

Israel: Prophecy and Fulfillment (continued)

What's Happening Now, What to Expect and How to React

The Current Scene. After nearly 2,000 years in exile, the Jewish people have returned to the promised land in large numbers to form the modern state of Israel. This remarkable phenomenon, unparalleled in the history of nations, has not brought peace to the new state. Attacks by Arab states, suicide bombings to kill or maim Israeli citizens, raids to kill or kidnap Israeli soldiers, rocket fire, damage to the economy and international disapproval have been Israel's lot since independence was declared in 1948. Diplomatic efforts have brought partial relief, but no diplomat with sufficient skill has emerged to bring a permanent solution. What will happen next, and what will be the ultimate outcome?

The Bible holds the answers. The Bible has predicted and explained with complete accuracy the unique patterns of Israel's history leading up to the current scene. The Bible is therefore completely reliable as it explains the current scene and predicts the things to come. Those things are of immense significance for every single person on earth, requiring from everyone a response of faith in Jesus Christ, Israel's and the world's Savior and coming King.

The Historical Background. God created the world for good purposes (Genesis 1-2), but humanity rebelled continually against Him and so brought three divine judgments on itself: the expulsion from the garden of Eden (Genesis 3), the worldwide flood in the time of Noah (Genesis 6-8) and the confusion of languages at the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9). God then withdrew from direct contact with the human race as a whole and formed a new nation, Israel, to represent Him in this sin-cursed world. He did this by announcing His permanent, unconditional covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12-24), Abraham's son Isaac (Genesis 26) and Isaac's son Jacob (Genesis 28). He changed Jacob's name to Israel (Genesis 32:24-32), and formed the nation of Israel from the descendants of Jacob's twelve sons (in Genesis, Exodus and beyond).

The Abrahamic covenant consists in large part of promises made by God to the nation of Israel: He'll always be Israel's God, He'll multiply her like the stars of heaven or the sands of the seashore, and He'll give her the land of Canaan, the land flowing with milk and honey, as an eternal inheritance. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob believed the promises, but a later

generation of Israelites turned away from them while God was leading them from Egypt through the desert to the promised land (Exodus 15:22-27; 16:1-3; 17:1-3; Numbers 13-14). As a result, God put Israel under a different covenant, the law of Moses, consisting of more than 600 religious, moral and civil rules beginning with the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19 through the end of Deuteronomy). Unlike the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant is conditional: Israel must obey all the rules all the time to be blessed by God through secure possession of the promised land; disobedience will bring exile from the land, dispersal among the other nations (the gentiles), and great persecutions and massacres there.

The rest of the Old Testament shows Israel struggling in vain to obey the law of Moses consistently. Her failures led to the exile to Assyria in 722 B.C. (II Kings 17), to Babylonia in 586 B.C. (II Kings 25; II Chronicles 36) and to the entire world (in post-Biblical times, beginning in 70 A.D.). She has suffered incredible persecutions and massacres during the long, latest exile. She has been greatly reduced in numbers and has nearly disappeared.

But the Abrahamic covenant of promise remains in effect, and everything is in place for it to be fulfilled: Israel has survived, retained her national character and preserved her burning desire to return to her own land (Psalm 137:5). A third covenant, the Davidic, promises that a descendent of David will be Israel's king, ruling over David's kingdom in the eternal future (II Samuel 7; I Chronicles 17; Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 23:5-6). This means Israel's national territory will be restored to her, permanently, under the government of the promised king.

From the late 19th century until now, waves of immigration from six continents have brought one-third of the world's Jewish population back to the promised land as citizens of the new Jewish state. This return, and the opposition to it, set the stage perfectly for a series of events which are prophesied to occur in "the day of the Lord". The events include God's judgment of unbelieving humanity; the fulfillment of the Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic covenants; the 1,000-year reign of Christ and his saints over the restored and glorified Davidic kingdom extended to the whole world; and, finally, the commencement of the eternal state, with its permanent separation between those whose sins are forgiven through faith in Christ and those whose sins are not forgiven.

The Prophetic Framework. Daniel, a Jew exiled to Babylonia, wrote his Old Testament book of Daniel from the perspective of nearly 2,600 hundred years ago in the sixth century B.C. (Daniel 1). In his book, he described how God sent the angel Gabriel to give him a vision of 70 "weeks" (490 prophetic years of 360 days each) which remained in God's plan to put an end to Israel's sin and begin the reign of the anointed one, called the Messiah or the most Holy (Daniel 9). The 70 "weeks" were to begin with the decree of the king of Persia authorizing the reconstruction of Jerusalem's outer defensive wall (Nehemiah 1; 2:1-8; Daniel 9:25). Secular historians have concluded that this decree was issued in 445 or 444 B.C. During the first 69 "weeks" (483 years), the reconstruction was to be completed in perilous conditions (Daniel 9:25). At the end of the 69 "weeks", "...shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself..." (Daniel 9:26). The reconstruction was in fact completed as prophesied (Nehemiah 2:9-20; 3-5; 6:1-15). Messiah was in fact "cut off, but not for himself" as prophesied, when Jesus Christ was crucified on Calvary's cross for the sins of humanity in about the year 31 A.D. This was 483 years of 360 days each from the year of the king's decree. (Matthew 27:1-2,11-50; Mark 15:1-37; Luke 23:1-46; John 18:28-40; 19:1-30; Romans 5:6,8; 1 Peter 2:24.) [Here's a question for those who affirm the truth of the Hebrew scriptures but deny that Jesus Christ is the real Messiah: who then is the real Messiah who was "cut off, but not for himself" in about the year 31 A.D. in fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy?]

Daniel's 70th "week" is the seven-year period commonly called "the tribulation" or "the tribulation period". It hasn't begun yet, as proven by the absence of the obvious, public events with which it will begin (Daniel 9:27; II Thessalonians 2:1-12). We are now living in the long time between the 69th and 70th "weeks", a time often called "the church age" or "the age of grace". In this time, God is represented by the church, meaning all people in all places who call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord (I Corinthians 1:1-3). In His grace, God is sending forth the church to announce the free gift of salvation through faith in the gospel, meaning the good news that Jesus has died for our sins and risen again (I Corinthians 15:1-8). God's work in this time through the church, not Israel, is shown by the reality that the church, not Israel, is actively proclaiming to all nations the one true God, His word the Bible, and His plan of salvation.

The church age will end and the tribulation period will begin when Jesus comes in the clouds to lift up the church

to heaven in the great event known as "the snatching away" or "the rapture" (I Corinthians 15:51-58; I Thessalonians 4:13-18). This event is now the next thing to occur in God's prophetic timetable: it will come suddenly, without warning. Some oppose this truth, claiming the rapture will occur at the mid-point or end-point of the seven years of tribulation. But three proofs establish this truth beyond doubt:

(1) the Bible's repeated mention of the Lord coming for his church at an unannounced moment like a thief in the night, meaning the church needs to be prepared for this all the time, in contrast to the three-and-a-half years or seven years of warning which the church would have if the rapture were to occur at the tribulation's mid-point or end-point (Matthew 24:42-51; 25:1-13; Mark 13:33-37; Luke 12:35-48);

(2) the evident presence of the church in heaven in Revelation chapters 4 and 5, between the church age described in chapters 1 through 3 and the tribulation period described in chapters 6 through 19 (in Revelation 4-5 the scene shifts from earth to heaven, and 24 elders are in heaven, clothed in white, with crowns of gold on their heads - in the New Testament context the 24 are church elders already raptured, purified and rewarded - the 24 speak to Christ on behalf of the vast multitude redeemed by his blood out of every kindred, tongue, people and nation, with no suggestion that this multitude, minus the 24, is still down on earth, awaiting the miseries of the tribulation); and

(3) the Jewish character of the seven-year tribulation period on earth as the conclusion of the 490 years of God's dealings with Israel, such character being shown in Daniel and in Revelation chapters 6 through 19: the Jewish temple is in place again in Jerusalem, Jews are in it worshipping, sacrificing and offering according to the Mosaic law, 144,000 Jews (12,000 from each of twelve tribes of Israel) are called to faith in Christ and sealed for a special Christ-led mission throughout the world (apparently a mission of preaching the gospel to all nations), and the word "church" isn't used even once in these 14 chapters in Revelation (nor is it used in any other Bible passage describing the seven years).

