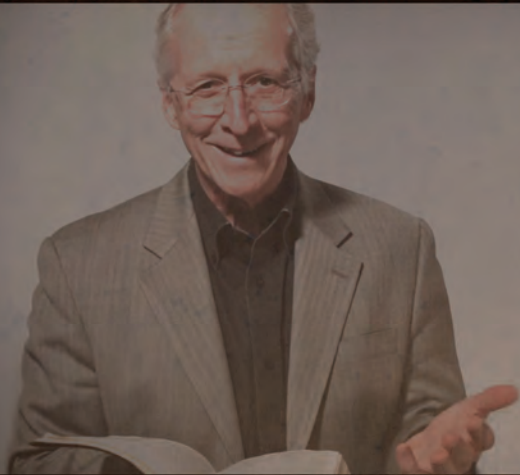




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Messianic Perspectives®

God has not forgotten the Jewish people, and neither have we.



ISRAEL, GAZA, "DIVINE RIGHT," AND JOHN PIPER PART 2

BY DR. GARY HEDRICK



In the previous installment, we examined four of John Piper's seven Mideast principles, including views on who God's chosen people are and the promises God made to Abraham and his descendants.

Principle #5

Therefore, the secular state of Israel today may not claim a present divine right to the Land, but they and we should seek a peaceful settlement not based on present divine rights, but on international principles of justice, mercy, and practical feasibility.

Let's break this down into segments. First, is Israel today a "secular state"? Most Israelis would agree that they are secular (that is, not religiously observant); but that's largely because of their disdain for the religious extremists, who are only a small minority in Israel.¹ It's also true that the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 did not mention God by name (other than a somewhat oblique reference to the "Rock of Israel"). Moreover, many of the Zionists who paved the way for the modern State of Israel were atheists and agnostics.² All of this is true.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that Israeli society across the board is culturally and recognizably Jewish. The founders used the name "Israel" (from the Bible) and made Hebrew the new state's official language. The Sabbath is observed universally throughout the country. Kosher laws prevail (just try to order a pizza in Israel with meat on it!). So it's misleading to imply that the term "secular" in this context means that Israel has no religious character. In many ways, the United States is more secular than Israel!

The term "divine right," as it is sometimes used in discussions about the Middle East, also requires some clarification.³ If it's defined as a divine fiat giving Israel a blanket license to possess her Land *no matter what*, then many of us would take issue with that definition. When we say Israel has a divine (or covenantal) right to the Land, we mean, first of all, that they own the Land, and second, that God is the One who decides when they possess it.

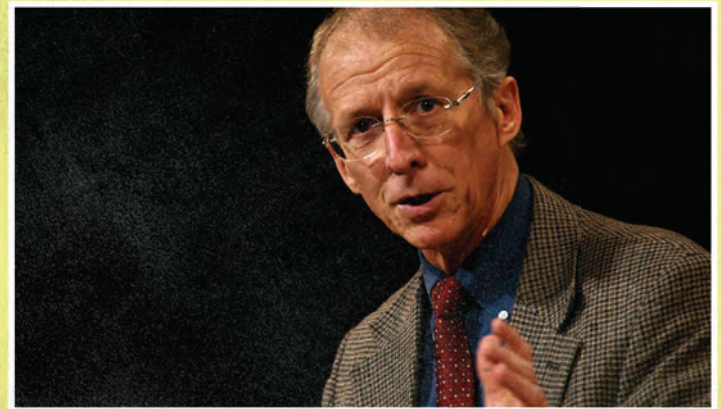
This was, after all, the arrangement in biblical times. Throughout most of the OT period, Israel dwelt in the Land even when they were in rebellion and unbelief. During those periods, the Lord used hostile neighbors as His instruments of judgment (not unlike what Israel is experiencing today). But there were also times (known as periods of "exile" or dispersion) when God allowed His people to be driven out of their Land and scattered among the nations (e.g., Deut. 4:27, Ezek. 36:19).

So we see that God has always been the One who sovereignly determines when His people will possess their Land—and when they will be exiled from it.⁴

It is important to understand that when we're talking about the Land of Israel, ownership isn't the same as possession. The two concepts are really quite different, both legally and practically.⁵

JOHN PIPER'S SEVEN MIDEAST PRINCIPLES

1. God chose Israel from all the peoples of the world to be his own possession.
2. The Land was part of the inheritance he promised to Abraham and his descendants forever.
3. The promises made to Abraham, including the promise of the Land, will be inherited as an everlasting gift only by true, spiritual Israel, not disobedient, unbelieving Israel.
4. Jesus Christ came into the world as the Jewish Messiah, and his own people rejected him and broke covenant with their God.
5. Therefore, the secular state of Israel today may not claim a present divine right to the Land, but they and we should seek a peaceful settlement not based on present divine rights, but on international principles of justice, mercy, and practical feasibility.
6. By faith in Jesus Christ, the Jewish Messiah, Gentiles become heirs of the promise of Abraham, including the promise of the Land.
7. Finally, this inheritance of Christ's people will happen at the Second Coming of Christ to establish his kingdom, not before; and till then, we Christians must not take up arms to claim our inheritance; but rather lay down our lives to share our inheritance with as many as we can.



