenon of Jewish minorities in country after country in all parts of the globe. There are Jewish communities in the United States, Canada, Mexico, all through Latin America as far south as Argentina, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, North Africa, South Africa, the Middle East, Iran, India, China, and as far away as the Pacific islands, including Australia and New Zealand. The phenomenon is always the same. The Jews in each country are part of that country, speaking its language, functioning within its economic system, and so forth. At the same time, significant numbers of Jews in each country retain their distinctive identity as Jews, both in their own eyes and in the eyes of the host country. As Moses told Israel: "And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other..." (Deuteronomy 28:64).

Now let's consider the second line of prophecy, concerning persecution. Anyone who knows anything about the history of the Jews knows that the Jewish people have been the most vilified and oppressed minority in the history of the world. In century after century, and in country after country, the Jews have been exposed to every form of persecution, legal and illegal. In Europe, the common practice was to prohibit the Jews, by law, from owning land, or engaging in certain occupations, or living outside of designated urban neighborhoods (called "ghettos"). Massive expulsions from various countries, misguided efforts to force the Jews to convert to Christianity, and other forms of discrimination, have been commonplace. Most terrible have been the physical persecutions, including the mass killings in Eastern Europe known as "pogroms", and culminating in the greatest genocide of all time: the Nazi holocaust during World War II, in which six million Jews were murdered, two million of them under age 14, and large numbers of them tortured in the most horrible ways, physically and mentally, before being killed. As Moses told Israel: "And ye shall perish among the heathen, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up" (Leviticus 26:38). The Lord said in Leviticus 26:22 that, through persecution, the Jews would be made "few in number". There were ten million Jews in Europe before the war, but only three million after it. Six million died, one million fled.

Of course we know from scripture that Satan is the ultimate source of the persecution of the Jews. Satan wants to eliminate Israel so as to prevent God from carrying out His holy promises in regard to Israel. This is part of Satan's larger objective of discrediting God in every possible way. Satan works

through human agents, stirring them up with diabolical motivations. We know from chapter one of the Book of Job that Satan is capable of placing his own motives into people even though the people may not be aware of what is happening.

The persecution mentality which the Jews have developed is close to my personal experience. As a Jew growing up in America, I never faced discrimination, and was easily accepted into college, fraternity, law school, law firm, etc. But my Jewish relatives and friends couldn't understand this. They kept expecting me to be the victim of prejudice, and kept asking me to give them examples of it in my life. On a broader scale, there are Jewish organizations which specialize in looking for anti-Semitism and making accusations of it, even when it isn't really there. Of course, the suspicion of non-existent persecution arises from the enormous quantities of actual persecution which the Jews have suffered in many countries. "And upon them that are left alive of you I will send a faintness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies; and the sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them; and they shall flee, as fleeing from a sword; and they shall fall when none pursueth" (Leviticus 26:36).

Now let's look at how God has fulfilled the third line of prophecy, concerning preservation. After almost 20 centuries of exile, lacking any home base as a nation, and facing every possible obstacle to national survival, the Jews do indeed survive as a distinct people.

The two main threats to Jewish survival have been physical annihilation on the one hand and cultural assimilation on the other. These correspond to Satan's two main lines of attack against the godly seed arising after the fall: extermination and corruption. The extermination attempt is pictured in Cain's killing of Abel, while the corruption attempt is pictured in the marital and spiritual intermingling of the godly and ungodly seeds just before (and leading to) the great flood. The Book of Esther is an early foretelling of the extermination threat to Israel, and the Book of Daniel is an early foretelling of the threat of corruption through assimilation.

But the threats have been thwarted, and the Jews have remained the Jews, with a distinctive national personality, customs, religion, and even language. The Hebrew language spoken in the State of Israel today is the same as the Hebrew spoken by the Israelites in Old Testament times, with the addition of some words of modern technology. Such a degree of continuity is extremely rare among the languages of the world. For example, if you go to Greece and speak New Testament Greek to the local people while they speak to you in modern Greek, they won't understand you and you won't understand them: the language has changed too much. On the other hand, if you go to Israel today speaking Old Testament Hebrew, you and the people will understand each other without difficulty. It's the same language.

Not long ago, in New York City, I watched a large pro-Israel parade down Fifth Avenue. The marchers were chanting this slogan: "Am Yisrael Chai! Am Yisrael Chai!" This means in Hebrew: "The People of Israel Lives!" After four thousand years, more than half of them in exile, the people of Israel lives, by the grace of God and in fulfillment of His promises. "And...when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them: for I am the Lord their God" (Leviticus 26:44).