Daniel predicts accurately that four gentile kingdoms will rule over Jerusalem before or during the 490 years, until

Messiah brings the eternal kingdom of God to prevail over all earthly kingdoms at the end of the 490 years. The four are the kingdoms of the Babylonians, the Medes and Persians, the Greeks of Alexander, and the Romans. (Daniel 2; 7-8.) Daniel speaks extensively of an individual, a political leader of a country which was part of the Roman Empire, who will achieve world power during the 70th "week" (Daniel 7-9; 11). This person is called "another little horn" (Daniel 7:7-8); "the abomination of desolation" (Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14); "that man of sin", "the son of perdition", "that Wicked" (II Thessalonians 2:3,8); "antichrist" (I John 2:18; 4:3); "the beast" or "the first beast" (Revelation 13; 19:19-20). He personifies the evil of the pagan, idolatrous, gentile kings who preceded him (Revelation 13:2). He's a smooth talker and flatterer who blasphemes against God, demands to be worshipped as God and persecutes unto death those who refuse (Daniel 7:8,11,19-20,25; 11:21-24,32,36-37; II Thessalonians 2:1-4; Revelation 13).

Right at the start of the seven-year tribulation period, the antichrist will establish a pact for Israel's benefit so she can resume the ritual sacrifices of the Mosaic law in Solomon's temple as rebuilt on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem (Daniel 9:27). Following up on this success, the antichrist will proceed peaceably, using flattery and deceit, to obtain wide political authority in the world (Daniel 11:21-24; Revelation 6:1-2). But the consequences of his reign will be disastrous: war, famine and death (Revelation 6:3-8) as the start of God's tribulation-period judgments which will include the seven seal, seven trumpet, seven thunder and seven plague judgments (Revelation 6; 8-10; 15-16).

Throughout the seven years, God will do a great work of worldwide evangelism through an angel who, it seems, will lead and guide the 144,000 Jews converted to Christ and sealed at the start of the seven years (Revelation 7:1-8; 14:1-7). God will send two witnesses to prophesy in front of the temple in Jerusalem during the first three-and-a-half years. The antichrist will murder them at the tribulation's midpoint, but God will raise them back to life and take them to heaven in the sight of the city's surviving inhabitants, presumably including many Jews, who will then glorify God. (Revelation 11:1-13.)

Perhaps due to rage over the conversion of Jerusalem, the antichrist will manifest himself at the tribulation's midpoint as a beast rising from the sea and will break his pact with Israel, enter the temple, end the sacrifices there, declare himself to be God and unleash a vast, unprecedented persecution

of God's people (Jeremiah 30:7; Daniel 7:21-22,25; 9:27; 11:30-36; 12:1; Matthew 24:15-22; Mark 13:14-20; II Thessalonians 2:1-4; Revelation 12-13). The second three-and-a-half years are called by Jesus the "great tribulation" (Matthew 24:21). Millions from all nations will come to the faith during the seven years, and many of them will be martyred, especially during the great tribulation (Revelation 6:9-11; 7:9-17; 20:4).

The tribulation period will end when the Lord Jesus Christ comes from heaven with the church to defeat the forces of the antichrist at the battle of Armageddon (Zechariah 14:1-4, 12-15; Revelation 16:12-16; 17:12-14; 19:11-21). The antichrist and his associate, called "another beast" or "the false prophet", will be cast alive into the lake of fire (Revelation 13:11-18; 19:20). Jesus will then establish the millennial kingdom, the glorious 1,000 years of righteousness and peace unparalleled on earth since the days of the garden of Eden (Psalm 72; Isaiah 11:1-10; Romans 15:12; Revelation 20:1-6; 22:16).

At the end of the millennium, Satan will be set loose for his final battle against God, but will be defeated and cast into the lake of fire to be tormented forever (Revelation 20:7-10). Then will come the great white throne judgment of all unbelievers of all ages: all will likewise be cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15). Then at last comes the eternal state: all saved by faith in Christ will be with God forever; all others will be in the lake of fire forever (Revelation 21-22).

The seven years of tribulation are a great time of conversion of the Jews to Christ. The process starts with the 144,000, goes on to Jerusalem's inhabitants at the tribulation's midpoint, and finally reaches all Jews surviving at the end of the seven years. (Isaiah 4:2-4; Jeremiah 30:7; Daniel 12:1; Zechariah 12; Romans 11:25-29.) This is the spiritual purification of Israel at the end of the 490 years as prophesied by Daniel (Daniel 9:24). God will use Christ's victory at Armageddon as a testimony to the surviving Jews, to bring them to faith in Christ (Ezekiel 38-39; Zechariah 12).

At the dawn of the millennial age, all Jews living outside the promised land (minus certain rebels) will be brought back to the land by God in fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant (Jeremiah 31:7-12; Ezekiel 20:33-44; 36:16-24; 39:25-29). During the millennium the Mosaic law will be taught to all nations, and carried out in the millennial temple in fulfillment

of the Mosaic covenant (Isaiah 2:1-4; Ezekiel 40-48). The kingdom of David, with Christ, David's descendent, as king, will be established and glorified in Israel as the center of the millennial kingdom, in fulfillment of the Davidic covenant (Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 23:5-6).

The Current Scene Explained. God controls history (Isaiah 46:9-11), and He has controlled it to make the current scene fit perfectly into His prophetic framework. Indeed, the current scene is exactly what's necessary in order for the evil person so much mentioned in scripture, the antichrist, to form his pact for Israel's benefit and go from there to world power. Before the tribulation period can begin, the conditions must be ripe for it to begin: the antichrist must act quickly, at its beginning, to fulfill the prophecies. The conditions are now ripe as never before. The time is at hand.

Jesus tells us to look for the signs of the times (Matthew 16:1-3; 24:32-33), so let's look for them. Everything in the historical background and current conflict leads to a focal point: East Jerusalem, with the Temple Mount where Solomon's temple needs to be rebuilt so Israel can resume the animal sacrifices and other rituals of the law of Moses. The controversy is more intense over the issue of who will control East Jerusalem than over any other issue. This is exactly the issue which the antichrist will resolve at the beginning of the tribulation period, according to Biblical prophecy.

The return of so many Jews to the promised land since the late 19th century is the fruit of Zionism, the Zionist movement, founded by the Hungarian Jew Theodor Herzl and other European Jews. Feeling a great need for Jewry to form an independent state with a national territory as other peoples have done, the Zionists focused after a while on Palestine as the appropriate site. At Palestine's center is Mt. Zion, where Jerusalem, called "Daughter of Zion" in scripture, is located (Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 21:5; John 12:15).