—Adapted from "Israel, Palestine, and the Middle East," a sermon preached by Pastor John Piper at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, MN, on March 7, 2004. ©2014 Desiring God Foundation (desiringGod.org).

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Moses explained that God had given the Israelites the Land, but that they still had to enter and take possession of it: *‘Look, the LORD your God has set the land before you; go up and possess it, as the LORD God of your fathers has spoken to you; do not fear or be discouraged’* (Deut. 1:21).

God gave Israel the Land (ownership) so they could dwell in it (possession): *‘You shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land and dwell in it, for I have given you the land to possess’* (Num. 33:53).

Israel’s ownership of the Land is unconditional: *And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: ‘Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever’* (Gen. 13:14-15).⁶

Abraham’s ownership of the Land was directly linked to his personal relationship with God. The only condition—if you want to call it that—for Abraham’s relationship with God was his initial act of faith. He believed God and then set out for Canaan (Gen. 12:4). Everything after that was God’s doing. Abraham stumbled and he bungled things along the way, but God was always faithful to bless him in spite of himself. It was a relationship of grace.

Long after the time of Abraham, his descendants (Israel) also stumbled—not just once or twice, but many times. Expulsion from the Land was only one of many forms of punishment God imposed on them. More often than not, as we noted earlier, He judged His people *while they were in the Land* rather than driving them out of it. The sin → bondage → repentance → restoration cycle was all too familiar to the ancient Israelites while they were in their Land!



In the OT, then, God usually didn’t judge the people of Israel by allowing enemies to drive them from their Land. More often than not, their enemies battered and beleaguered them while they were in the Land. And that’s precisely what we are seeing today! Israel is oppressed on every side, much as they were during periods of rebellion in the days of the judges or during the divided kingdom.

It is true that God repeatedly told Israel they must obey Him in order to be assured of their possession of the Land (e.g., Deut. 30:20). But it’s a bit disingenuous to imply that God didn’t allow Israel to dwell in her Land during periods of disobedience or unfaithfulness. On the contrary, during most (if not all) of the time ancient Israel was in her Land, it was because of God’s mercy and grace rather than because they deserved it.

Can Disobedience Nullify a Unilateral Covenant?

Would any of us in the New Covenant community (i.e., the Church) be bold enough to claim that we are deserving of the Lord’s blessings? I hope not! My only claim to righteousness (someday, when I stand before God) will be based on the fact that the Messiah’s righteousness has been imputed to me by faith—rather than on anything I have been able to do. Believers in Yeshua should be the first to acknowledge that in spite of our best efforts, even in the power of the Holy Spirit, we still rely on God’s mercy and grace in His dealings with us.

In his letter to the Galatian believers, Paul explained that once a unilateral (royal grant) covenant is accepted (ratified), no one can change or cancel it: *Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though it is only a man’s covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it. . . . And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect* (Gal. 3:15, 17).⁷

That is, Israel’s failure to keep the conditional Sinai Covenant (which our sovereign God knew from the beginning she couldn’t keep anyway) does not nullify the prior, unconditional Abrahamic Covenant.

It might surprise Dr. Piper that some of us would agree with his suggestion that any proposed Mideast peace accord would be more wisely based on “international principles of justice, mercy, and practical feasibility” rather than on Israel’s “divine right” to the Land. The real problem in the Middle East isn’t that Israel is claiming a divine right to the Land, but that her enemies are rabidly anti-Semitic and want to destroy her. They are willing to sacrifice even their own children to achieve their sinister goals.⁸ The Gaza War in the summer of 2014 once again put this frightening reality on display for the whole world to see!⁹



Principle #6

By faith in Jesus Christ, the Jewish Messiah, Gentiles become heirs of the promise of Abraham, including the promise of the Land.

This is common ground, once more, right up to the last phrase: “including the promise of the Land.” You may recall that earlier, Piper made a similar point in Principle #3 (see *Messianic Perspectives*, July-August 2014). So is he saying that Christians have inherited the promises that he believes Israel forfeited—including the Land? If so, it’s an interesting twist because most amillennialists don’t claim to have inherited Israel’s Land promise—at least, not in a literal sense. Piper, on the other hand, evidently understands the inconsistency of claiming that the Church is New Israel without also claiming that she has inherited the Land promise, as well. We should give him credit for being consistent on this point.

Piper is not the first religious leader to believe that Christians are entitled to the Holy Land. Centuries ago, the Crusaders believed they were obliged to defend the Land. We are not implying that any of our fellow evangelicals today are planning military ops in the Middle East; rather, we are simply stating that the idea of Christians having a stake in the physical Land is not new.

This being the case, one can’t help wondering if Piper would say that the Church’s entitlement to the Land is dependent on her obedience, as (he seems to say) Israel’s was. If so, how does he think the Church at large is doing on that score?



