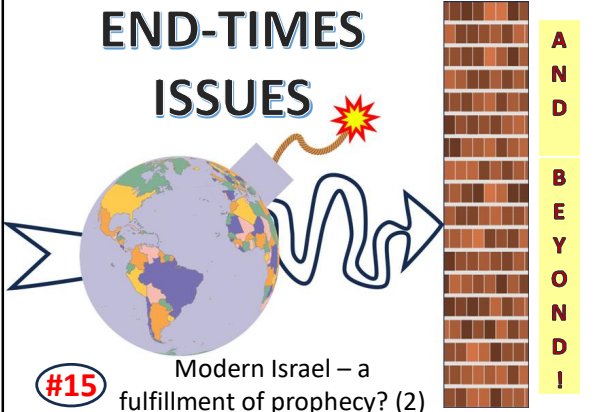


# END-TIMES ISSUES



#15 Modern Israel – a fulfillment of prophecy? (2)

AND  
BEYONDI

## ★ IS MODERN-DAY ISRAEL A FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY? ★

⇒ We can:

- ✓ Base our views on opinion and speculation.
- or: ✓ Grab some out-of-context verses, and use them to "interpret" the rest of the Bible.
- or: ✓ Read some "end-time" novels and believe what they say.
- or: ✓ Gather information from the Bible *before* we reach a conclusion, leaving each passage in its *own* context.

↻ We are attempting to do the *last* of these options. ↻

### Last time...

⇒ We looked at a number of Old Testament passages, and discovered that they centered around *three covenants* (promises or agreements).

⇒ From these, we learned: ① The land and the people will *never cease to exist* – a promise made to their ancestors. ② When they abandon God, they will be severely punished, but not annihilated. God will not restore the nation permanently to the land *until they, as a nation, repent*. ③ The New Covenant will accomplish this.

#### ① The covenant made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

- ✓ Permanent and unconditional
- ✓ NOT made with the nation, NOT influenced by their conduct. Nothing *the nation Israel does can break this covenant!*
- ✓ This is the reason the Jews still *exist*, and why God is unwilling to totally destroy them (*in spite of* their rebellion against God).
- ✓ It also applies to the *land* that was given to Israel's ancestors.
- ✓ God will keep this promise, *because he is righteous*.

#### ② The covenant made with the nation (through Moses).

- ✓ Conditional; what happens depends on their conduct.
- ✓ *It does not nullify or cancel the covenant made with Abraham.*
- ✓ Perpetual disobedience brought judgment and exile. The nations that destroyed Israel are also judged for their own sins.
- ✓ As a nation, they must humbly repent and have a changed heart. Then God will bring them back to the land and restore their fortunes. They will never again be destroyed.
- ✓ This need for a changed heart points to the New Covenant.

#### ③ The new covenant made with the nation (through Christ).

- ✓ God will change their hearts; they will no longer rebel.
- ✓ Knowing God and having complete forgiveness are included in this covenant.
- ✓ (Today, *we* know details that *they* didn't understand. We know it was through Christ. We also know that Gentiles are included.)

### Some additional Old Testament observations.

#### ① Many of the statements about Israel are connected to words such as "forever," "eternal," "everlasting," etc.

❖ This is often found in passages that mention the land of Canaan.

"Remember Your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, to whom You swore by Your very self when You declared, 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, and I will give your descendants **all this land that I have promised, and it shall be their inheritance forever.**'"

Exodus 32:13 (BSB)

The prophets told you, 'Turn now, each of you, from your evil ways and deeds, and you can dwell in **the land that the LORD has given to you and your fathers forever and ever.**'

Jeremiah 25:5 (BSB)

He remembers His **covenant forever**, the word He ordained for a thousand generations—  
the **covenant** He made with Abraham, and the **oath** He swore to Isaac.

He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an **everlasting covenant**:

"I will give you the **land of Canaan** as the portion of **your inheritance.**"

Psalms 105:8-11 (BSB)

- ❖ These words ["forever," "eternal," "everlasting," (or equivalent)] are also used to describe the New Covenant.

I will make an **everlasting covenant** with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me.

I will rejoice in doing them good and will assuredly plant them in this land with all my heart and soul.

Jeremiah 32:40-41 (NIV)

They will come and bind themselves to the Lord in an **everlasting covenant** that will not be forgotten.

Jeremiah 50:5b (NIV)

(The New Testament also describes it this way – see Hebrews 13:20.)