Jewish immigrants in small groups came from Europe to Palestine and bought land there, with the tacit or explicit consent of the Ottoman Turks and then of the British after Palestine passed from Turkish to British administration in 1917. As their numbers increased and their settlements grew, the Jews in Palestine began agitating, sometimes violently, against British rule and in favor of an independent Jewish state. They got their way in 1947, when the United Nations adopted a partition plan giving part of Palestine to the Jews for a state

and part to the Arabs who had resided in Palestine for centuries.

Under the UN plan, Jerusalem was to be a neutral, free city not belonging to either the Jewish or the Arab states in Palestine. The Arab countries rejected the plan, and five of them attacked Israel, initiating what the Israelis call their "war of independence" (1948-49). Israeli forces prevailed and expanded Israel's territory well beyond what the UN plan provided. In particular, the Israelis captured West Jerusalem, resulting in the city's partition by a fence. The Arab country of Transjordan (later called Jordan) controlled East Jerusalem, including the Old City with the Temple Mount.

In 1956, Israeli forces briefly occupied the Sinai peninsula as part of a joint campaign with Britain and France to free the Suez Canal from Egyptian nationalization. In 1967, Egypt and Syria took bellicose actions against Israel, with Jordan's support. In the resulting "six-day war" (June 5-10, 1967), Israeli forces occupied the Sinai (again) and also the areas known as the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights. Israel thus acquired full control of the Temple Mount, but left its Moslem holy places under Moslem supervision.

In 1973, Egyptian forces crossed the Suez Canal to attack Israeli forces on the Jewish fasting day called Yom Kippur (when many Israeli soldiers were weak from fasting). In the resulting "Yom Kippur war", the Egyptians drove the Israelis eastward at first, achieving sufficient military success to force a settlement which led to full Israeli withdrawal from Sinai, a formal peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, and the deployment of United States forces to enforce the Sinai's demilitarization. A peace treaty between Jordan and Israel followed. The Palestinian Arabs and the state of Israel were to negotiate a settlement which was widely expected to lead to an independent Arab state in the West Bank and Gaza.

In the ensuing negotiations, Israel ceded control of some West Bank areas (notably Jericho) to the Palestinian Arabs, but startled the Arab world by refusing to consider the transfer of any part of Jerusalem to Arab sovereignty. Israel proposed an Arab state in Gaza and most of the West Bank, with Israeli sovereignty over all of Jerusalem plus nearby West Bank areas containing Jewish settlements. Israel has continued to build up those settlements and to ring East Jerusalem with Jewish-inhabited apartment houses, a policy she calls "creating facts".

Israel has formally annexed East Jerusalem with a large swath of suburbs. On September 28, 2000, Israel's Defense Minister, Ariel Sharon, walked through the Old City with colleagues and a large police force to signal Israel's intention to retain it.

Mr. Sharon's action deeply offended the Palestinian Arabs, causing them to launch an "intifada" (meaning uprising, in Arabic): waves of violence against Israeli soldiers, settlers and ordinary civilians, with many bombings and suicide attacks which have killed or maimed many Jews, Israeli Arabs, foreign guest workers in Israel, and others. Israel has responded with counterattacks which have inflicted about triple the number of casualties on the Palestinian Arabs as Israel has suffered, but which haven't resolved matters or brought peace. On the contrary, the Arabs of Palestine have been radicalized. Fatah, their long-dominant political force which recognized Israel and agreed to the two-state solution, has been overtaken in popular support by Hamas, which favors destruction of Israel and has sponsored many of the intifada attacks.

Complicating Israel's military problems is Hezbollah (meaning Party of God, in Arabic), a Shiite Moslem paramilitary group based in southern Lebanon. In 2006, Hezbollah's raids and rocket firings into Israel provoked an Israeli counterattack against all of Lebanon, leading to the deployment of a peacekeeping force (15,000 Lebanese and 15,000 international troops) north of the Israeli-Lebanese border. Hezbollah remains well-armed and well-entrenched, though somewhat removed from view, in southern Lebanon. Violence continues to flare up between Israeli forces and Palestinian Arabs in the West Bank and Gaza, notwithstanding Israel's withdrawal of its Gaza settlements. An outbreak of all-out war could occur at any time.

The starting point of all this current trouble is Israel's refusal to withdraw from East Jerusalem and nearby areas. Israel claims she must retain this territory for security reasons, as a defensive shield against groups like Hamas and Hezbollah which aim to use a Palestinian state as a springboard for continued attacks on Israel leading to her destruction. But Israel could insist on stringent international guarantees and controls of her pre-six-day-war borders, like the arrangements in Sinai which have worked well to prevent renewal of hostilities between Israel and Egypt. She could also require dismantling of the militant anti-Israel groups, followed by a period of peace for the building of mutual trust between Jews and Arabs, before her withdrawal to the agreed borders. Backed

for the first time by a clear Israeli commitment to withdraw to those borders, such demands would carry a strong moral force in the Arab world and the international community. If the conditions were met and Israel withdrew, she would still occupy more than three-quarters of the land area of Palestine; the new Palestinian state would occupy less than one-quarter. This huge territorial advantage, coupled with already agreed-to restrictions on Arab military forces and installations between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, would give Israel overwhelming superiority in any conventional war. As for terrorism and other unconventional attacks, Israeli leaders themselves have conceded that the solution has to be diplomatic and political, not military. Thus national security can't be the main reason for Israel's insistence on retaining East Jerusalem and part of the West Bank.

The main reason, the very heart of the present situation, is religious. Israel's Biblical history centers on Jerusalem, which David established as Israel's capital and God selected as His dwelling place in the temple which Solomon built on the Temple Mount. News media have published accounts of the deep desire of Israel's present-day religious leaders to rebuild the temple and resume the practice of the Mosaic law there. These leaders have already formulated architectural plans, prepared the priests' costumes and begun gathering red heifers and other special animals for the religious proceedings. Only the conflict with the Moslems over control of the Temple Mount blocks these leaders from moving forward. Even non-religious Jews feel a profound attachment to the Jewish holy places in Jerusalem and the traditions associated with those places. Example: right after Israeli troops captured the Temple Mount in 1967, Israeli military leader Moshe Dayan, a secular Jew, said: "We have returned to our most holy places, and we will never leave them." A consensus for re-dividing Jerusalem, leaving the Old City in Arab hands, doesn't exist in Israel for the foregoing reasons.

At the same time, the emotional commitment of the Arabs to the recovery of East Jerusalem can't be denied or defeated. Jerusalem is Islam's third holiest city; on the Temple Mount are two of Islam's holiest shrines, called the Al Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock; according to tradition, Mohammed ascended to heaven from the Temple Mount. A solution which leaves all of Jerusalem in Jewish hands won't be accepted by the Arabs, or by the Moslem world in general with its more than a billion people. If Israel tries to retain East Jerusalem by force, no amount of walls, other barriers or applications of

force by Israel will lead to the stability and peace longed for by the Jewish state.

The correspondence between the present scene in the Holy Land and the first major step in the prophesied career of the antichrist is quite obvious. All agree that diplomacy is the ultimate answer; diplomacy has already achieved some success in regard to the more outlying areas, namely, Egypt, Jordan and southern Lebanon; a diplomat capable of moving from those successes to the heartland issue of East Jerusalem will be welcomed by everyone. The antichrist is a diplomat, a professional talker and negotiator. His first achievement will be exactly the resolution of the current heartland issue so Israel can realize at last her religious dreams on the Temple Mount in a peaceful context. Jerusalem means "City of Peace" in Hebrew; God denied David permission to build the temple because David was a man of war; God chose Solomon to build it in conditions of peace so the God of peace would be made known there to all peoples (I Kings 4:1,24-25; I Chronicles 28:1-10; II Chronicles 2-7). The antichrist's exact work will be to recreate such conditions so the temple and Israel's practices there can be recreated too. Everything is just now exactly set for him to do this work.

