

The Future of Israel and the World

*“So all Israel shall
be saved: as it is
written, There
shall come out of
Sion the Deliverer,
and shall turn
away ungodliness
from Jacob: For
this is my covenant
unto them.”*
—Romans 11:26,27

IT IS APPARENT TO ALL that man for the past hundred years has lived in the most rapidly changing world since the dawn of the human race. Change has impacted all aspects of life—social, economic, religious, and political. Speaking now of just the political changes, we see as a fact of history that virtually all the powerful pre-1914 hereditary ruling houses of Europe have been replaced by other forms of government. During this same period, much of the population of the earth has succumbed to the control of various types of dictatorships. Some of these have been godless, totalitarian governments. Others have been autocratic regimes, ostensibly based on religious ideologies. Still more have been the result of power-hungry individuals whose

desires have been simply to rule over as much of mankind as possible.

As a consequence, the period beginning with the outbreak of World War I has to a large extent been one of general deterioration and fragmentation of world governments. Yet, it is not altogether so, for during this same period a multitude of new nations have been born. In many cases, these new nations have been the outgrowth of the aforementioned loss of power of the old ruling monarchies, as their many colonial holdings throughout the earth clamored for, and achieved, independence from the “mother” countries of Europe.

One of the countries which has been “born” during the past hundred years is Israel. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that Israel was “reborn,” for this people had formerly been a nation, with its own government. However, the ancient nation of Israel enjoyed a distinction not true of any other people on earth, before or since, in that its government functioned under the direction of God. The kings of Israel are spoken of in the Bible as sitting upon “the throne of the LORD.”—I Chron. 29:23

The full end of Israel’s kingdom came when Zedekiah, the last king of the remaining two-tribe portion of the nation, called Judah, was dethroned by King Nebuchadnezzar. (Ezek. 21:25-27) Then the entire nation—all twelve tribes—became captives in the kingdom of Babylon. This captivity lasted for seventy years. Meanwhile, Babylon was conquered by the Medes and Persians, and it was King Cyrus of Persia who issued the decree of liberation permitting the Israelites to return to

their land, but not to re-establish their own government.

From that time on, Israel continued to be a subject people, vassals to whatever nation controlled their land, which at the time of Jesus' First Advent was the Roman Empire. In the years A.D. 69 to 73, Titus, leader of the Roman army, besieged and finally destroyed Jerusalem. Then the Israelites who were not destroyed in this terrible ordeal were scattered throughout the world. This situation remained through the centuries and is referred to by the Jewish people as the period of their Dispersion—or *diaspora* in the Greek language.

DISPERSION FORETOLD

Moses, the lawgiver of Israel, foretold this scattering of the Israelites among the nations, and also their regathering as we have seen it taking place during the past century. This forecast is recorded in Deuteronomy 29:24 and 30:1-6. The latter part of the prophecy reads: "The LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers. And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live."

Moses also foretold how long the era of Israel's loss of independence and scattering would be. As we have seen, Israel was a nation under God, and for this reason it was subject to disciplinary measures for wrongdoing. Moses refers to certain corrective punishments to which they would be subject, and

then adds, “If ye will not yet for all this hearken unto me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins.”—Lev. 26:18

This warning of “seven times more” of punishment is repeated four times. Students of prophecy believe that this is a time measurement. A symbolic “time,” the Scriptures indicate, is a period of 360 years, and seven of these would total 2,520 years. The Biblical key to this method of reckoning is recorded in Ezekiel 4:4-6. Since Moses’ prophecy indicates that this was to be a complete and all-encompassing punishment, we believe it is reasonable to conclude that it began with the loss of their national independence and kingdom.

“Seven times” from Israel’s loss of their kingdom brings us to A.D. 1914 and the events surrounding World War I. Out of that conflict came the ejection of the Turks from Jerusalem and the land of Palestine by British General Allenby. Additionally, in late 1917, the famous Balfour Declaration was made by the British government, which opened Israel’s ancient homeland to Jewish refugees and pioneers from all lands. This resulted in the infusion of the Zionist movement with new life and hope.