The story of the ingathering, in partial fulfillment of the fourth line of prophecy, is the most remarkable of all. Throughout the long centuries of exile, the idea of a return to the promised land has burned in the soul of the Jewish people without cease, in accordance with Psalm 137:5, which says: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning." In the late 19th century in Europe, the idea began to take concrete form. Fearing new waves of persecution, Jews in many countries began a movement called Zionism. They formed the World Zionist Organization, which held two Congresses and established the Jewish National Fund. Much of the leadership and intellectual inspiration came from a man named Theodor Herzl, a Hungarian Jew living in Vienna, who wrote a book called The Jewish State, advocating the establishment of a secular homeland for the Jews. The Fund grew large through contributions by Jews of different nations, who often had lots of money through successful careers as businessmen, bankers and professionals (the Jews being so frequently prohibited from doing anything else).

When Zionism got started about a century ago, Palestine was under the rule of the Ottoman Turks and was populated by well over a million Arabs and other people. The community of Jews continually present since Biblical times was only about 5,000. But the Jewish National Fund began buying up parcels of land in Palestine, and small groups of Jews began leaving Europe to settle on the parcels as farmers. These Jewish pioneers suffered great hardships, coming as they did from urban backgrounds for the most part, few of them having ever lived on a farm. But slowly, the Jewish population of Palestine began to grow, reaching about 60,000 by 1914, at the outbreak of World War I.

A milestone occurred in 1917, when Great Britain issued the famous Balfour Declaration, recognizing the right of the Jewish people to a national homeland in Palestine. (Prime Minister Lloyd George and Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour were apparently motivated by a combination of British national interests and personal Biblical convictions.) At the end of the war, Turkey found itself on the losing side and Britain on the winning side, with the result that Britain obtained control of the promised land through the British Mandate of Palestine, established by the League of Nations. Jewish immigration then proceeded at an increasing tempo, fueled by the Nazi persecutions

which caused many Jews (who weren't previously conscious of their Jewish identities) to seek refuge outside the European continent. By the end of World War II, the Jewish population of Palestine stood at around 600,000.

At this point there occurred one of the more extraordinary political events of modern times. In 1947, at the United Nations, the Soviet Union and the United States (along with most other countries) agreed to recognize an independent nation of Israel on Palestinian soil. What made this so remarkable is that it occurred at the height of the cold war, when the two superpowers were at each other's throats on every other issue of the day. It seemed as though the civilized world, its conscience seared by the emerging revelations of Nazi atrocities, was seeking a salve for its conscience and was finding it in the recognition of the State of Israel. When the British Mandate ended in 1948, Israel became an independent nation pursuant to the U.N. plan.

Immediately after independence, there occurred one of the more extraordinary military events of modern times. The Arab League, representing organized nations with populations totaling in the tens of millions, sent five regular armies - those of Egypt, Transjordan, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq - to crush the tiny new Jewish state by force. But miraculously, the little handful of Jewish irregulars put the five armies to rout (with the limited exception of the British-trained army of Transjordan, which held fairly firm on what we call today the west bank). It's as though I and a few of my buddies were to get out there and start throwing Molotov cocktails at tanks, and the tanks were then to turn around and run away.

One of the first things Israel did after its military triumph was to send an air force plane to Vienna to recover the coffin of Theodor Herzl, who had died at an early age in 1904 as a result of overexertion in the Zionist cause. He was reburied with highest military honors on a mountain renamed Mt. Herzl, near Jerusalem.

After the war of independence, which lasted from 1948 to 1949, the ingathering rumbled forward with new momentum, drawing on Jews from most of the world (not primarily from Europe as before). Under an Israeli statute called the Law of the Return, any Jew of any nationality became entitled to live in Israel and acquire Israeli citizenship. Today, the Jewish population of Israel is approximately 3.5 million, or more than 700 times what it was at the start of the ingathering. "For, lo, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the Lord: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it" (Jeremiah 30:3). "...[A] great company shall return thither" (Jeremiah 31:8).