The Biblical prophecies calling for the present circumstances to exist were written long, long ago. From then until now, all kinds of extraordinary things had to occur: the Jews had to be exiled, persecuted, preserved, and restored to the land with their religious or traditional zeal for Jerusalem; the Arabs had to exist in the land with their fervent Islamic and patriotic zeal for Jerusalem; the balance of forces had to be such as to produce conflict without resolution; diplomacy had to produce some success, kindling a hope for more, but with no diplomat in view with the ability to achieve full peace; and the international environment had to favor UN-type initiatives involving diplomats from places far from the scene of the conflict. If one ponders seriously the improbability of all these things coming together to produce the current scene, one has to consider the only option which really explains the current scene: God spoke the prophecies found in His word, the Bible, and is directing events so His word will be fulfilled.

The current scene described so far is in or near the 10,200 square-mile territory called Palestine. The current scene worldwide is an interesting backdrop extremely useful to the antichrist in the second phase of his ascension to world dominance.

The array of violent conflicts which fill the newspapers from day to day often seems anarchic, a confused and senseless jumble of the sins and follies of mankind. But on closer look, a pattern is visible: more and more of the hatred and bloodshed in diverse places fits into the emerging apocalyptic struggle between two vast religious conglomerations, namely, Christendom and Islam. In Yugoslavia, Chechnya, the Philippines, Indonesia, the Sudan, Nigeria, Afghanistan and Iraq there's a common thread of Moslems on one side and Christians (or, at least, people called Christians) on the other. The emotions are growing deeper, as when Moslems in many countries riot and destroy western property over cartoons in a Danish newspaper depicting Mohammed unfavorably, or riot and burn the Pope in effigy over his criticism of Mohammed's teachings. The unfathomable implications begin to emerge when New York, Washington, London and Madrid are subject to devastating attacks on civilians by the Moslem fascist group called al Qaeda or by tiny fanatical Moslem cells which exist in many places and are extremely hard to detect and dismantle.

Combining the Palestinian and world scenes, one sees a war on many fronts between the Islamic east or south and the Judeo-Christian west. The link between this war and the antichrist's two-step rise to power isn't hard to see. He'll start by leading Jews and Moslems in the middle east to a diplomatic accommodation centering on the future of Jerusalem. He'll then build on this success by promising to calm in like manner the antagonisms between Christians and Moslems internationally. Religious rivalries are intractable; they produce conflagrations which no man can tame. No man, that is, except the antichrist, can tame them; or at least he will so claim, presenting his skill and experience as the only way, really, to save us from being engulfed by flames of passion which readily translate into military action. Consider, for example, what will happen when al Qaeda and the countless small Moslem cells acquire biological, chemical or nuclear weapons.

The logic of the antichrist's appeal in his second phase will flow from the similarity between the Palestinian and world scenes. The Palestinian conflict is between two monotheistic religions, Judaism and Islam, both claiming to spring from the Old Testament. The worldwide conflict is likewise between two monotheistic religions, Christianity and Islam, both claiming to spring from the Old Testament. The man who succeeded in the one arena has the best chance to succeed in

the other, doesn't he? Just give me the authority to do the job, and I'll do it, he'll say.

The momentum of events will be on his side. The same forces striving today to resolve the Palestinian conflict are striving also to resolve the Moslem-Christian conflict in the world. The moderate, pro-western governments of Arab countries such as Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf states are quite anxious to resolve the Palestinian and also the world issues. Their goal is to diffuse more radical Moslem groups such as al Qaeda, the Shiites and the Taliban, which threaten to sweep away the moderates in the same way the Shah of Iran was swept away. The moderates are working closely with the US and other western governments to achieve diplomatic solutions of the issues. Once a smooth-talking diplomat emerges and resolves (at least apparently) the Palestinian crisis, he'll be very well positioned to obtain the support of all the peace-seeking governments and groups for a new initiative to resolve the ominous, threatening crises between Islam and Christianity. Of course he'll need appropriate powers.

The momentum of history will also be on the side of the antichrist in his bid for world leadership. For at least the past century, the climate of thought has been: we must achieve world peace through strengthened international institutions; we've made much progress toward the goal, but have suffered some setbacks; we just need to keep trying and we'll get there. The League of Nations was born out of hope that just-ended World War I was the war to end wars. The United Nations was born out of the same hope in regard to just-ended World War II. The cold war, with its many hot-war manifestations in Eastern Europe, Korea, Indochina, Afghanistan and elsewhere, dashed hope, for a while. But the cold war ended with the defeat of the Soviets in Afghanistan, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the liberation of Eastern Europe, the tearing down of the Berlin Wall! Doesn't this show that world peace is really in sight? The disturbing religious warfare which replaced the cold war has called the optimism into question. But even here there are hopeful signs. Didn't diplomacy work in the Israeli-Egyptian, Israeli-Jordanian and (at least to some extent) Israeli-Hezbollah conflicts? And didn't joint multi-national efforts work in Bosnia and Kuwait?

The key pitch of the antichrist figure will be just along these lines. We're close, so tantalizingly close, to our dream of world peace, he'll say. Peaceful reconciliation of competing factions through dialogue brought about by diplomacy -

that's the trend of history, that's the only way to go, and I'm the one to lead us that way. Why, look what I've already accomplished in Palestine! Just trust me, and I'll do the same in the rest of the world.

With the true Christians gone and the world's people weary of war, longing for permanent peace and yet despairing of ever actually achieving it - the charismatic figure, the little horn, the man of sin, will get his way. Then the end times, the seven years of tribulation, will really have begun.

No one knows for sure when these things will happen, only that they will happen. The present circumstances, which seem so favorable to their happening, could change, through man's efforts or otherwise, causing a delay in the final events. For example, the Arabs and Israelis could negotiate, without the antichrist, a truce or apparent end to their conflict. But the final events can only be delayed, not eliminated. Sooner or later, Israel's desire to approach God in the temple where He said to build it will require the emergence of the predicted person to help Israel achieve her goal. Then we're on our way to Armageddon, the millennium and eternity, in accordance with the divine plan as revealed in the Bible.

Here's some further reflection on the geographical background of the indicated person. As mentioned, Daniel's prophecies reveal that the person will come from a country which belonged to the Roman Empire. Those prophecies, coupled with Revelation's description of the new Babylon (Revelation 17-18), suggest that the Roman Empire itself will exist again in some form during the seven years of tribulation. According to the Revelation passages, the new Babylon (the reconstituted Roman Empire) will be a very wealthy, trade-oriented, pleasure-loving society. It will exude worldly materialism and will definitely oppose Christ's gospel as the unique way to reconcile mankind with God. It will be highly alliance-oriented, reaching out through commerce and other means to forge close unions among the world's diverse nationalities, religions, philosophical viewpoints, etc. The antichrist figure will fit right into this mindset of his home-base countries, with his campaign to unify the world under his leadership to put an end to the plague of war.