While there were temporary setbacks of one sort or another, the rehabilitation of the region by the Jews and their migration to their ancient homeland continued. Out of this came the birth of the new State of Israel in 1948. Thus seen, it was in 1914, after more than 25 centuries as a captive people to other nations and empires, that the chain of events began to unfold which led to national independence for this Biblical and historic nation.

TIMES OF THE GENTILES

The full significance of Israel's liberation since 1914 can be seen more clearly by noting a forecast by Jesus, who is recognized by most leading Jews today as an eminent teacher and prophet. He was questioned by his disciples concerning the end of the present age. Part of Jesus' reply was, "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." (Luke 21:24) At the time of this prophecy, the Jewish nation, symbolically referred to as "Jerusalem," was being "trodden down" by the Gentiles, and this was to continue until "the times of the Gentiles" were fulfilled.

Coincidental with the overthrow of Israel's last king, the Prophet Daniel, interpreting a prophetic dream which the Lord had given to the king of Babylon, foretold a succession of four world powers, beginning with Babylon. The second of these was Medo-Persia; the third, Greece; and the fourth, Rome. The division of the Roman Empire into the various states of Europe as they existed prior to 1914 was shown by the toes of the image.—Dan. 2:31-45

To King Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel said, "The God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory." (vs. 37) This does not mean that Nebuchadnezzar sat on the throne of the Lord, as had been the case with the kings of Israel. It was simply that, beginning then with Babylon, Gentile rulership over the earth would not be interfered with by God, and this dominion would extend even over God's own people, the Israelites.

However, this was not to continue indefinitely. Daniel's prophecy pointed out that it would last only until the days of the divided Roman Empire—"the days of these kings"—as depicted by the toes of the image. (vs. 44) Then the God of heaven would set up a kingdom, or government, that would "stand for ever." This is a reference to the long-promised kingdom of the Messiah.

It is manifest from the events of history, as they relate to both Israel and the great Gentile empires of the past, and the distinct prophetic testimonies given with respect to each, that the period which Jesus described as the "times of the Gentiles" is synchronous with the "seven times" of Israel's punishment and loss of national independence. This means that the "times of the Gentiles" also reached their prophetic end in 1914. It is important to remember that the fulfillments of Bible prophecy which came about at this point in time were just the small beginning of events to which the Scriptures refer, rather than their completion. World War I, which began in 1914, marked the beginning of the complete downfall of the divided remnants of the old Roman Empire. It also led to the national sovereignty of Israel.

The nation of Israel today is a free country. No longer are the Israelites without their own government. Israel is a nation among the nations of the world, no longer a vassal to Rome or to any other Gentile power. It has a population of over 6.2 million Jews, and boasts the third highest standard of living in Asia. It is among the leading countries in the world in many areas of endeavor. The nation of Israel is not without its difficulties, however,

having fought in several wars subsequent to 1948 in order to maintain its freedom. In spite of these, Israel remains a free country, and has even grown stronger, to the point where now, some sixty-seven years later, they are considered one of the most powerful nations in the world. The incidents which led to this began at the close of the “seven times” and “times of the Gentiles” foretold by Moses and Jesus.

INTERVENING EVENTS

Many of the important experiences of the Israelites as a people during the period of their rise to freedom among the nations are also foretold in the Bible. One of the prophetic expressions describing this is that God would “bring again” their “captivity.” This expression appears in Joel 3:1,2, where the Lord says: “In those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land.” It is important to note that the word “captivity” in this passage, according to *Strong’s Concordance*, means “a former state of prosperity.”

In verses 9-14 of this chapter a warlike gathering of the Gentile nations is foretold, and “the valley of Jehoshaphat” is described as “the valley of decision.” In this gathering of the nations there is a preparation for war in which, symbolically speaking, the nations are said to beat their “plowshares into swords,” and their “pruninghooks into spears.” We

have seen this taking place in the era beginning with 1914, and the prophecy points out that it would be during this time that the Lord would “bring again” the “captivity,” or former prosperity, of his people. It has, in fact, been the success of Israel and their relative prosperity during this period that has caused many nations to be gathered together against them.