I’m speaking here tongue-in-cheek, of course. We all know the evangelical church is in a shambles today. There are all sorts of abuses and failures even at the highest levels of spiritual leadership. So the problem for our amillennial friends is a real one. Could the Church also forfeit her place in God’s plan—just as Paul warned in Romans 11:17-22? Would they say it’s a possibility? I hope not!¹⁰

Israel’s relationship with God is based on grace (the Abrahamic Covenant) rather than on works (the Sinai Covenant). And so is ours! There is no evidence that the Land promises (or any other promises, for that matter) were ever transferred permanently from Israel to the Church. Blessings and privileges are shared, certainly, but not transferred permanently from one to the other.

How are these promises and blessings shared? Very simply, non-Jewish believers become beneficiaries of many aspects of the biblical covenants when they come to faith in the Messiah and are grafted into the Olive Tree of Abrahamic faith (Rom. 11:17). That doesn’t mean those promises have been permanently taken away from the original beneficiary (Israel). On the contrary, we already saw (under Principle #3) that Israel will be grafted back into her Olive Tree again someday when she comes to faith in her Messiah.¹¹



Principle #7

Finally, this inheritance of Christ's people will happen at the Second Coming of Christ to establish his kingdom, not before; and till then, we Christians must not take up arms to claim our inheritance; but rather lay down our lives to share our inheritance with as many as we can.

Again, we have common ground here. We agree that the Messiah will establish His kingdom on earth when He returns and that the restoration promises will continue moving toward their ultimate fulfillment.¹²

However, we do not agree with people who say that there can be no specific prophetic fulfillment until the Messiah returns. We believe the Dry Bones prophecy in Ezekiel 37, for instance, demonstrates that the end-time resurrection of national Israel will occur gradually, in stages, rather than all at once—and some of those anticipatory events will take place prior to the Messiah's Second Coming.

Nonetheless, many of our Reformed friends take the position that the ancient Restoration prophecies won't be fulfilled until the Messiah arrives and sets up His eternal Kingdom on earth.¹³ They do not view any return to the Land prior to the Second Coming as a fulfillment of Bible prophecy.

It might surprise these Christian brethren to know that they have Orthodox Jewish counterparts who are closely aligned with them on this issue! These ideological bedfellows are anti-Zionist rabbis who vigorously maintain that the modern State of Israel is not a fulfillment of prophecy. In fact, some of them say its very existence is an affront to God because only the Messiah has the right to reestablish the Jewish State.¹⁴

As stated earlier, we respectfully disagree. The notion that we only have to sit back and wait for the Messiah to fulfill the prophecies may appeal to some people; however, the reality is that God most often works through human instrumentality. We believe He used those early Zionists—as rough-edged and irreligious as some of them were—to begin setting the stage for the fulfillment of end-time prophecy.

Anti-Zionist rabbis (and maybe some of our TGC friends) have understandable concerns about fallible human beings wanting to step in and “help” God accomplish His purposes. Abraham, to cite one notable example, ran ahead of God's plan by taking an Egyptian woman, Hagar, as a wife and fathering a child (Ishmael) with her (Gen. 16:1-16). The consequences, as we all know, have been disastrous—and the drama continues, even now, 4,000 years later. But is that really what's happening with respect to the State of Israel? Have well-meaning humans stepped in to “help” God and messed things up in the Middle East?

Let's think about that. First, the fact that most of the early Zionists were irreligious militates against the conclusion that they were trying to help God fulfill prophecy. Most of them didn't believe in God and they weren't concerned about prophecy; they simply wanted a safe haven for the Jewish people in an increasingly hostile world.

EZEKIEL'S "DRY BONES" PROPHECY And Its Graduated Fulfillment (Ezek. 37:7-11)

This is one of the Bible's best-known, self-interpreting prophecies. The Lord explained to Ezekiel that the bones were *the whole house of Israel* (v. 11), and itemized several successive stages of prophetic fulfillment in the text:

- *There was a noise* (v. 7)
- *Suddenly [there was] a rattling* (v. 7)
- [Then] *the bones came together, bone to bone* (v. 7)
- Muscles, tendons, and skin were added (v. 8)
- The restored bodies were infused with the breath of life and stood up, *an exceedingly great army* (v. 10)

However, the LORD did not tell Ezekiel how long the process would take. This ambiguity is evidently deliberate and is in keeping with the insistence of other biblical writers that the timing of specific prophetic events is in God's hands—and should be left there (e.g., Acts 1:6-7).