Three modern countries connected culturally with the original Roman Empire are France, Italy and Spain. They belonged to the Roman Empire; their languages are derived from Latin (the language of the Roman Empire); their religion is

Roman Catholicism (the official religion of the Roman Empire in its last years); their law is built on the Roman system of legal codes; they contain extensive ruins of Roman stadiums, amphitheaters, aqueducts, roads, bridges, etc. These countries enjoy great prosperity based in large part on trade. They are among the world's weakest in their response to Christ's gospel: their churches of believers are few and small. They are uniting with other European nations and are actively promoting world unity and peace. France and Italy have been leaders in the search for a diplomatic solution to the Palestinian-Israeli dilemma, and are the main contributors to the international peacekeeping force now serving in southern Lebanon. The Roman Catholic Church is well known today for its ecumenical approach, meaning its effort to join with men of good will in all religions to achieve desired political and social objectives. It would thus not be surprising for Roman Catholic France, Italy and Spain to form the core of a conglomeration of nations which resembles the Roman Empire, abounds in a rich variety of consumer goods, seeks world peace not based on the gospel, and produces the experienced and capable peacemaker whom the Bible calls antichrist. The current scene in these countries is about what one would expect in order for the Biblical prophecies to be fulfilled in this manner.

The word antichrist means, in New Testament Greek, either an opponent of, or a substitute for, the real Christ. In light of that second meaning - a substitute - it would not be surprising for the antichrist's name to resemble the name Jesus Christ. Note how the names of Jacques Chirac, recently retired President of France, and Juan Carlos, current King of Spain, resemble the name Jesus Christ. This is not to suggest that either of these two men or any other particular figure is actually the antichrist. No one but God now knows who he is or when he will appear in his Biblical role. All the things mentioned above merely indicate that he can appear at any time and that the pieces of the puzzle are now close to coming together. The time is at hand.

[John, the human author of Revelation, used the name Babylon to refer to Rome. John wrote Revelation while on the Roman-controlled island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, perhaps as a prisoner of the Romans due to his gospel preaching (Revelation 1:9). Perhaps he didn't want to provoke the Roman authorities by directly identifying their city as the one God will judge and destroy near the end of the tribulation period (Revelation 14:8; 16:19; 17-18; 19:1-3). Perhaps he used Babylon as the substitute name because the spiritual character of ancient

Babylon resembled that of Rome in his day. John made clear he meant Rome, when he described the city he was talking about as built on seven mountains (Revelation 17:9,18). Rome, not Babylon, fits this description.]

Zionism Evaluated. Mt. Zion is the mountainous region in the center of Palestine. In looser usage, Zion or the land of Zion refers to the whole territory promised by God to Israel. Zionism, the Zionist movement, is the ideological framework for the return of so many Jews from so many places to the land of Zion in the past 125 years. Zionism holds that the Jewish people have every right and duty to return to Zion, form an independent state there and resume Jewish national life within that state.

How does God view Zionism? Why is it important to know this? The answer to the latter question justifies the inquiry into the former: Christians and the world need to know Zionism's exact place in the divine plan, so they can shape correctly their dealings with today's state of Israel, the product of the Zionist movement.

Zionism evokes natural sympathy, much admiration, and even a feeling that it is the work of God. Isn't it true that the Israelites lived in Zion for centuries as a sovereign nation, and left only when expelled by force? Haven't the Jews suffered incredibly, unspeakably, more than any other people in history, during their long time of exile in the "diaspora" (the gentile world outside Zion)? Isn't Zion the only place, ultimately, where Israel can find the peace and security she so much longs for, with ties of sentiment and tradition binding the people to the land? Above all, didn't God Himself give this land to the descendents of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (the Jewish people of today)?

"Yes" is the correct answer to all the above questions; yet a closer look at Biblical teachings and modern realities leads to a more restrained view of the Zionist phenomenon. The issue is one of timing. Yes, God promised, and will carry out His promise, to restore Israel to the land. But when? There is really no doubt as to the Biblical answer: at the end of the tribulation period, that is, at the dawn of the millennial age, not now. Zionism is essentially an effort by the Jewish people to take matters into their own hands by substituting their timetable for God's. The effort is quite understandable in light of Israel's dreadful experiences as a

people in exile, but must be responded to with caution and in accordance with God's will as revealed in the Bible.

God is love, but God is also just. He created Adam and Eve in order to love them by giving them the whole creation (Genesis 1:26-29), but He judged their sin by driving them out of Eden and putting them under the curse of separation from Himself, with resulting lives of hardship ending in physical death (Genesis 3). He created Israel in order to love her, but judged her repeated sin by driving her out of the promised land and putting her under the curse of persecution and a declining population. He will definitely recover and restore her, but only under certain conditions which have not yet come to pass.

The great heroes of faith in the Bible, when confronted by God's judgments of their sin, responded by accepting His judgments, blessing His name and waiting patiently for His mercy. An example is David when he was confronted with the lifelong distress which God would bring to his house due to his sin in the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah the Hittite (II Samuel 11; 12:1-14; 15:1-17,23-26; 16:5-13; Psalm 51). Israel would do well to reconsider her history, humble herself before her God, and confess that her exile, with suffering, is God's judgment of her national sin, not merely the arbitrary, unjust actions of sinful gentiles against the innocent Jewish minorities in the gentile lands.

Many, many wonderful prophetic passages in both the Old and New Testaments describe God's marvelous mercy toward Israel. The passages guarantee, over and over, that God's wrath against His people Israel will come to an end, pass away and be forgotten. A glorious new era of peace, prosperity and eternal blessings for Israel will then begin. The hope and consolation of Israel is to desire and look forward with all her heart to that future time. (Isaiah 40:1-2; 45:17,25; 46:13; 49:13-15; 54:7-14; Jeremiah 29:11; 30:22; 31:31-34; Hosea 14:4-5; Joel 3:16-18; Micah 7:18-20; Zechariah 2:10; 10:6; Luke 1:46-47,54-55,57-60,67-80; 2:25-38; Romans 11:1-5,25-36; Hebrews 8:8-12.)

Specifically, the passages combine to describe the restoration of exiled Israel to the promised land as follows: God will lead all remaining Jews back home, including the physically incapacitated; the gentile world will rejoice to see this and will assist the Jews in their journey home; God will put new hearts into the returning Jews so they'll know and obey God from then on; God will bless them in their homeland with material prosperity, physical health and eternal joy; God will

exalt Jerusalem as Israel's capital bathed in divine glory and shining as a brilliant light to the whole world; God will make Israel the center of His worldwide kingdom; God will motivate gentiles from all the world to come seek Him through Israel and learn His laws through Israel's teachings; God will transform the earth physically, making the deserts bloom; God will do these great things through His chosen servant, the Messiah, of the house of David. (Isaiah 2:1-4; 11; 35; 43:1-7,19-21; 44:1-6; 49:5-16,22; 51:3,11; 52:7-10; 53; 60; 61:6; 62:1-5,11-12; Jeremiah 3:17-19; 23:3-8; 24:4-7; 30:1-11,17-19,22; 31:1-17,24-28; 32:37-44; 33:7-26; 46:27; Ezekiel 11:16-20; 28:25; 36:16-38; 37:21-28; 39:25-29; 47:1-12; Amos 9:13-15; Micah 2:12-13; 4:1-7; Zephaniah 3:13-17; Zechariah 8:3-8,11-15,20-23; 13:1-2; 14:8-9,16,20-21; Acts 1:6-7.) As an obvious by-product, there'll be no more Arab-Israeli conflict: the land of Canaan will be Israel's but the Arabs will rejoice in their vastly larger domains converted from deserts into an earthly paradise.