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- ② **Some O.T. prophecies appear to have a partial fulfillment – i.e., not to the extent that Scripture says will happen.**

- ➔ **People returning to the land:** After 70 years of exile, some (not all) of the Jews returned to the land. But some Scripture passages indicate that *all* of them who are alive will someday return. (Some passages describe it as a "remnant" of the original number.)

I will certainly gather **all of you, O Jacob,**  
I will certainly assemble those Israelites who remain.

Micah 2:12a (NET)

(The word "they" may refer to saved Gentiles.)

And they will bring **all your people, from all the nations,** to my holy mountain in Jerusalem as an offering to the Lord ...

Isaiah 66:20a (NIV)

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- ➔ **Jerusalem\* and the temple rebuilt:** Both were rebuilt after the Jews returned from exile; but various details in the descriptions do not appear to have been fulfilled at that time.

- ❖ The temple Ezekiel describes (chapters 40-43) does *not* match the temple that was rebuilt after the return from exile. Nor did the glory of God return to the temple – which Ezekiel says will happen.

...and I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east.  
... and **the glory of the LORD entered the temple** through the gate facing east.

Ezekiel 43:2a, 4a (BSB)

(Ezekiel described its departure in chapters 8-11.)

\* (Other towns and cities will also be restored – Ezekiel 36:33; Amos 9:14.)

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- ❖ In Isaiah, we learn that not only will there be a *new* Jerusalem, but it will be located on a *new* earth! This agrees with what we read about in the book of Revelation!

For behold, **I will create new heavens and a new earth.** The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.

But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for **I will create Jerusalem** to be a joy and its people to be a delight.

I will rejoice in Jerusalem and take delight in My people.

Isaiah 65:17-19a (BSB)

I saw **a new heaven and a new earth,** because the first heaven and earth had disappeared, and the sea was gone. Then I saw **the holy city, New Jerusalem,** coming down from God out of heaven, dressed like a bride ready for her husband.

Rev. 21:1-2 (GW)

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- ➔ **The New Covenant has arrived.** But so far, it has not had its full effect on Israel as a *nation*.

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make **a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.**

"But this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD. **I will put My law in their minds and inscribe it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they will be My people.**"

Jeremiah 31:31, 33 (BSB)

- ➔ **Perhaps some of the consequences of rebellion haven't fully occurred.** [Let's hope this is wrong!]

- Read, for example, Leviticus 26:36-39. The things described there *have* occurred in different places, at different times ... but not as a *worldwide* persecution. (We don't know what it will take to bring Israel to repentance and blessing. We also don't know how wicked the wicked get, as the end approaches. Let's hope that Israel quickly gets to the blessings of Leviticus 26:40-46!)

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### What about the New Testament?

- ➔ The *Old Testament* was the early Christian's Bible. So there was no need for the *New Testament* to repeat everything the O.T. said. (If people had questions about Israel, they would just look in the Bible!)
- ➔ These various *Old Testament* issues are occasionally mentioned in the N.T.; but there was a *necessary* shift in focus.
  - Gentiles were now being saved, and needed to know how to live as followers of Jesus!
  - People needed to know the significance of Jesus' death and resurrection, and how the New Covenant changes affected their relationship to God.
- ➔ This change in focus was *not* unexpected; nor was it incompatible with the Old Testament. It was caused by the New Covenant – which the Old Testament said was *needed* (Deuteronomy 10:16), and would one day be *put into effect* (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

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① **The three O.T. covenants we have considered are mentioned and affirmed.** In some cases, there is a different (though not contradictory) emphasis. [Since they already had the *Old Testament*, the *New Testament* did not have to repeat everything the O.T. said.]

➔ **Covenant with Abraham:** The main focus is that this covenant is the *reason* that Gentiles can be saved.

And you [= Israel] are heirs of the prophets and of the **covenant** God made with your fathers. He said to **Abraham**, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.'

Acts 3:25 (NIV); a quote of Genesis 22:18.

This covenant was also affirmed to Isaac and Jacob (Genesis 26:4; 28:14). In all three instances, the promise included giving them the land of Canaan. (This is mentioned in Hebrews 11:8-9.)

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➔ **Covenant with Israel:** The focus changes: Because Christ has come, there is no longer a need to practice the ceremonial rituals. The Jews are free to do them (not for salvation), but they are *not* to be forced upon the Gentiles. (Compare Acts 15:1-29 to Acts 21:17-26.)

✓ This covenant is also called: ① the "Mosaic Covenant," because it came from God through Moses, and ② "The Law," because it taught them how they were to live.

✓ Obeying the *moral* law remains an obligation for all people in all times. The ten commandments are the best summary of this law.