But now, lest I be carried away with passion for my message, let me draw back a bit in regard to the ingathering. I acknowledge that what has occurred during the past 100 years isn't the actual ingathering of Israel in fulfillment of the fourth major line of prophecy, and certainly isn't the salvation of Israel in fulfillment of the fifth. Those prophecies (often called the Palestinian covenant and the new covenant) are set forth extensively in many Old Testament passages besides just those I read you earlier. According to those prophecies (and other, closely-related ones), a single, integrated set of events will occur after the completion of the punishments of Israel. God Himself (more precisely Messiah, who is God in human form) will lead the remnant of exiled Jews back to Zion, forgive their sins, put new hearts into them, make them His purified children, establish them eternally in peace and safety in the land, and bring peace, prosperity, justice and the knowledge of God to all the earth. In contrast, the Zionists of the past 100 years, acting mostly with secular motives and not believing in Christ the Messiah, have taken matters into their own hands by establishing a Jewish State ahead of God's timetable. Their startling initiatives to change the demography of Palestine, and their tolerance of violent, unjust actions by Jewish para-military groups against the Arab population at key moments, have helped ignite an Arab-Jewish conflict which existed to only a small extent before. This conflict will disappear when God carries out His actual plan, giving both the Jews (Isaac's descendants) and the Arabs (Ishmael's descendants) their promised territories in the full flowering and blooming of a rejuvenated natural world.

I do say, though, that what has occurred during the past 100 years is a foreshadowing of the ultimate ingathering by which the fourth line of prophecy will be fulfilled. It is also a necessary precondition to the end-times events which will culminate in the ultimate ingathering, the salvation of Israel, the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant and the establishment of the kingdom of heaven on earth. According to scripture, the end-times events must be preceded by a partial, premature ingathering of unbelieving Jews whose presence in the promised land sets the stage for those events. What has occurred during the past 100 years appears to be that partial ingathering.

We thus can see that the first three of the five major lines of Biblical prophecy have been remarkably fulfilled in Israel's history down to today, and the fourth is in motion toward fulfillment, while the fifth remains for hereafter. The extent of the fulfillments which have already occurred in their proper chronological order is absolutely amazing. This is apparent when one realizes that these lines of national development are completely unique to Israel. You can search all the annals of history, studying all the chronologies of all the other nations which ever existed, and you will not find even one nation whose story even begins to resemble the story of Israel. Putting it statistically, if 100,000 nations have existed since

time began, then the odds are 100,000 to 1 against anyone being able to predict in advance that any one of the major course-lines of Israel's journey through the ages would actually come to pass. Putting these course-lines together, the odds are billions and billions to one, which is the same as infinity to one for all practical purposes. It is impossible that the writers of the Old Testament, using human wisdom, educated guesses, and the like, could have foretold so accurately the extraordinary course of Israel's future. The only way it was possible, and the way it in fact occurred, is that the Holy Spirit told the writers exactly what to write, down to the last word.

And I haven't even begun to talk about the fulfillment of numerous so-called secondary prophecies concerning Israel, some of which are found in the passages I read earlier and some elsewhere in the Bible. I am referring to such things as the ending of the separate legal authorities of one or all of the twelve tribes of Israel after the Messiah's first coming (see Genesis 49:10); the ending of the Old Testament system of animal sacrifices, as an additional curse for disobedience to the law of Moses (see Leviticus 26:31); the desolation of the land during Israel's absence, followed by the land's renewed cultivation after Israel's return (see, for example, Leviticus 26:32 and Ezekiel 36:34-36); and the carrying out of these words of God to Abraham: "And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee..." (Genesis 12:3).

The carrying out of "And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee" is particularly striking to students of World War II and its aftermath. Within a year after the infamous Wannsee conference, where top German leaders decided on "The Final Solution of the Jewish Problem", Germany's battlefield fortunes turned from general success toward total failure: the Afrika Korps was routed by British forces at el-Alamein, and the Sixth Army together with supporting tank units (a total of 330,000 soldiers) was encircled, then decimated, by Soviet forces at Stalingrad. Germany lost as many soldiers and civilians in the war as the number of Jews it massacred: six million. The country itself was smashed asunder at the war's end. The eastern third (Silesia, Pomerania and East Prussia) was annexed by Russia and Poland, the German population was expelled, Russians and Poles were brought in to settle in their place, and the entire area was irretrievably lost to Germany. The middle third (known to us as East Germany) came firmly under the Soviet yoke for 40 years: a communist puppet dictatorship was installed and maintained at gunpoint, the borders were made the most fortified in the world, and anyone trying to escape was shot on sight. Only the western third, the Federal Republic of Germany, survived as a free and independent nation. Berlin, the traditional capital, was divided and surrounded. In contrast, Germany's two axis partners, Italy and Japan, suffered much during the war but emerged afterward with their national territories basically intact and with political freedom and economic health. Italy and Japan were guilty of many terrible

deeds during the war, but neither was much involved with anti-semitism.