One need not read far in the prophetic passages to see that they're talking of a restoration of the exiled Jews to the promised land in conditions totally different from what Zionism has brought to pass. In these last 125 years, Messiah hasn't appeared; God hasn't brought back all remaining Jews to their land; the gentile world, while favorable at first, has largely turned against Zionism (consider the hostility of most Moslems, the lopsided votes against Israel in the United Nations, and the widespread use of the word Zionism in a negative or hostile way, as equivalent to imperialism or the like); Israel has hardly undergone a spiritual transformation; she has hardly experienced prosperity, health and joy in supernatural abundance; Jerusalem, wracked by conflict, is an object of pity and concern, not a source of inspiration; no worldwide kingdom with Israel at its center has been inaugurated; no inpouring of gentiles seeking spiritual truth in Israel has occurred; no physical transformations of the earth have come to pass; the Arabs are hardly willing to cede to Israel the whole promised land; etc.

In addition, many Zionist actions leading to or following from the formation of the state of Israel are not favorable to the claim that Zionism is God's fulfillment of His plan as set forth in the great prophetic passages. Especially troubling is the treatment of the Arab population already living in the land, with resulting provocation of the Arabs into bitter hostility toward the new state.

Most of the Jewish migrations back to the promised land occurred legally, with the consent of the governing

authorities: the Ottoman Turks until 1917, and then the British. At first the Arabs didn't oppose the process: the Arab countries have been traditionally far more tolerant of Jewish minorities than the European countries; even today the Arabs insist that they're willing to let Jews live in Palestine. But when the Jewish settlers began concentrating geographically and showing their intent to secede into an independent Jewish-controlled homeland for all the world's Jews, the Arabs took understandable exception.

As the Jews turned violent in their campaign to expel the British from Palestine, they committed atrocities against the Arabs as well. Most Jewish military operations were conducted by Haganah (meaning Defense Force, in Hebrew), the official organization which became Israel's army. But a role was also played by irregular paramilitary groups, notably the Irgun Zvai Leumi (meaning National Military Organization, in Hebrew) and the Lehomai Herut Yisrael (meaning Fighters for the Freedom of Israel, in Hebrew). The latter group was also known as the Stern Gang, after its founder, Avraham Stern. These groups became notorious for their acts of terror against Arab civilians: throwing hand grenades into market places, for example. On April 10, 1948, Irgun members entered the Arab village of Deir Yassin, near Jerusalem, lined up men, women and children in the central square and machine gunned at least 120 of them to death, Nazi style. Years later, when Menahem Begin, a leader of the Likud party and a future prime minister of Israel, would rise to speak in the Knesset (Israel's parliament), the opposition would bang on their desks and chant "Deir Yassin! Deir Yassin!" Mr. Begin was the Irgun's leader when the massacre occurred. Haganah formally disavowed the actions of the paramilitaries, but not the benefit which inured to the new Jewish state from the departure of the terrified Arabs.

During the war of independence (1948-49), between three quarters of a million and a million Arabs fled from the territory governed by the state of Israel at the war's end. All agree that this mass exodus was essential to the survival of Israel with a Jewish majority, a Jewish government and a Jewish national and religious character. Without this exodus, the large majority of Israel's population would have been Arab. Free elections would have led to an Arab-governed country with a Jewish minority, which wasn't at all the Zionist goal. Israel's demographic problem was further shown by this irony: even in the limited areas reserved for Israel under the UN partition

plan, the Arabs had a small majority before the war of independence.

What caused nearly a million Arabs to leave the new country of Israel? Naturally, the versions differ. The Arabs claim that the cause was Jewish terror which made the Arab population fear to live in the new state. Israel claims that the cause was Arab radio broadcasts urging the Arab population to depart so the invading Arab armies could drive the Jews into the sea. Objective observers say the natural desire of people to escape from a war zone could be the explanation. There is probably some truth to each version. The mere fact that there is at least some truth to the Arab version is enough to tarnish the moral legitimacy of the new country with its Jewish majority. Israel has stoutly refused to let any of the refugees or their descendents return home, and has confiscated their property. (Question: can this be justified under any of the three versions of why the refugees left?) She has offered to pay compensation.

To understand Arab feelings over these things, consider the following hypothetical example. Suppose the United States generously allowed large-scale immigration from China, and the arriving immigrants decided to settle in New Jersey. Suppose they then agitated for an independent Chinese-controlled nation to be carved out of most of New Jersey, and used force against the native American population, most of whom then departed. If the result were the actual formation of a new Chinese country in New Jersey with international recognition, what would be the reaction of the American people? Would it matter if, instead of being Chinese, the immigrants were members of an ancient Indian nation whose original homeland thousands of years ago was New Jersey? Would this be enough to convince Americans that this enterprise was of God?

Admittedly, there are differences between Israel's case and these lurid hypotheticals. Israel is in fact the ultimate owner of the land in controversy, according to God in the Bible. Israel's lack of any other territory and her vast suffering are pertinent. Also, mention could be made of God's authorization to Israel, in Old Testament times, to wipe out the native populations in order to possess the land. But countering these distinctions is the Bible's undeniable teaching about the matter at hand. According to the Bible, God's plan for the return of Israel at the end of history is very, very different from the Zionist plan which has produced so much dislocation,

disorder, hatred, violence, and moral doubt in many people's minds.

On the practical level, perhaps the past events should be forgotten and the status quo defended. All nations have checkered histories by which they acquired their present territories. International law is based on recognition of borders that now exist; otherwise there would be no end to claims for the rectification of past wrongs. There has to be an informal statute of limitations on such claims.

The trouble with this in Israel's case is that it is Israel, more than the Arab world, which wants to change the status quo. Most Arab states, like most others, are willing to accept the state of Israel within her frontiers of June 4, 1967. But Israel has repeatedly rejected this arrangement and insisted on retaining East Jerusalem and other parts of the West Bank.

Israel's territory, determined by her frontiers of June 4, 1967, includes all areas granted to her by the UN partition plan of 1947, plus all areas captured by her in the war of independence, and is more than three quarters of the total land area of Palestine. Though half of this national territory is desert, and though the territory must be shared by Israel with her Arab minority (about one-fifth of her population), the arrangement is still very favorable to Israel: she gets 7,800 square miles, the bulk of Palestine, while most of the Arabs would be confined to a mini-state with only 2,400 square miles (namely, the West Bank with East Jerusalem, and Gaza). Yet Israel refuses to negotiate on the basis of this arrangement.

In 2002, Saudi Arabia led the Arab League in offering full peace to Israel - including recognition plus diplomatic and trade relations - provided Israel withdraws to her borders of June 4, 1967. The offer doesn't require Israel to receive back any of the nearly a million refugees who fled during the war of independence, or any of their descendents. Instead it calls for "a just solution" to this issue, plainly meaning compensation. The offer would allow for Israeli sovereignty over the specifically Jewish holy sites on the Temple Mount.

Israel could of course accept the Saudi offer in principle, then bargain hard for ironclad guarantees against terrorism or any other attacks on her territory or people. US or other peacekeepers could monitor the border as in the peace arrangement between Israel and Egypt. The new Palestinian state

would be demilitarized, meaning Israel would enjoy military superiority over her and could sweep in and occupy her at will in the case of any violation of the peace accord. Israel might even insist on a long period of calm, with full disarming of militant Palestinian groups, no more attacks, and an end to all hostile propaganda (including in Palestinian schools), before she would withdraw to her agreed borders.

The Saudi offer is astonishingly generous to Israel, in light of all the recent historical circumstances. If properly responded to and "fleshed out" as to the specifics, the offer would actually provide far more security to Israel than her unilateral annexation of East Jerusalem and nearby West Bank areas. The unilateral approach antagonizes the Arabs, isn't supported by the world, and drains Israel militarily, economically and psychologically. Fences built to keep out Arab attackers don't work: the attackers tunnel under them, fire rockets over them, or devise all kinds of other techniques to get around them. What's to stop them from attacking Israeli and non-Israeli Jewish civilians throughout the world, something they've eschewed up to now? It's far better to rely on an internationally supported and guaranteed peace settlement which fulfills key Arab expectations, thus strengthening Arab moderates and taking much of the wind out of the sails of those who want to destroy Israel.

