

Israel's Future among the Nations

*“Arise, shine; for
thy light is come,
and the glory of the
LORD is risen
upon thee.”
—Isaiah 60:1*

THE HOPES OF MANY IN
the world have been that the
dark and troubled Middle
East might be set on the road
to peace and light as a result
of the so-called “Abraham

Accords” and similar initiatives in recent years
to negotiate better relations between Israel and
several of her Arab neighbors. These hopes, how-
ever, were greatly dimmed by the outbreak of the
current war resulting from the October 2023 attack
on Israel by Hamas, a Palestinian Sunni Islamist
political and military movement that has governed
Israel’s Gaza Strip since 2007.

It seems evident that no amount of signed doc-
uments, past or present, will allay the historic
animosity and conflict that continues to exist
between Israel and those who either oppose her
existence outright, or who at a minimum claim

ownership of a portion of her land. This bitter hostility has continued to fester, with periodic eruptions of war, ever since the reestablishment of Israel as a nation in 1948. The world now despairs to hope the animosity will ever end.

THE REBIRTH OF ISRAEL

Out of the whirlpool of conflicting disorder that has characterized nearly all major world events during the past century, there has emerged something as unlike the general pattern of things as day is different from night. A new nation was born—the nation of Israel. Actually, it was the rebirth of a nation which existed centuries ago. The current state of Israel is, however, different from the old in almost every respect, except for its shared Jewish heritage.

This nation was reborn at a time when comparatively few of these ancient chosen people of God were desperately striving to maintain their hold on the Promised Land. At the same time, Israel was ringed about with hostile armies which were either threatening or attacking them almost constantly. Yet, out of this travail, with powerful nations sometimes looking on only passively, the State of Israel was born. To say that it was a historical event is not enough. It was also a prophetic event, foretold in the Scriptures.

Both Biblical and secular history furnish an interesting and colorful background for this people. It has been well said that one of the greatest living testimonies to the credibility of the Bible to be found in the world today is the Jew. Now that the Jewish people have been brought together into a reborn nation, this testimony has been greatly

strengthened. Indeed, the majority of those who make up the new nation of Israel are themselves as yet unbelievers in the Bible as the inspired Word of God. Even this, however, substantiates the accuracy of the prophecies pertaining to their reestablishment in the land.

THE LAND AND THE SEED

Abraham is the recognized father of the Jewish people and was the first to whom the name Hebrew was applied. (Gen. 14:13) To him God made wonderful promises. One of these pertained to the land which would eventually become Israel. It reads, "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." (Gen. 13:14,15) This promise in reality constituted an assurance of their future title deed to the land.

In addition to this assurance concerning the land, God promised Abraham that his seed, or offspring, would be involved in the blessing of all mankind: "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." (Gen. 22:18) Abraham evidently understood this promise to mean that one day his descendants would become a powerful nation and would be in a position to extend blessings to all other nations of the earth. In the New Testament we are told that he "looked for a city ... whose builder and maker is God." (Heb. 11:10) A city, in the Bible, symbolizes a government, much as it does in our language, as for example, when we speak of Washington, DC, the seat of government in the United States.

The descendants of Abraham became known as Israelites, named after his grandson Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel by God. (Gen. 32:28) Later, under the leadership of Moses, with him serving as a mediator, they entered into covenant relationship with Jehovah. Upon doing so, God said to them, “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.”—Exod. 19:5,6

From this pronouncement it is plainly evident that obedience to divine law was to be the measuring rod by which God would determine whether or not Israel would continue to be his chosen people. If they were to occupy a high position in his arrangements they must show obedience to him by a sincere and continued effort to obey his law.