A look at the other European countries shows a strong correlation between whether or not a given country collaborated with the Nazi roundups of the Jews, and whether that country's post-war status was freedom and independence or Soviet subjugation. Countries as distant and different from one another as Spain, the Netherlands, Finland and Greece all protected the Jews, and all emerged basically independent and democratic either right away or after a time. Finland is especially noteworthy because it shares a long border with Russia and was a wartime ally of Germany. In the changed military conditions of 1945, the Red Army could have easily overwhelmed little Finland, but didn't do so, for reasons never fully explained by historians. Countries which collaborated with the roundups, like Poland and Hungary, suffered territorial deprivations and 40 years of Soviet occupation. The most blessed land in the world, the United States of America, is also the land which has harbored the largest number of Jews in full freedom and opportunity: six million, the same number Hitler killed.

Let's remember again the big picture, the three big lessons God is teaching to all of humanity through His dealings with Israel: that He is the all-powerful God who is there, that our sinful disobedience to Him (reflecting our inherent sin natures) is continually separating us from Him, and that He has a plan to redeem us from sin and its consequences if only we will respond. On the first lesson - His being the all-powerful God who is there - I can think of no better way for God to reveal His presence to everybody than His extraordinary pattern of prophecy and fulfillment over the long course of Israel's life as a nation. The story of Israel thunders through history as resounding proof of the presence and the power of the living God. That's the only way I can put it.

The second lesson is the consequences of sin. The terrible things which have happened to Israel, the dreadful sufferings which the Jews have experienced, convey a tragic message. Israel has been privileged by God like no other people. In the two millennia before Christ's first coming, the Israelites alone knew there was only one God. In addition, they had all kinds of special revelations from God, including a whole catalogue of precise predictions whereby the Messiah could be identified at his first coming. Yet Israel disobeyed, disobeyed and disobeyed, refusing every warning, trampling on God and His prophets every time, and rejecting Christ despite all the evidence of who he was. The result was Israel's separation from God, with everything awful implied by such separation. Israel's tragedy pictures the separation which every human being faces - including ultimate separation in hell - as the natural and inevitable result of innate human sinfulness.

Fortunately, the third lesson is the most wonderful good news for all who want it. The good news is the grace and mercy of God in coming in human form as Jesus Christ through the seed of David (Matthew 1:1), to give Himself as a living sacrifice for the sins of all mankind. This is the key to fulfillment of the Davidic covenant: every Jew and every gentile who desires salvation can receive it by believing in Jesus, so that the Davidic Kingdom can be established for the purified remnant of Israel and the Millennial Kingdom for the purified remnant of the whole human race, with Christ as King.

Just as Israel's long-term future is predicted with extraordinary precision in the Old Testament, so also are the person and the redemptive work of Christ. On the surface, the Old Testament describes a chronology of events which includes the giving of the law of Moses and Israel's disobedience to the law. But under the surface is an undercurrent of prophecy about God's intention to send Jesus Christ into the world to fulfill the law, atone for every Jew's and every gentile's disobedience to God, and present the free gift of eternal life to everyone who will receive it by faith. This undercurrent is often called the "scarlet thread of redemption", after the scarlet ribbon which the harlot Rahab hung out of the window of her apartment in the walls of Jericho so she and her family (the city's only believers) would be spared from God's judgment of the city (Joshua chapter 2).

The promise of Christ starts in outline form as far back as Genesis 3:15. The promise becomes stronger in the Abrahamic covenant, for God is surely talking about Jesus Christ when He predicts the coming of a great blessing to all the nations of the earth from the seed of Abraham (Genesis 12:3, 22:18). It becomes stronger still, through a series of pictures or models of the Savior's redemptive work. There is Isaac, the child of promise, born by supernatural means after a long period of waiting, humble and obedient to his father's command that he be sacrificed to God, walking up the mount and carrying the wood to be used to sacrifice him at the top. The substitutionary element is pictured by the ram provided by God in place of the originally intended sacrifice. (Genesis chapter 22.) There is Joseph, the good and loving person, sent by his father to his brothers (the children of Israel) with perfectly noble intentions, but rejected by his brothers and sold by them to the gentile world power. He wins acceptance, position and a wife among the gentiles, until the later time when he forgives his brothers unconditionally and saves them (along with a great many gentiles) from death. (Genesis chapters 37-47.) There is Moses, sent by God to the Hebrews but initially rejected by them, who flees to the gentiles and takes a gentile wife, returning nonetheless to deliver the Israelites from bondage (Exodus chapters 1-14). (As pictured by Joseph and Moses, Jesus comes first to Israel but is rejected, then goes into the gentile world where he finds acceptance and his bride the church, then returns to redeem his original people.) There is the passover lamb,