The Vision of Ezekiel by Francisco Collantes

FOUR JERUSALEM TEMPLES IN SCRIPTURE

1. Solomon's Temple, built during the reign of its namesake (1 Kings 6:14)



The ancient city of Jerusalem with Solomon's Temple

2. Herod's Temple, which was a remodeling of Zerubbabel's Temple (Ezra 1-5)



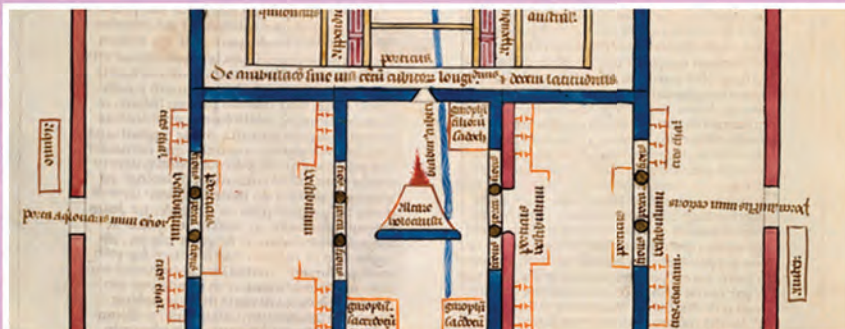
Model of the Second Temple in the Israel Museum

3. The future Tribulation Temple (Isa. 66:1-6; Rev. 11:1-2)



The New Jerusalem (Tapestry of the Apocalypse)

4. The Millennial Temple (Ezek. 40-48)



Nicholas of Lyra's detailed plans for Ezekiel's Temple

Note: Following the Millennium, in the Eternal State, there will be no more Temple (Rev. 21:22).

Second, God uses people to do His work! There is a time to be passive and “wait on the Lord” (Isa. 40:31). There is also a time to be proactive by getting busy and doing something (Neh. 2:18).

Even today, there are Orthodox Jewish critics who look askance on the work of the Temple Institute in Jerusalem¹⁵ because they say only the Messiah can rebuild the Temple when He comes. However, this begs the question: What about the first and second Temples? Did God wave a magic wand and cause those magnificent structures to appear supernaturally? No, He didn't. Human planning, resources, artistry, and lots of hard labor went into the construction of both of the ancient Temples.

Some people think God will supernaturally create the Millennial Temple (the one described in Ezekiel 40–48) after the Tribulation Period, with little or no human instrumentality. Personally, I think it's more likely to be an immense undertaking that will involve planning, assembling experts in pertinent specialties, and amassing resources from kingdom citizens all over the world, not to mention protracted effort and work—all under Messiah's watchful eye.

Could everything that's been happening in Israel up until now (in the 19th and 20th centuries, and into the 21st century) be a prelude to the final fulfillment of the ancient Restoration prophecies? Perhaps a better question is: Why not?

Is it possible that God used unbelievers like those crusty, early, secular Zionists to do His work? Of course it is. In fact, He specializes in using the most unlikely candidates in working out His plans. God even called a pagan king (Nebuchadnezzar) His “servant” because He used him to discipline Israel (Jer. 25:9)! And let's not forget about Pharaoh, Balaam, Cyrus, Herod the Great, and even the witch of Endor—each of whom was instrumental, as unwittingly as it may have been, in the accomplishment of God's sovereign purposes.

The Prophet Ezekiel quotes the LORD as saying, “*When I have brought them back from the peoples and gathered them out of their enemies' lands, and I am hallowed in them in the sight of many nations, then they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who sent them into captivity among the nations, but also brought them back to their land, and left none of them captive any longer. And I will not hide My face from them anymore; for I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel, says the Lord GOD*” (Ezek. 39:27-29).

Does God supernaturally cause Jewish people from around the world to return to Israel, or does He use people, nations, and circumstances to bring them back? Or is it a combination of both—God working supernaturally while utilizing human agency? I prefer the last option.

Piper's Take on Prophecy And the 1982 Invasion of Lebanon



The 1982 Lebanon War was dubbed “Operation Peace for Galilee” by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) had infested southern Lebanon in the late 70s and early 80s, using it as a staging area for terrorist incursions into northern Israel. The PLO’s “hit and run” strategy (that is, hitting targets quickly in Israel and then retreating back across the border to safety in Lebanon) hamstrung the Israeli military. So the IDF finally invaded the area on June 6. The commanding general was Ariel Sharon.

The invasion, largely born out of desperation, turned into an unpopular occupation. Even in Israel, it was controversial (some Israelis didn’t like the way the IDF handled the problem in Lebanon). On June 22, 1982, just a couple of weeks after the initial invasion, Pastor John Piper weighed in on the controversy, issuing a monograph entitled “Prophecy and the Invasion of Lebanon.” It began with these two telltale paragraphs:

The most important fact about Israel today is that she has committed treason against her King. The King sent his Son into the world on a mission of peace and reconciliation. He came to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 10:6; 15:24). He wanted only the tribute which faithful subjects owe. But the Son was rejected by Israel. And to this day most Jews reject the Son of their King. In banishing the filial ambassador of their Sovereign they have committed high treason. And today they occupy his land under the flag of rebellion. A revolt against the Son is insurrection against the Father-King. For “no one who denies the Son has the Father” (1 John 2:23).

Therefore, Israel has surrendered her rights to God’s fatherly reign. This is what Jesus meant when he said to them: “The Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it” (Matthew 21:43). The faithful subjects of the Jewish King are those who trust and follow his Son. They are the true Jews by adoption (Romans 2:28, 29; Philippians 3:3; Galatians 3:7, 29). They will inherit the Kingdom; they are the heirs of the promises (Ephesians 3:6; Galatians 3:29).