Over the ensuing centuries, Israel was unfaithful to God’s law much of the time. Finally, they lost their national independence and were taken captive to Babylon. Concerning the overthrow of their last king, Zedekiah, we read, “Thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end. Thus saith the Lord GOD; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: ... I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him.”—Ezek. 21:25-27

After seventy years of captivity in Babylon, the people were permitted to return to their own land, but they did not regain their national independence. (Jer. 25:8-12; 29:10; Ezra 1:1-5) In addition to their captivity in Babylon, they were successively subject

to Medo-Persia, Greece, and then Rome. They were under their Roman taskmasters when Jesus came on the scene. (Luke 2:1-5) They had lost their position as a sovereign nation, but God's covenant of favor was confirmed unto them for a period of seventy symbolic weeks. (Dan. 9:24-27) Using the scriptural principle of a day for a year—in this case 7 days x 70 weeks—a total of four hundred and ninety years is shown in applying Daniel's prophecy. (Num. 14:34; Ezek. 4:5,6) This period included the time of Jesus' earthly ministry, and ended three and one-half years after his death.

Had they accepted Jesus, and under this final test proved faithful, the nation of Israel could have secured the position of God's "peculiar treasure ... above all people," and they could have been "a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." (Exod. 19:5,6) However, the record is that Jesus "came unto his own, and his own received him not." (John 1:11) Instead, Israel rejected and crucified him. Thus it was, nearly twenty centuries ago in the shadow of Golgotha, the noblest Israelite who ever lived—Jesus the Messiah, the promised king of Israel and the world—declared to the generation which rejected him: "Your house is left unto you desolate."—Matt. 23:38

THE NEW NATION

The hope of having part in God's city, or kingdom, which the divine promise had engendered in the heart of Abraham, and which originally belonged to his natural descendants, was taken from them by this final decree of rejection uttered by the Master. He explained further that the kingdom

would be taken from them and given to a nation bringing forth fruits thereof. (Matt. 21:42,43; Luke 19:42-44) The Apostle Peter identifies this new nation which inherits the kingdom promises made originally to natural Israel, showing it to be the church of this present age since Pentecost. (I Pet. 2:4-10) The Apostle Paul gives us the same information in pointing out the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham concerning the seed which was to be the channel of blessing to all the families of the earth. He explains that Christ is this seed, and that associated with him will be those who are called of God and "baptized into Christ," from among both Jews and Gentiles.—Gal. 3:8,16,27-29

Another very illuminating lesson on the status of the natural descendants of Abraham is the eleventh chapter of Romans. This chapter opens with a question: "Hath God cast away his people?" The Apostle Paul's answer is, "God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin." What the apostle evidently means is that God was not discriminating against individual Israelites. This is shown by his further analysis in which he reveals that a "remnant according to the election of grace" had maintained a favored position in God's arrangements, and that the remainder were temporarily "blinded."—Rom. 11:1-10

The remnant Paul refers to is mentioned in the explanation that Jesus "came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God." (John 1:11,12) Those who, through baptism into Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit become sons of God, and who are faithful unto death, will

reign with Christ. Together with him they will be the royal nation. (Rom. 6:3-5; 8:14-17; Rev. 2:10; 20:4,6) God's promises justified Israel in seeking this high position, but Paul explains, as a nation "Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for."—Rom. 11:7

ISRAEL'S BLINDNESS TO BE REMOVED

Spiritual blindness results from unfaithfulness to God. It was so with Israel. They rejected the Messiah, and whatever spiritual vision they had prior to that time was lost. This condition was to continue, Paul explains, "until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." (Rom. 11:25) This coming in of the "fulness of the Gentiles" is described by the apostle as the ingrafting of wild olive branches into the original Israelitish olive tree, "contrary to nature." (vs. 24) In grafting, the grafted branch retains its original identity and bears its own kind of fruit, not being changed in any way by the sap of the tree of which it becomes a part. However, it is different with these Gentile branches. They are, contrary to nature, changed; for they become spiritual Israelites, and inherit the promises originally made exclusively to the natural descendants of Abraham.

When this grafting work is completed, then "all Israel shall be saved," wrote Paul, for, "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, when I shall take away their sins." (vss. 26,27) The covenant here referred to is the one promised in Jeremiah 31:31-34. It is to be made with "the house of Israel, and with the

house of Judah.” Israel and Judah are both mentioned because at the time this promise was made the nation was divided, ten of the tribes being identified as Israel, and the other two as Judah.