The sound advice which Israel's friends should give to Israel with respect to the Saudi peace offer is: "Take it and run, before they change their minds!" Israel's opposite stance has led to the current and worst intifada: the suicide and other bombings with all the bloodshed of these recent years. Prominent Israeli and Arab moderate personalities have drafted and signed, in their unofficial capacities, a "peace treaty" along the lines of the Saudi offer. The signing took place in Geneva, Switzerland, and the "treaty" was formally presented to the pertinent governments for consideration. Israel, however, has scoffed at it and continued on her course of expansion into territories not accepted by any nation as belonging to her at this time.

Israel's attitude in the present controversy is one more sign that her actions in modern times aren't God's fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant as contemplated by scripture. Rather, Israel's actions are her own aggressive taking of initiatives to advance her cause before God is ready to do so. Much of the trouble she has experienced can be attributed to her acting outside of God's will.

The Bible is replete with illustrations of how Abraham and his descendents through Isaac and Jacob have proceeded this same impetuous way in the past with unfortunate results. Here are a few such illustrations:

(1) God promised childless Abraham a line of descendents to inherit the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 12:1-3,7; 13:14-18; 15). When ten years passed with no sign of fulfillment of this promise, Abraham and his wife Sarah took their own initiative to obtain descendents through a relationship between Abraham and Sarah's Egyptian handmaid Hagar (Genesis 16). Ishmael, born to Abraham and Hagar, wasn't God's choice as heir to the covenant (Genesis 17). God's choice, Isaac, was born to Abraham and Sarah 14 years later by supernatural means in accordance with God's timetable (Genesis 17-18; 21:1-7). As a result of Abraham's and Sarah's unauthorized initiative, conflicts arose between Sarah and Hagar and between Ishmael and Isaac (Genesis 16; 21:8-11).

(2) Isaac's younger son Jacob, not his older son Esau, was God's choice to inherit from Isaac the Abrahamic covenant. Jacob, not waiting for God to show His preference, took advantage of Esau's physical hunger and later used outright deception to deprive Esau of the firstborn's rights. Fleeing from angry Esau, Jacob went to the land of Abraham's relatives to look for a bride. There he kissed his young cousin Rachel the first time he saw her, then committed himself to serve her worldly father Laban for seven years to win her as his bride. Laban tricked Jacob into marrying Rachel's older sister Leah at the end of the seven years, using deception similar to what Jacob had used against Esau. Laban got Jacob to agree to another seven years of service to gain Rachel as a second wife, then obtained still more years of service from Jacob. The rash initiatives of Jacob put him ahead of God's plan and timetable to give him both the Abrahamic covenant and a wife. One consequence was repeated conflict between his two wives, leaving him without peace in his own house. Another was his great difficulty in disengaging from Laban to return to the promised land. (Genesis 25:19-34; 27-31.) Jacob would have done better following the example of his father Isaac, who waited patiently at home for God to carry out His plan for him, including a wife whom God brought to him in accordance with His timetable and method (Genesis 24; 26).

(3) The first generation of Israelites who left Egypt with Moses tried to advance toward the promised land against

military opposition from the Amalekites and Canaanites, though God had already announced His plan for Israel to enter the land only in the next generation. The result, as predicted by Moses, was that God wasn't with the first generation in its initiative, and they were routed by their foes on the battlefield. (Numbers 14:26-45.)

(4) False prophets in Jeremiah's time, impatient with the exile in Babylon, taught that the exiled ones would return home soon. God's actual plan was for them to settle down for a 70-year stay in Babylon, submit to her authority and seek peace for her. (Jeremiah 25:8-13; 28-29.)

(5) Jewish Christian leader Paul insisted on going to Jerusalem to preach Christ's gospel to the Jews there, though they had already heard and largely rejected such preaching and the Holy Spirit had warned Paul three times against going there. The results were no conversions of souls to Christ through Paul's preaching in Jerusalem, and an early end to Paul's career and life due to the actions of the city's Jews, through the Romans, against him. (Acts 20-28.) God definitely has a plan for the salvation of the surviving nation of Israel through faith in the gospel, but it's far more long-range than Paul's plan which he tried to substitute for God's (Isaiah 45:17; 53; Jeremiah 30:7; 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:24-38; 37-39; Daniel 12:1; Zechariah 12; Matthew 20:28; Romans 11:25-36; Hebrews 8; Revelation 7:1-8; 11-12; 14:1-5; 21:10-13).

The formation of the modern state of Israel, and the actions of that state down to today, bear the earmarks of Israel getting ahead of God once again instead of waiting patiently for Him to carry out His promises. Yet there is more to be said about the Zionist movement and its place in history. The return of the Jews to their ancient homeland is dramatic, exciting; it calls the attention of the whole world to the continued life of this people created by God, and the undying fervent zeal of this people to reestablish itself in the land God gave them. It is also an essential ingredient, an indispensable starting point, of the end-time events by which God will indeed fulfill His every promise to Israel and carry out His announced plan of history and the eternal future. It is also contemplated (though not commanded) in scripture: the Jews are shown as present in significant numbers in the promised land and its capital, Jerusalem, during the tribulation-period events which lead to Armageddon (Ezekiel 38-39; Zechariah 12-14; Matthew 24:15-22; Mark 13:14-20; Revelation 11-12; 16:12-16; 19:11-21). These Jews in the land are described as the people "gathered out of

many people", "brought forth out of the nations" or "gathered out of the nations" (in Ezekiel 38:8 and 12), indicating action taken by God in restoring them to the land. God's resurrection of Israel is predicted to occur in two steps: her physical coming together again as a people (Ezekiel 37:1-8, perhaps fulfilled when modern Israel became an independent state in 1948); and her spiritual coming back to life in the Lord (Ezekiel 37:9-14, to be fulfilled when the remnant of Israel mourns for having pierced God's Son and is saved by the deliverer, Zechariah 12:10-14; Romans 11:26-27).

The waves of migration and the formation of the Jewish state may be likened to many a prior action which God didn't command or approve but which He nonetheless utilized as part of the divine plan. Here are four examples:

(A) The union of Abraham and Hagar, and the birth of their son Ishmael, was Abraham's and Sarah's idea, not God's, but God used it to create the great Arab nation in partial fulfillment of His promise that Abraham would be the father of many nations (Genesis 16-17; 21:12-21; 25:12-18). In Biblical history, the Arabs abound in many remarkable roles: they're government ministers in Israel, protectors of David and his people in the wilderness during their flight from Absalom, authors of many proverbs in the book of Proverbs in accordance with their wisdom tradition, wise men from the east who come to Jerusalem to worship the newborn Jesus Christ, likely resisters of the antichrist and converts to the real Christ in large numbers during the tribulation, likely encouragers of the Jews to come to faith in Christ during the tribulation, likely protectors of Jewish Christians in the wilderness during the great tribulation, etc. (See Arabs in the Shadow of Israel, by the great Arab Christian scholar of the Bible, Tony Maalouf.)