So it sounds like the general idea was that it’s open season on the Israelis because most of them don’t believe in Jesus. But what about the substantial (and growing) remnant of Jewish believers in Israel? If a little leaven leavens the whole lump, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5:6-7, couldn’t the inverse also be true? Couldn’t we say that, in a sense, the presence of a believing remnant in Israel (a kosher, unleavened “lump,” if you will) makes the whole lump kosher in God’s eyes? Would anyone be so brash as to suggest that Jewish believers in Yeshua should also come under God’s judgment?

Even today, 32 years later, many activists in the so-called “Mideast peace and reconciliation” movement (including even some liberal-leaning Israelis) would deny Israel the right to defend herself from her enemies. Some of their demands include the following:

- The Jewish State should raze the security barrier (or “wall”) that has effectively reduced terrorist fatalities in Israel by 95 percent;
- The Israelis should do away with the checkpoints where the IDF stops Palestinians (and others) to check for weapons and explosives; and
- They should do away with the naval blockade that intercepts Gaza-bound ships to check for incoming illegal contraband.

Is this what John Piper has in mind? Maybe so—or maybe not. Piper is actually a bit of an enigma because sometimes he sounds

like he’s siding with Israel’s enemies; but at other times, he sounds like he’s more aligned with those of us who are pro-Israel. Eschatologically, for example, Piper says he’s premillennial and believes in an end-time mass ingathering of Jewish people when “all Israel” will come to faith in her Messiah (Rom. 11:26). To some Christian commentators, though, this end-time Jewish ingathering will be a mass conversion of the Jewish people to traditional Christianity rather than Israel receiving her Messiah while retaining her Jewish identity and culture. So a shared premillennial view of Romans 11 doesn’t necessarily mean we’re all on the same page.

Piper concludes his 1982 article by pronouncing a prophetic woe on Christians who support the rebellious and “arrogant” Israelis:

Therefore, woe to the followers of Christ who condone the displacement of 600,000 Lebanese citizens at the point of Jewish rifles. Woe to the Christians who think Jesus Christ sanctions the killing of 10,000 Lebanese because the bullets came from Israeli tanks. God does not sanction the sins of this rebel people. They stand under his judgment for their sins. Our response can be only this: an outcry of righteous indignation against Israel’s arrogance and aggression; and a prayer that they might repent and be saved before it is too late.

On behalf of the prophets,
Pastor John

Civilized people everywhere would agree that the killing of thousands of innocent Lebanese civilians—and the displacement of hundreds of thousands more—was tragic. Collateral damage in warfare is always horrific. Nonetheless, militant Palestinian factions have cunningly used collateral damage to their advantage for generations. It’s part of their strategy. They set up their missile launchers adjacent to schools and hospitals, for instance, and then fire missiles from those sites into Israel. When the Israelis fire back to take out the launching sites, innocent school children and/or hospital patients die in the crossfire. This makes the Israelis look like the bad guys when all they’re doing is defending themselves. The real bad guys in the 1982 Lebanon War, then, were the sinister terrorist factions whose persistent provocations made it necessary for the Israelis to take defensive military action in southern Lebanon.

One final point. One can’t help noticing the tone of “Christian” elitism and superiority in Piper’s article. It’s that familiar, anti-Israel refrain: *Those stubborn, faithless Jews rejected their Messiah, so God has now rejected them and given the Kingdom to us!* But are we really better or more deserving of God’s favor than our Jewish counterparts? Don’t we ever fail Him? Are we never faithless? Don’t we rebel against Him at times? Really, the only thing that sets us apart from unbelieving Israel is the amazing grace of Almighty God. Through His Son, Yeshua the Messiah, He has done something remarkable among the Gentiles! And it’s His work, not ours! But He’s not finished with His earthly people Israel—not by a long shot (Rom. 11:11-15).

Pastor Piper said the Jews are “arrogant,” but sometimes we Christians are the ones who are arrogant. The Apostle Paul warned non-Jewish believers about the perils of adopting a position of arrogant superiority:

Do not boast against the branches [i.e., the Jews]. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, “Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.” Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either (Rom. 11:18-21).

I'd like to finish this with a few Mideast tenets of my own:

