

Jerusalem

Introduction. Last week was a historic time in modern-day Israel. On the 70th anniversary (May 14, 1948) of the United Nations recognition of modern-day Israel, the United States moved our embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, recognizing it as the capital. While we do not espouse a political position on moving the capital to Jerusalem, it is interesting from a biblical perspective.

Many people who identify as Dispensational Premillennialists believe that moving the embassy to Jerusalem has spiritual implications that are a step necessary to bring about the so-called apocalypse, Jesus' literal reign on earth, and the conversion of Jews to the gospel. To them, the kingdom of God will be the earthly, theocratic kingdom of Israel yet to be established.

One's view of the kingdom is directly related to one's understanding of the role of Israel. Those who look to an earthly, theocratic kingdom of Israel do so because they believe there are promises to that nation which have not been fulfilled. Thus they believe the end times will involve the fulfillment of such prophecies.

I. If God Fulfilled The Abrahamic Covenant, No Promise Remains For Israel

- A. God's covenant with Abraham included three promises.
 1. Land (Genesis 12:1; 13:15; 15:18; 17:7-8).
 2. Nation (Genesis 12:2; 15:5; 22:17).
 3. Seed (Genesis 12:3; 22:18).
- B. Has the land promise been fulfilled?
 1. Premillennialists say "no," but look at the competent witnesses who say "yes!"
 - a) Moses.
 - (1) He gave instructions concerning the cities of refuge that were to be kept only if God fulfilled His promise (Deuteronomy 19:7-9).
 - (2) Joshua 20:7-9 states that these cities were built, implying that the land promise was fulfilled.
 - b) Joshua (Joshua 21:43-45).
 - c) Solomon (1 Kings 4:21).
 - d) The priests (Nehemiah 9:7-8).
 2. The confusing aspect about this is that God made another promise about the retention of the land. While its original reception was unconditional and based solely on the promise to Abraham, the retention of the land was conditional and based on obedience (Joshua 23:12-16).
 3. The land was an "everlasting possession," but this does not mean age without end. If so, the possession must continue even after the 1,000 year reign.
 - a) However, the word "everlasting" in the original Hebrew language meant "age lasting." Several items in the Old Testament were described as "everlasting" or "perpetual."
 - (1) Circumcision (Genesis 17:13).
 - (2) The Passover (Exodus 12:14).
 - (3) Burning incense (Exodus 30:8).
 - (4) The Sabbath (Exodus 31:16-17).

- (5) The Levitical priesthood (Exodus 40:15).
- b) Yet, all of these ended with the abrogation of the Law of Moses. Therefore, what was “perpetual” and “forever” had an end.
- 4. When Israel sinned they were driven from the land, fulfilling the curses promised in Deuteronomy 28-30. Many of the passages read now concerning Israel’s return do not apply to our generation, but rather refer to the time before Christ and after Israel had been taken into captivity. However, the original promise to Abraham has been fulfilled!
- C. Has the nation promise been fulfilled?
 - 1. Isaac was the promised son through whom it was fulfilled (Genesis 21:3, 12; 26:2-5).
 - 2. Judah and Israel were “as the sand which is by the sea in multitude” (1 Kings 4:20).
 - 3. Though Israel was destroyed and driven from the promised land because of sin, they were never totally destroyed. In fact, they were promised “a full end” would not be made of them as of other nations, but in fact, a “remnant” would return after 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11; 29:10; 30:11).
 - 4. God fulfilled the original promise to Abraham concerning the nation as well as the promise to restore the remnant (Nehemiah 1:3-11; Ezra 1:1-11; 9:13-15).