(B) Jacob's carnal tactics against Esau weren't sanctioned by God, but God nonetheless confirmed the result which was Jacob's preferred status over Esau including inheritance of the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 25:19-34; 27-28; 35:9-15). Jacob's rashness led him to a distorted family life including relations with four different women (Leah, Rachel and their handmaids, Bilhah and Zilpah), but God used his conduct to produce his twelve sons whose descendents formed the twelve tribes of Israel (Genesis 29; 30:1-24; 35:16-20; 46:8-27; Numbers 1; 26). Jacob's inappropriate initiatives were thus turned by God to advantage for His glory (Israel is His glory, Isaiah 46:13).

(C) Joseph's brothers sinned by selling him into slavery in Egypt, but God used this to save many people alive, including the brothers themselves, through Joseph's leadership in Egypt during seven years of plenty followed by seven of famine (Genesis 37; 39-50).

(D) Though Paul's inappropriate initiative in going to Jerusalem produced little more than setbacks, imprisonment of Paul and his eventual execution in Rome, the Lord nevertheless spoke favorably of his testimony in the two cities and told him to be of good cheer (Acts 23:11).

Zionism thus fits into a Biblical pattern of actions by God's people which He doesn't mandate but which He knows of and then uses to bring about the things He does mandate. This balanced and correct perception of the Zionist phenomenon leads very practically to sound advice for Israel and the world as the end of the world approaches.

Zionism reflects the complex connection between man's free will and God's sovereignty in the course of history. The Zionists have exercised their free will by taking action based on their own instincts and reasoning processes, not God's commandments; the returning Jews have acted carnally, not as the spiritually transformed people which the remnant of Israel will be in the future; Israel's leaders need great patience and restraint in dealing with the consequences, the hostile reactions provoked by the Zionist movement. Yet in a larger, deeper realm, God is directing events, using even the unauthorized initiatives of the Zionists as a preliminary step in the shaping of a plan which will ultimately lead to the accomplishment of His goals and the glorification of Himself.

A very extreme example of man's sin and God's sovereignty is the betrayal of Jesus Christ by Judas Iscariot. The action was pure sin which Judas shouldn't have committed and for which he is personally responsible. Any friend of Judas, advising him before his action, would have been duty-bound to tell him not to do it. Yet God used this misdeed to fulfill Biblical prophecy and carry out the divine plan of redemption through the shedding of Christ's blood on the cross. (Psalm 41:9; 55:12-14; 69:25; 109:8; John 13:18; 17:12; Acts 1:16-20; 2:22-24.)

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?

Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?

For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen."

(Romans 11:33-36)

The Right Responses. The information now available about Israel's place in prophecy should lead to new ways of thinking on the part of Christian believers, Israel and the whole world.

For believers in the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, the fulfillment of Biblical prophecies concerning Israel is a strong sign that the end of their sojourn in this world is fast approaching. Christ will come soon in the clouds to lift his church to heaven, thus initiating the antichrist's reign and all the other prophesied events which will lead to the end of history and the beginning of the eternal state. This is a wake-up call for Christians to prepare to meet their Maker and appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ to give an account of their works (Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10). Christians are to rejoice in their eternal salvation but also live soberly so Christ will find them serving obediently when he comes (Titus 2:11-14). There's never been more reason than now to think his return is imminent, and to live in expectation of this great event.

But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.

(Words of the Apostle Peter in I Peter 4:7)

And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

(Words of the Lord Jesus Christ in Revelation 22:12)

He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

(Words of the Apostle John in Revelation 22:20)

Christians need also to reexamine their attitudes toward Israel in light of actual Biblical teachings as applied to the current scene. Yes, Christians are to love and bless Israel as God's original people whom He will bring back to

Himself through their Messiah and Redeemer, Jesus Christ (Genesis 12:1-3; Isaiah 1:18; 7:14; Micah 5:2; Zechariah 12:10; Romans 11). But loving Israel doesn't mean approving all her policies. She is ahead of her time of full restoration to her land in accordance with God's promises to Abraham. She is thereby provoking massive resistance which God isn't ready to help her overcome. Knowing these things, Christians need to urge Israel to pursue a policy of restraint, reigning in her territorial ambitions and accepting with contentment what God has allowed her to achieve in our time: an independent state possessing most of what was the British Mandate of Palestine, including a strong foothold in Jerusalem. She can then wait patiently for Messiah to come and do the rest, as he surely will because God has said so.

Christians need to redefine their mission in regard to Israel. The mission isn't to help her gain territory, or reach the Zionist goal of bringing all Jews to live in the new Jewish state (a goal just as elusive today as the goal of more territory). Rather, the mission is to show forth to Israel the Prince of Peace, the Lord Jesus Christ, by helping Israel achieve peace as much as it can be achieved in the present circumstances. This probably means that Christians should urge Israel to declare in principle her willingness to return to her borders of before the six-day war, upon establishment of time-tested conditions of peace and understanding between Arabs and Jews in Palestine. If this is considered by Christians to be too specific an intervention in political issues, they should at least refrain from intervention on Israel's side in those issues in a way which encourages her to press her agenda without considering God's timetable.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee.

Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces.

For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee.

(Psalm 122:6-8)

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

(Matthew 5:9)

For the world in general, the fulfillment of Biblical prophecies concerning Israel requires a fresh look at this book, the Bible, which has so fascinated mankind since it was written.

Honestly, in the quiet of your own heart, can you not see that the only way those prophecies could come true was that God Himself directed the writing of them? There's far too much here to be mere accident or coincidence. And if the Bible is indeed God's word, then what it says about Jesus Christ must also be true: he is the way of salvation; faith in his work of salvation on Calvary's cross brings pardon for sin; he bore our sins there so we wouldn't bear them in eternity. The Old and New Testaments are in perfect accord about this: more than 200 specific, improbable predictions about the details and significance of Messiah's first coming are literally fulfilled in Christ, as irrefutably set forth in the New Testament.

The key is to believe in Jesus as God's Son who has already done everything necessary to save you from condemnation and give you eternal life.

Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? (John 11:25-26)

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:6)

The key is to believe now, without delay.

"...behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation..." (II Corinthians 6:2)

Tomorrow may be too late to make the decision of faith. The current scene shows that the commencement of the tribulation period is imminent, and the Bible indicates that those who heard and rejected the gospel message before the beginning of the tribulation won't have a second chance during that period (II Thessalonians 2:7-12). Therefore, respond now to God's call to life through the Prince of Life, the Lord Jesus.

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.

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

(John 3:16-18)

On the practical level, Israel should review her territorial stance, on the basis of Biblical teachings and current realities. An incident for Israel to ponder is in her own history in the Biblical account of the career of Amaziah, king of the southern Israelite kingdom called Judah. Amaziah won a big victory over the Edomites in the valley of salt. Not content with this, he challenged the northern kingdom, called Israel, to a battle. The northern king, Jehoash, warned Amaziah that Amaziah's forces were inadequate to tackle the northern army and that he should be satisfied with his victory already won against Edom. But Amaziah persisted, with the result that he and his kingdom were badly defeated and humiliated, being without God's help to advance against the north (II Kings 14:1-20). The parallel to today's situation is obvious. Israel hasn't got what it takes to hold onto East Jerusalem and part of the West Bank; God isn't with her in this, according to His plan as revealed in scripture; trying to accomplish this will not produce good results; Israel needs to learn contentment with what she has already achieved and can consolidate with a proper diplomatic plan. This isn't weakness but prudent waiting upon the Lord for Him to carry out His glorious plan for Israel in His due time.

But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

(Isaiah 40:31)

The Bible's prophecies are sure and unfailing, a light to guide us through the seeming chaos of current events and our personal lives. We need to respond to the evidence of the Bible's reliability, and believe what the Bible says about the things to come and our eternal destiny.

Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.

(Revelation 1:3)

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