1. The Jewish people hold the title deed to the Land of Israel (ownership), but God is the One who determines when they live there (possession). They have a "divine right" to possess the land whenever God wants them to. Anti-Israel Christians should beware lest they find themselves in opposition to something God himself is doing!
2. The covenant Israel "broke" was the conditional Sinai Covenant. They did not break the Abrahamic Covenant because (a) it was a unilateral covenant of grace, and (b) their failure to recognize *HaAdon Yeshua* (the Lord Jesus) as their Messiah is only temporary. Someday, the "scales" will fall off their national eyes and they will come to faith in Him. When that happens, and it surely will, it will be like "life from the dead." In the meantime, there is a remnant of Jewish believers known in the Bible as "the Israel of God." This remnant has existed in continuity since biblical times.
3. It is a grievous error to say that a Jewish person who comes to faith in the Messiah is no longer Jewish because he/she has become a Christian. If anything, a Jewish person who knows the Messiah is more Jewish than he/she ever was before. "The Israel of God" represents an overlap between Israel and the Church—so for a Jewish person, it's not an either-or proposition (that is, being either a Jew or a Christian, but not both). Jewish Christians (i.e., Jewish believers in Jesus) occupy a prominent place in the history of the early Church (and also in the history of Judaism). In fact, for 2,000 years now, Israel has never been without this remnant witness.
4. The existence of a Jewish State in our generation is a miracle of epic proportions. To imagine that Israel's rebirth in 1948 was merely a hiccup of history, or the result of a random convergence of events, takes a lot more faith than most Christian supporters of Israel can muster.



The Conversion of St. Paul by Luca Giordano


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5. Some Christians aren't fond of the term "Zionist" because of what they perceive as its negative religious and/or political overtones—and that's perfectly okay. We don't all have to self-identify as Christian Zionists. The content of what we teach is more important than the semantics.
6. Christian pacifism is a legitimate topic for discussion, and we respect believers who hold pacifist convictions sincerely and consistently. However, Jewish people dwelling as a nation in their Land have a right to defend themselves militarily from aggression just as they did in ancient times.
7. Our support of the State of Israel doesn't require either of the following conclusions:
 - a. It doesn't mean that we agree with all the policies or actions of the Israeli government. After all, most Israelis don't like the policies of their government (as reflected in the fact that it's been decades since any one party in Israel garnered the support of more than half of the electorate), let alone the rest of us!
 - b. It doesn't mean that we don't sympathize with the plight of the Palestinian people—especially those who are believers. The Palestinians have become hapless pawns in a deadly, political chess game

that pits Israel and her friends against anti-Semitic forces who won't be placated by anything short of the wholesale destruction of the Jewish State. That's why many ministries in Israel (like CJFM) help sponsor humanitarian endeavors in the Palestinian territories.

8. We affirm that Jewish people need Yeshua (Jesus), just like everyone else. In fact, we believe there's nothing we can do, ministry-wise, that puts us closer to the center of God's will than introducing His chosen people to their Messiah. The devil has spent millennia trying to keep the Jewish people and their Messiah apart, but that sad condition is slowly but surely changing! The process will come to fruition someday when "all Israel" follows the example of the remnant by coming to faith (Rom. 11:26). 



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ENDNOTES

¹ Many "secular" Israelis see the Haredim (i.e., the ultra-orthodox religious fundamentalists) as freeloaders because they collect welfare benefits as long as they're studying Talmud—which can turn out to be a lifetime. Some of the Haredim become permanent Yeshiva students, even into middle age and beyond, and never hold a real, paying job. They and their families live at taxpayer expense and the Israeli public is growing increasingly weary of supporting them (see "Haredim, Israel, Poverty & Homelessness" by Shmarya Rosenberg at FailedMessiah.com). So yes, most Israelis would consider themselves secular rather than religious—and proudly so. But let's not assume that means they're not distinctively Jewish or have no religious beliefs.

² Agnosticism and atheism both have a strong foothold in the Jewish world in our generation primarily due to the horrific reality of the Holocaust. Many Jewish people—both young and old—want to know how a good God could allow His chosen people to suffer on such a massive and appalling scale. To them, it's a huge contradiction. How can a good and just God allow evil to run amuck in our world? Philosophers have wrestled with this question for millennia. They have a word for it: theodicy (from two Greek words meaning "God-justice").

³ Historians use the term "divine right" to describe the medieval European view that kings (particularly in 16th- and 17th-century England and France) derived their authority from God and answered only to Him. In more recent times, it has come to denote people or entities claiming to be accountable only to God, apart from any earthly authority.

⁴ Thoughtful supersessionists today should find it sobering to recall that in the OT, God judged Israel's enemies *even when the nation was in rebellion against Him*. For instance, He punished Nebuchadnezzar for driving Israel from her Land, even though the Babylonian king had been an instrument of God's judgment when he did so (Jer. 51:24).

⁵ The Bible distinguishes between Israel's *ownership* of the Land and her *possession* of it. Even today, in modern real estate law, it is possible to own property without actually being in possession of it—in fact, it's quite common in the business world. The reverse can also be true: someone can possess property without owning it (the legal term is "adverse possession"). The Palestinians, for instance, currently possess Gaza and the West Bank—but they don't own it (at least, not biblically). So again, ownership and possession are two different (albeit related) things.

⁶ Archaeologists have learned a lot about covenants in the Ancient Near East (ANE) by translating and studying ancient contracts and other documents. We know, for instance, that there were three basic types of covenants: (1) royal grant (unconditional), (2) parity (an agreement between equals forming an alliance), and (3) suzerain vassal (conditional, where a lord or king agreed to take care of his loyal subjects in return for their service and/or payment of tribute). The Abrahamic Covenant is unique because it includes both unconditional (royal grant) and conditional (suzerain vassal) elements. Ownership of the Land was unconditional (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:9-21) while possession of it was conditional (17:1-10). The condition for possession, of course, was obedience (or keeping covenant, v. 9). Ownership, though, was settled when God made His original promise to Abram.