✓ As we've seen before, the Law does *not* change hearts. It teaches us how we should live; but it does not save us. (Even *Moses* said that the people *still* needed changed hearts – Deuteronomy 10:16.)

Through [Jesus] everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a **justification you were not able to obtain** under the **law of Moses**.

Acts 13:39 (NIV)

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✓ The early church based its message on the Law and the prophets, and on how Jesus fulfilled what they taught.

I [Paul] am saying nothing beyond what **the prophets and Moses** said would happen: [about the Christ].

Acts 26:22b (BSB)

... Paul was explaining the kingdom of God to [the Jews]. He was trying to convince them about Jesus from **Moses' Teachings and the Prophets**.

Acts 28:23b (GW)

✓ Paul taught that the Law was *good*.

I agree that **the law is good**.

Romans 7:16b (NET)

(See also Romans 7:13-14; 1 Timothy 1:8.)

When we look at passages that use the word "law," we need to pay attention to the context. It may refer to the ceremonial/sacrificial rituals, the civil regulations, or the moral law. Each had a purpose; but the coming of Jesus (and the new covenant) has fulfilled some elements of the law, making them no longer necessary.

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➔ **The New Covenant:** In the New Testament, there is more emphasis on this covenant and what it does. After all, Jesus is the one who brought this covenant into existence!

✓ It came into existence by means of his sacrifice of himself on the cross.

In the same way, after supper [Jesus] took the cup, saying, "This cup is the **new covenant in My blood**, which is poured out for you.

Luke 22:20 (BSB)

Therefore Christ is the mediator of a **new covenant**, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, now that He has died to redeem them from the transgressions committed under the first [= Moses'] covenant.

Hebrews 9:15 (BSB)

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✓ When the New Covenant arrived, certain aspects of the Old Covenant would cease to have any value.

- WHY? Because Jesus accomplished *in full* what they did *in part*.

By speaking of a new covenant, [God] has made the first one obsolete; and **what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear**.

Hebrews 8:13 (BSB)

✓ This does *not* mean that *all* aspects of the Old Covenant are gone. For example, there are still moral obligations that apply to *all* people.

✓ The main focus of the New Covenant is on:

1. access to God (= through Jesus Christ, who changes our hearts), and
2. the motivation for obedience (= internal, not external).

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② **The New Testament message: "The words of the prophets are about to be fulfilled!"**

➔ **The message of the gospels:** The emphasis on repentance and the Kingdom of God showed that something *new* was happening.

➔ **Zechariah (father of John the baptizer):**

✓ Led by the Holy Spirit, he prophesied that Jesus would fulfil the covenant given to Abraham.

... salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to show mercy to our fathers and **to remember His holy covenant, the oath He swore to our father Abraham**, to grant us deliverance from hostile hands, that we may serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our lives.

Luke 1:71-75 (BSB)

18

### Jesus:

- ✓ According to Jesus, Israel had a future. A day would come, when things would be "renewed." At that time, the apostles would judge the twelve tribes of Israel.

Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, in **the renewal of all things**, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Matthew 19:28 (BSB)

- ✓ This renewal *cannot* occur without Jesus. Since Israel has rejected Jesus, its coming would be delayed. It will not come until the Jews (as a nation) recognize him for who he is, and are willing to *receive* him as coming "in the name of the Lord."

"For I tell you that **you will not see Me again until you say**, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Matthew 23:39 (BSB)

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### The apostles:

- ✓ After Jesus' resurrection, he talked with the apostles about the kingdom of God, over a period of 40 days. What he said left the apostles with an expectation that the kingdom would be restored to Israel. So they asked "When?"
- ✓ Jesus didn't tell them "It's not going to happen" or "It's figurative language," or anything similar. Rather he said it wasn't for them to know the *timing* of when it would happen.

So when they came together, they asked Him, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Jesus replied, "It is **not for you to know times or seasons** that the Father has fixed by His own authority."

Acts 1:6-7 (BSB)

(Verse 8: *Their* job was to tell others about Jesus!)

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### Peter:

- ✓ Not long after the Holy Spirit came down at Pentecost (Acts 2), Peter told the Jews that, if they would repent, Jesus would return. There would be a restoration and "times of refreshing." He also points out that this was *promised* through God's prophets.

Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that **times of refreshing** may come from the Lord, and that he may send **the Messiah**, who has been appointed for you—**even Jesus**. Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he **promised long ago** through his holy prophets.

Acts 3:19-21 (NIV)

So far, Israel *hasn't* done this. So the words of the prophets are *still* waiting to be fulfilled. And they *will* be fulfilled someday!