II. Christ Is The Ultimate Fulfillment Of This Covenant

- A. The Jews were favored in order that Christ might come.
 - 1. The seed is Christ (Galatians 3:8, 16).
 - a) God is not a respecter of persons, thus His blessing upon Israel was not for their sakes alone, but in order that “all nations would be blessed.”
 - b) All who obey Christ are “Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:26-29).
 - 2. Christians are now spiritually the “Israel of God” (Romans 9:7-8; Galatians 6:16).
- B. In Christ, distinctions have ceased.
 - 1. Being a Jew or Gentile is now of no importance (Galatians 3:26-29). However, Premillennialists still believe it is important!
 - 2. God has created a new spiritual nation and the fleshly differences have been taken away (Ephesians 2:14-22; 1 Peter 2:9-10).
 - 3. A New Covenant now guides the family of God because the Old Covenant has been taken away (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Colossians 2:14-17; Hebrews 10:16-18).
- C. The church is now the remnant of Israel “according to grace” (Romans 11:5).
 - 1. Isaiah prophesied the Lord would set His hand “the second time” to recover the remnant of His people (Isaiah 11:10-11).
 - a) The first time was when they returned from Babylonian captivity (Ezra 1:1-4).
 - b) The second time is in the church age according to Paul’s quotation and application of the passage from Isaiah (Romans 15:7-12, esp. v. 12).
 - c) Where is the promise of a third time?

2. In Christ a remnant of Israel is saved as well as any Gentiles who obey by faith (Romans 9:24-27; 11:5). He is the “hope of Israel” (Acts 26:6-7; 28:20).

III. What Is Left To Be Fulfilled Concerning The Nation Of Israel?

- A. The nation will never be made whole again (Jeremiah 19:1, 10-11).
 1. God taught Jeremiah a lesson concerning His sovereignty. He furthermore explained why He was just in punishing Israel (Jeremiah 18:1-17).
 2. Although He spared a remnant of physical Israel in order to keep His promise to Abraham that “through his seed all nations would be blessed,” God was not bound by any promise to keep them intact as a nation. Since He has fulfilled all He promised concerning their land and their development as a nation, He has scattered them.
 3. Like an earthen bottle broken into pieces which can never be totally put back together, even so Israel shall never again be restored.
- B. Israel can return to God by faith (Romans 11:23).
 1. Paul was persecuted for preaching about the “hope of Israel” (Acts 26:6-7; 28:20). What he preached was contrary to Jewish expectation. What modern “prophets” are preaching excites Jewish expectation because they prophesy the restoration of the earthly nation.
 2. As a nation the Jews rejected Christ and the gospel and thus are lost. However, if they receive the gospel they can be saved (Romans 1:16). Premillennialism denies the benefits of the gospel and the blessings of the New Covenant to the Jews.
 3. The Gentiles are warned not to become high-minded toward the Jews. Though Israel was broken off because of unbelief and the Gentiles were grafted in by belief, the roles can be reversed. Romans 11:26 says, “And so all Israel shall be saved.”
 - a) An adverb of manner states that in the same way that the apostles and all the early church (who were Jews) were saved, so shall all Israel be saved.
 - b) The process is by faith in Christ (Acts 15:11; Romans 9:30-33; 10:11-13; 11:23). They could obey the gospel and be Christians, just like the Jews on Pentecost and the Gentiles after Peter preached to them.

Conclusion. God’s “Israel” today is spiritual (Galatians 6:16). It is composed of both Jews and Gentiles who will accept Jesus Christ as their Lord, as Paul argues in Romans (9-11). Today many false prophets are misusing the Bible to claim the end is very near. It might be near, but the political upheaval between national Israel and the Arab world is not a fulfillment of scripture. The claim that the Jews, although very popular because it is still in line with ancient expectations, will return to the land of Palestine is not supported by the Bible, regardless of the location of our U.S. Embassy.

The “New Jerusalem” metaphorically described by John in Revelation is heaven (21:2, 10). It is not an earthly habitat. It is the eternal dwelling place for the faithful who go home to live with the Lord. One day, I look forward to being in Jerusalem — not the one on earth, but the heavenly Jerusalem through faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 3:25-26).