⁷ In the context here in Galatians, Paul was making the point that the performance-based Sinai Covenant did not cancel or modify the earlier, grace-based Abrahamic Covenant that was already in force. For a reasonably detailed and balanced treatment of the controversy over whether the Abrahamic Covenant was/is conditional or unconditional, see Daniel Lee's article, "A Reassessment of the Meaning of the Abrahamic Covenant for Evangelical Theology" in *The Quodlibet Journal* (Vol. 6, No. 3: July-September 2004). Accessed online at www.quodlibet.net.

⁸ Golda Meir, the fourth prime minister of the modern State of Israel, once said, "We can forgive the Arabs for killing our children. We cannot forgive them for forcing us to kill their children. We will only have peace with the Arabs when they love their children more than they hate us."

⁹ With technologies like cell phone cameras and high definition satellite imagery, the public has been able to see, first-hand and in dramatic detail, children and civilians being used as shields for Hamas terrorists and their weaponry. During the recent Gaza War, the IDF (Israel Defense Force) even captured an Arabic operations manual where Hamas leadership explains how and when to use human shields (www.idfblog.com/blog/2014/08/04/captured-hamas-combat-manual-explains-benefits-human-shields).

¹⁰ Our point here is that Israel's relationship with God has always been based on grace (the Abrahamic Covenant) rather than on works (the Sinai Covenant). NT believers should understand this better than anyone because our relationship with the Lord is based on His grace rather than on how well we are able to perform. If we step out of line, God disciplines us (Heb. 12:5-11)—but He doesn't kick us out of the Family of God! Why should He deal with Israel any differently? If a professing believer leaves the fellowship of the saints and recants his faith in the Messiah, it doesn't mean he has lost his salvation. Rather, it shows that he was never a true believer in the first place (1 John 2:19). The writer of Hebrews confirms this when he explains that an absence of divine discipline in the life of a sinning "believer" shows that he's not one of God's children (Heb. 12:8). This cannot be said about Israel, though, because there has been ample evidence of God's chastening hand throughout much of her history!

¹¹ Earlier, we also noted Paul's warning about the folly of non-Jewish believers boasting in their supposedly superior status (Rom. 11:17-21).

¹² We say the restoration promises will continue moving toward their ultimate fulfillment because it's an ongoing process that doesn't happen suddenly or overnight. In fact, God set a plan in motion even before the foundations of the world that will result, over time, in a massive reversal of the deleterious effects of the Fall. The 1,000-year millennial age is a transitional period between the current, imperfect world order and the future, perfect Eternal State (Rev. 21:1—22:5). The Apostle Peter referred to this process as "the times of restoration of all things" (Acts 3:21). This great, cosmic unraveling of the curse began with the birth of the Messiah in the first century, and will continue as He returns and sets up His Kingdom on earth. A thousand years later, the process will be complete.

¹³ Some of them say that since national Israel has been replaced by the Christian "New Israel" (or spiritual Israel), the Land of Israel will be restored to the Church. But how can something be restored to the Church that the Church never had before?

¹⁴ Writing to President Obama in 2012, leaders of the Orthodox Jewish Satmar movement exhorted him "to always distinguish between Judaism and Zionism, and recognize that Israel is not a Jewish state, only a Zionist state; it does not represent the Jewish people" (Rabbi Moshe Dov Beck and Rabbi Yisroel Dovid Weiss of Neturei Karta International [Jews United Against Zionism], open letter to Barack Obama dated November 11, 2012, accessed at www.nkusa.org).

¹⁵ The Temple Institute in Jerusalem is one of several Orthodox Jewish organizations devoted to the rebuilding of the Temple. Biblically speaking, the structure they plan to erect someday will be the Tribulation Temple, not the final, Millennial Temple described by Ezekiel (chs. 40-48). Information about the Institute is available online at www.templeinstitute.org.

Fruit from the Harvest

by Violette Berger



“Well Pleased”

Michelle Beadle, CJFM representative (New Orleans) has been meeting weekly with a Jewish woman who prayed to receive Yeshua as her Messiah at Michelle’s Rosh Hashanah service last year. Michelle’s study includes Messianic prophecy, the importance of prayer, how to read and study the Scriptures, fellowship with other believers and how to share the Gospel message with family and friends. A subsequent discussion centered on immersion (baptism) and the need to follow the example of Yeshua who was baptized by John the Baptist. Michelle writes: “I am so happy to report she was immersed, with her husband and son as witnesses. They are both also disciples of Yeshua!”

When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, “You are My Son; in You I am well pleased” (Luke 3:21-22).