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### Paul:

- ✓ He makes a few references to the future of Israel; but his main focus is on teaching *Gentiles* (non-Jews) how to follow Jesus. The Jew's *temporary* rejection has given Gentiles opportunity to be saved.

... because of their transgression, **salvation has come to the Gentiles** ... Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved.

Romans 11:11b; 25b-26a (NIV)

### GOD'S MESSAGE TO ISRAEL:

**Early N.T.:** "The prophecies are ready to be fulfilled! The 'last days' are coming! But you first need to **repent!**"

**Peter (Acts 3):** "The 'last days' have arrived; but your sin prevents their final fulfillment. You need to **repent!**"

**Paul (Romans 11):** "Until you Jews **repent**, Gentiles will be happy to take your place in the kingdom of God!"

22

### Book of Revelation – The renewal finally arrives:

- ✓ At the end of the age, God is going to make everything new – better than what presently exists, because sin and evil will be removed. Jesus will be ruling, and people will be holy.

The one who was sitting on the throne said, "Look, I am **making everything new!**" Then he said, "Write this, because these words are true and can be trusted."

Revelation 21:5 (BSB)

- ✓ One of these new things is the *new* Jerusalem. It will have 12 gates – each having the name of one of the tribes of Israel.

The city had a great and high wall with twelve gates inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, and twelve angels at the gates.

Revelation 21:12 (BSB)

(Also, the names of the apostles will be on 12 foundation stones.)

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### So, what can we conclude?

### ★ IS MODERN-DAY ISRAEL A FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY? ★

#### ⇒ If we compare modern-day Israel to what Scripture says...

- ✓ **We have to say "It is NOT!"** – at least in the fullest sense of "fulfillment." There are a number of NECESSARY prophetic details that are *not* currently being fulfilled.
  - There are several prophecy details that are *not* being fulfilled. But the *absence of repentance* is the most significant issue!
- ✓ **Still, it may be very significant.** The present situation may be preparation for the final event. It could be a reminder and/or warning that it will come.

★ **In any case, the existence of Israel is not an accident in God's plan!** ★

24

"Old Testament prophecy is about the nation Israel."

★ HAS THIS ALWAYS BEEN THE VIEW OF CHRISTIANS? NO! ★

- The **early Christians** tended to have this view. This is the view they saw, when they read their Bible (which was the O.T.).
- **After the nation of Israel was destroyed** (AD 70 and AD 135), people started questioning how it could be possible.
- **One of the views that developed in this time** was that the church *replaced* Israel, and that the prophecies were fulfilled *symbolically* in the church (and *not* in Israel). This became the predominant view for many centuries.
- **Now that Israel has again become a nation**, many Christians have returned to the view that the O.T. prophecies are about the *nation* of Israel (whether or not they have any application to Christians).

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**Disagreements *still* exist on various issues.**

Most disagreements have to do with issues that we *don't* need to take a definite stand on.

- The timing of various events is an example.
- Also, we should remember that there *are* things NOT revealed to us. (Revelation 10:4 proves it!) We do not know the impact that the unrevealed things will have on future events. This means we should trust God more than we trust our viewpoints! [Consider Deuteronomy 29:29: Leave the secrets to God!]

**We should learn from what happened at Jesus' first coming:**

- Unexpected things happened that didn't match what the people thought would happen. [It's easy for us to see this *afterwards*, because the "unrevealed" things are now revealed.]
- God also brought together seemingly contradictory or "impossible" prophecies, in order to fulfil all that he has promised, and to demonstrate the greatness of his power.
- He did it then... he can do it again.

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⇒ So, what does it mean to us?

★ Does this leave us with a "mission"? ★

⇒ Of course!

- 1 Everything that's happening in the world is significant, though not necessarily a direct fulfillment of prophecy.
  - *All* history is moving toward the climax of Jesus' return. This need to *be ready* for his return is an *always-increasing need!*
- 2 Don't be gullible, every time someone claims that a specific event has fulfilled Scripture!
  - Eventually things *will* fulfil Scripture; but a clear-minded evaluation of Scripture must come first, before reaching such a conclusion!

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③ Our #1 obligation is to trust God and obey him!

- This is more important than understanding every detail about prophecy.

★ YES, there is a blessing in learning about the future ...

**Blessed** is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and obey what is written in it, because the time is near.

Revelation 1:3 (BSB)

★ But we need to let it affect *how we live!*

- The apostle John, referring to Jesus' coming, says:

And everyone who has this hope in Him **purifies himself**, just as Christ is pure.

1 John 3:3 (BSB)

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