Paul wrote, “There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer” of Israel. Sion, or Zion, was originally, so to speak, the “Capitol Hill” of Jerusalem, and the name is used in the prophecies to symbolize the Messianic kingdom in the hand of Christ and his church. This is the kingdom which was taken from the natural descendants of Abraham and given to the new, spiritual nation composed of individual believers from among both Jews and Gentiles. Together with Jesus, these are shown to be on spiritual, or heavenly, Mount Zion as “saviours” at the time when “the kingdom shall be the LORD’S.”—Obad. 1:21; Rev. 14:1; Isa. 55:5; Hos. 1:10

It is to this deliverance and enlightenment to natural Israel that our opening text refers: “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee.” (Isa. 60:1) The true light of Israel—and indeed of the whole world—is Jesus. This is emphasized by Simeon’s prophecy at the time the babe, Jesus, was dedicated at the Temple in Jerusalem. In a prayer to God, Simeon said of this child that he had come to be a “light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.”—Luke 2:32

This glory was not realized by Israel at the time of Jesus’ First Advent because the nation rejected the light, and killed him. Simeon foretold that the result of this would be their fall. He said, “Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken

against.” (Luke 2:34) Only a remnant—the few Israelites who received Jesus at his First Advent—experienced at that time the fulfillment of the prophecy, “Arise, shine; for thy light is come.” These few, together with believing Gentiles throughout the ensuing age, have rejoiced in the light and have let it shine out in a dark world for the blessing and encouragement of others.

For the people of Israel as a whole, however, the time is still future when the light will be recognized by them, when their own eyes are opened to recognize their Messiah. It will be then that “all Israel shall be saved.”

LIGHT OUT OF DARKNESS

Following the assurance of our opening text, the Prophet Isaiah then states: “Behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall rise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.” (Isa. 60:2,3) This indicates that just prior to the removal of Israel’s blindness there would be a very dark period in human experience, a time when both Jews and Gentiles would be without spiritual vision. How descriptive this is of the present time!

Never was true faith in God at a lower ebb than it is today. Truly gross darkness does cover the people; this is true of Israel and all the other nations. While Jehovah’s hand has been in the affairs of the Jews, shaping circumstances to induce large numbers of them to return to the Promised Land, the motives of most have been economic and

national, rather than a strong faith in God's promises. There have been exceptions, of course, but only a relative minority have truly looked to God for help. Most have put their faith in munitions and wealth. While they have the pioneer spirit of enthusiasm, they, like the other nations, have no solution for their problems. Similar to most nations also, their government is strife-ridden with contending political and religious factions.

They hope, of course, that eventually they will find a solution for their problems and that the government will finally become prosperous and economically strong. The prophecies indicate that before their final trouble they will enjoy a brief period of relative peace and prosperity. (Ezek. 38:8,11,12) Meanwhile, God's hand in the affairs of men is directing the final issue, and in due time the light will come to Israel and to the whole world, and the result will bring blessings to all people.

That light is already present in the world, but Jews and Gentiles alike are blind to it, even as Israel did not recognize their Messiah at the First Advent. However, divine providence is even now shaping the affairs of Israel, particularly with respect to the Jews being regathered there. The prophecies indicate that their national rebirth as a nation and regathering of their people is prior to the time when their blindness is removed. This is shown especially in the prophecy of Ezekiel 37:1-14, where the whole house of Israel is likened to a valley of dry bones.

In the bringing back to life of these bones, a three-phase action is indicated. First, the bones

come together—"bone to his bone." Then they are covered with sinews and flesh. Finally, they are given breath, or life. Accompanying these developments there is a noise, a shaking, and then the blowing of four winds. It is out of the four winds that life comes to what is said to be the whole house of Israel.—Ezek. 37:7-9

In a general way, these three phases of revival seem to coincide with the three major spasms of the time of trouble with which the present evil world comes to an end. The first of these spasms was the First World War which started in 1914. As a result of this there came a rustling, as it were, of Israel's bones. Palestine was partly opened up to them, many returned, and the reclaiming of the land began. Out of the Second World War came the sinews and the flesh. Finally, the new state of Israel was formed shortly thereafter in 1948.