Equally striking is the prophecy which mentions the fact that the Lord would have “a controversy with the nations” in connection with his people and their land. (Jer. 25:31) Verse 2 of Joel 3 mentions the parting—or dividing—of the land. This also has occurred, for we know that the Gentile nations did not live up to the pledges contained in the Balfour Declaration and resolved the disputes by limiting Israel to less than half of the land which God promised. Although Israel has gained some of this land back, they still only control a portion of that which God gave to them.—Gen. 13:14,15

“FEAR” AND NOT “PEACE”

Other prophecies also reveal that the period of the regathering of Israel would be fraught with many difficulties. Jeremiah wrote: “Lo, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, . . . and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it. . . . For thus saith the LORD; We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. . . . Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob’s trouble; but he shall be saved out of it.”—Jer. 30:3-7

The meaning of this prophecy is clear. It emphasizes that even when the time came for this historic people to be restored to their land, they were to experience fear and trembling—that it would not immediately be a time of peace and happiness for them.

To begin with, there was much rejoicing on the part of the Jews over the Balfour Declaration and its subsequent implementation by a mandate from the League of Nations. This mandate undertook to assure the Israelites a home in their Promised Land. In a very definite way the beginning of their return from their long captivity had begun.

However, not long after that, the Jews in Germany, Austria, and Poland were bitterly persecuted by the Hitler regime. This increased in intensity and continued throughout the years of World War II, during which an almost unthinkable holocaust took place, in which six million Jews were killed, and countless others were left homeless.

Meanwhile, because of Arab opposition, the door to their land of promise was closed to further immigration—closed at a time when this suffering people needed a homeland more than they ever needed one before. Truly it was “a voice of trembling, of fear,” which they heard, and not of peace.

Another prophecy which testifies in a general way to the same unusual combination of circumstances reads: “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that it shall no more be said, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; But, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had

driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers. Behold, I will send for many fishers, saith the LORD, and they shall fish them; and after will I send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them.”—Jer. 16:14-16

This prophecy indicates that when the time came for the Israelites to return to their land, efforts would be made to induce them to return. The Lord said that he would send for “fishers” to “fish them.” This may well have been fulfilled by the Zionist organization, which was founded in 1896 by the late Theodor Herzl. Fishermen use bait to attract fish, and for many years the Zionist organization pointed out why Jews should go to their land, and the advantages that would accrue to them if they did.

However, not many Israelites were induced to go to the Promised Land by this method, although today Herzl is held in high esteem in modern Israel. One of the stirring sites in Jerusalem is the memorial garden honoring Herzl. The stone approach to his grave symbolizes the step-by-step progress of the Jewish state. Herzl’s work was not in vain.

The prophecy states that the Lord would also send for “hunters, and they shall hunt them.” Here more forceful methods are suggested. Among these undoubtedly should be included the bitter persecution at the hands of Hitler during the Holocaust. This particular driving method increased in intensity until nearly all the Jews of Europe who were not killed were made to long for their homeland and were anxious to go there when the opportunity was offered.

Another prophecy which is very much to the point along this line reads: “As I live, saith the Lord GOD, surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched

out arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule over you: And I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people.”—Ezek. 20:33-35

There has been much “fury” manifested during the one hundred years since 1914 in connection with the efforts of the Israelites to migrate from the various countries in which they have been domiciled, and to make a new home for themselves in the land of promise. As predicted, even those who are there are in “the wilderness of the people,” in the sense that they share with all people of the earth the distress and uncertainty of this chaotic time in human history. They have not yet found peace and security.

In next month’s issue of *The Dawn*, we will examine some of the future events described in Bible prophecy which relate to Israel and their role in God’s plan. We will also consider the glorious hope for Israel and the entire world of lasting peace, safety, and life which will be established through the righteous rule of Messiah’s kingdom—that for which so many millions have prayed for nearly two thousand years, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth.”—Matt. 6:10 ■