spotless and without blemish, killed and its blood daubed above and on either side of each Hebrew door in a three-point pattern corresponding to the top of the cross, so God's angel of death will spare the Hebrews from judgment, just as those who have incorporated by faith the blood of Christ, the perfect Lamb of God, will be spared from judgment at the end of history (Exodus chapter 12). Again there is Moses, leading the spared ones through the wilderness and to the promised land of Canaan, just as Christ leads the saved through the trials of this life to the promised land of heaven (Books of Exodus through Deuteronomy).

There is Numbers 21:6-9, where serpents were biting and poisoning the children of Israel until Moses, at God's direction, posted a replica of a serpent on a pole so all who looked up at it would be saved from the poison. Adam, who poisoned the human race with sin, is like the actual serpents, and Jesus Christ on the cross is like the saving replica on the pole. All who look up in faith to the Christ of Calvary will be saved.

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:
That whosoever believeth in him should not perish,
but have eternal life.
For God so loved the world, that he gave his only
begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not
perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:14-16.)

The predictions of Christ become more and more precise, including the foretelling of his birthplace (Micah 5:2); his lineage from the house of David (many places in Isaiah and elsewhere); the exact time when he will enter Jerusalem and be put to death (Daniel chapter 9); the use of crucifixion to put him to death (Psalm 22, especially verse 16, and Zechariah 12:10, both written many centuries before crucifixion was known as a method of execution); and the whole theological significance of his death (the last verses of Isaiah 52 and all of Isaiah 53). This is but a small sampling.

Finally, Jesus Christ bursts onto the stage of history as recorded in the four gospel books of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), fulfilling all the Old Testament promises about his first coming. He offers himself to Israel as its king, but the Jews reject him and turn him over to the gentile authority, Rome, for crucifixion. Right after his resurrection and ascension there begins the "long parenthesis" between the 69th and 70th "weeks" (seven-year periods) of God's remaining dealings with Israel (prophesied in Daniel chapter 9). God shunts Israel aside and calls forth His church (meaning all believers in Jesus Christ) to represent God on earth during the long period until the beginning of the 70th "week" (the Tribulation Period). The calling of the church accords with the many Old Testament pictures and prophesies of how Israel will reject the Messiah but the gentile world will give him wide

acceptance. Isaiah says the Messiah will be "an ensign for the nations", "a light to the gentiles" (Isaiah 11:12, 42:6).

At the end of the Tribulation Period, when Christ returns in glory with his saints, he will finally be recognized by the remnant of Israel as its true King, Messiah and Savior. As predicted in the last verse I read to you, Zechariah 12:10, the Jewish people will be filled with righteous mourning over the Son of God whom they pierced at Calvary. Israel's mourning for its sin, and its turning to Christ for forgiveness, will result in Israel's salvation and purification in fulfillment of the new covenant. Christ will lead all the Jews of the world back to the promised land in complete fulfillment of the Palestinian covenant. God will also fulfill the Davidic covenant by establishing the house, kingdom and throne of David with Jesus Christ as King forever and ever. God will likewise bring in the Millennial Kingdom, the 1,000-year reign of Christ and his saints in the whole earth (Revelation 20:1-6), followed by the eternal state of bliss for all the believers in Christ (Revelation chapters 21 and 22, the last two chapters of the Bible).

I'd like to close by singing the first verse of a wonderful hymn which expresses admirably the role of Jesus Christ as redeemer of everyone, Jew and gentile, who believes in him. Here it is:

Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy
people free;
From our fears and sins release us: Let us find
our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the
earth thou art;
Dear desire of ev'ry nation, joy of ev'ry longing
heart. Amen.

Steve Gurko

Note to reader:

You may wish to obtain a second essay, dated June 15, 2008, and called Israel: Prophecy and Fulfillment (continued) – What's Happening Now, What to Expect and How to React. This second essay may be freely downloaded with the "English Products" link on www.bbea.org