However, there is not yet life in these "bones" from God's covenant standpoint. Breath has not yet been given to Israel. Verses 13 and 14 outline this sequence of events: "Ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live." Three events are outlined here. God has now "opened" their national "graves"—event one; he has brought them "up out" of their graves—event two; but he has not yet put his "spirit" in them, so as yet they do not have life. It is not until all three of these steps in their revival have been accomplished that they will truly know Jehovah, and will recognize God's "only begotten Son," Jesus, as their Messiah, their Light.—John 3:16

A detailed description of the last phase of the great time of trouble is presented in chapters 38 and 39 of Ezekiel's prophecy, and here also we find that not until this final phase occurs, and in it God delivers his people from their enemies, will their eyes be opened to know him: "So the house of Israel shall know that I am the Lord their God from that day and forward."—Ezek. 39:22

In that day, God will, as he had done in olden times, fight for the Israelites who have returned to their land. (II Chron. 20:15; 32:8) The eyes of many nations also will be opened, and as the prophecy declares, "They shall know that I am the LORD." (Zech. 14:2,3; Ezek. 38:23) Thus we have the assurance that the time for the rightful blessing of Israel will then begin. "You ... have been the very symbol of a curse to all the nations; ... and you shall become the symbol of a blessing."—Zech. 8:13, *The New English Bible*

This does not mean, however, that the state of Israel under its current government will be transformed into the earthly phase of Christ's kingdom. Its government, as will those of all other nations, will fall, to be replaced by the Messianic kingdom government. It will be as individuals that Israel will be delivered from their enemies and have their eyes opened to behold the glory of the Lord and to recognize the great light which shall then come to them. By acceptance of their Messiah, and obedience to the laws of his kingdom, the glory of God's favor will rest upon them. Thus will be fulfilled the other part of Simeon's prophecy, that Christ was "set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel." The fall came when they rejected the light, and

their rising will be the result of their accepting him.

PRINCES IN ALL THE EARTH

Today the Jewish people continue to be gathered to Israel in keeping with the divine arrangement for their eventual blessing. However, they will first need to recognize Christ Jesus as the Son of God, their Messiah, Redeemer, and Deliverer, before the blessings of the kingdom will be offered to them. (Zech. 12:10; Ezek. 39:25-29) The human representatives of the kingdom of Christ will be the resurrected faithful fathers of old such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and other Ancient Worthies, whom the Scriptures declare will be made “princes in all the earth.” (Ps. 45:16) See also Luke 13:28; Hebrews 11:39,40; and Isaiah 1:25-27.

These ancient heroes of faith will not be part of the spiritual phase of the kingdom—the personnel of which will be Jesus and his church—yet these worthy ones will occupy a position of preferment above the world in general, having attested their faith and love during the reign of evil, in a manner approved by God. Thus they were prepared and proved worthy to be the earthly ministers and representatives of the spiritual kingdom.

As individually the people of Israel recognize and accept the leadership of these resurrected ones as representatives of their Messiah, they, too, will have the opportunity of cooperating in the work of the kingdom. So also will believing Gentiles. The “new earth” will increase and spread its influence over the whole world, under the direction of the “new heavens.” “Of the increase of his government and peace there

shall be no end,” the Scriptures declare; that is, it will ultimately embrace all nations, with even the dead being awakened to have an opportunity to share in its blessings.—II Pet. 3:13; Isa. 9:6,7; I Cor. 15:22

The spiritual seed of Abraham, gathered from both the Jews and Gentiles during the present Gospel Age, will be considered by God as “spiritual” Israelites in the heavenly phase of God’s kingdom. (Rom. 2:28,29; Rev. 3:12; 21:2) So it will also be in the case of those who participate in the earthly phase of God’s kingdom, beginning with the faithful ancient ones of old who lived prior to Jesus’ First Advent. From this constantly enlarging “new earth” the light spoken of in our opening Scripture will shine forth until the knowledge of the glory of God shall fill the whole earth “as the waters cover the sea.” (Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14) It is a glorious hope, and what a blessing it is to stand at the very threshold of the Messianic kingdom, and to see the early beginnings of the fulfillment of the promises of God. May we as prospective spiritual Israelites, “arise and shine,” and faithfully tell the whole world these blessed tidings! ■