“The House of Mourning”

CJFM Area Director, Michael Campo (Chicago) was grieved recently to hear that his long-time friend who lives in Green Bay, Wisconsin, was terminally ill—especially since “M” was not a believer. Mike spent the day praying for the Lord to provide an opportunity for him to witness to his friend. Mike and his wife, Sandie, stepped out on faith and drove to Green Bay. When they arrived at M’s house, they found it filled with family, friends, and hospice workers. Discouraged that Mike would not have an opportunity to speak privately with M, M’s daughter, who is a believer, asked everyone to please leave the house and go into the backyard. Mike then had an opportunity to share the Gospel message with his friend. He also reminded him that the Lord had used Mike to lead M’s wife to the Lord a few years ago—eight months before she passed away—and that she was in heaven waiting for M. Mike was blessed when M prayed the prayer of faith with him. M passed into eternity the following day. Mike presided over the funeral service and although it was held in a Catholic church and he was restricted from giving an altar call, he had the privilege of sharing the Gospel message and teaching the meaning of the following verse: *Better to go to the house of mourning Than to go to the house of feasting, For that is the end of all men; And the living will take it to heart (Eccles. 7:2).*

“Ears to Hear”

CJFM National Ministry Representative John Kanter, (Dallas) recently broke bread with “a not-yet believing” Jewish gentleman. John bases that description on the following two assessments: (1) The man attended a Jewish evangelism class and was not hostile toward the material John taught. (2) The man’s comment at the end of a two-and-a-half-hour discussion that the Book of Malachi has such an abrupt ending one is compelled to conclude that there has to be more to the biblical story than just the Hebrew Scriptures. As a result, John is hopeful that this gentleman “seems very close to believing that Messiah has come, Messiah has provided atonement, and that Messiah’s name is

Yeshua.” Please pray for his salvation. John also shares, as an encouragement to everyone, “that if we simply take the time to listen to people share their life journey, more often than not a level of trust can be established which is conducive to relating and personalizing the Good News which is the Gospel.”

“He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (Matt. 11:15).

Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem (Psalm 122:6)

CJFM worker Ruth Nessim (Israel) has seen first-hand “the hatred and holy jihad of Hamas and ISIS to destroy not only the Christians and the Jewish people, but also America, whom they regard as a center of Christianity and corruption. Their goal is to subjugate the world to Islam.” Ruth requests prayer “for all of the precious young believers, both Jews and Arabs who have been called up into the Army, standing for Israel at this dangerous time.” The son of Pastor “N,” an Arab pastor with whom Ruth has worked for years, recently joined the strongest Israeli Army battle unit. Pastor N was able to give the Army Commanders who recruited his son his own testimony—how God saved him and gave him a love for Israel. Pastor N said, “They were astounded!” Please also pray for Ruth’s friend, Frederika, who has turned 100, and still does not believe. Ruth writes: “We continue to pray that God will give us a great harvest in the coming times of trouble. Remember us, our families, and the work of reconciliation which goes on, war or no war!”

Museum of Israel in Jerusalem

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QUESTION: *I know you don't like so-called "replacement theology," but how do you get around verses like Matthew 21:43, where Jesus said, "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it"? Isn't it clear that He was prophesying in this parable that Israel would be replaced by another "nation"—namely, the church? The fact that the NT calls the church a "nation" in Romans 10:19 and 1 Peter 2:9-10 makes this interpretation even more compelling, does it not? And most of the commentaries agree, by the way.*

ANSWER: Yes, you're right! Many of the commentaries—even some good ones—do agree with you on this. But any interpretation that says God has rejected His earthly people Israel permanently and irrevocably is clearly and demonstrably wrong, no matter who its adherents are.


The Apostle Paul (*Rav Sha'ul*) said, "The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29). And the context of Romans 11 makes it clear that the referent is *Am Yisrael*, the People of Israel—the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So Paul's point was that the gifts and calling that God placed on ethnic Israel are enduring and without termination. They may be interrupted at times (due to Israel's lack of cooperation), but they are never done away with permanently.

Upon whom, then, was this ominous judgment in Matthew 21:43 pronounced? The Bible Knowledge Commentary explains that the Lord's words were directed at the first century Jewish leadership:

By way of application Jesus said the kingdom of God was being taken away from those who heard Him, and it would be given to the people who would produce its fruit. The [Greek] word . . . *ethnei* is usually translated "nation." (It appears here without an article.) Two interpretations of this verse are often presented. One is that Jesus was saying the kingdom had been taken from the Jewish nation and would be given to Gentile nations who would produce the proper fruit of genuine faith. It is argued that since *ethnei* is singular, not plural, the word refers to the church which is called a nation in Romans 10:19 and 1 Peter 2:9-10. But the kingdom has not been taken completely away from Israel forever (Rom. 11:15, 25). And the church is not now inheriting the kingdom.

A better interpretation is that Jesus was simply saying the kingdom was being taken away from the nation Israel at that time, but it would be given back to the nation in a future day when that nation would demonstrate true repentance

and faith. In this view Jesus was using the term "nation" in the sense of generation (cf. Matt. 23:36). Because of their rejection, that generation of Israel would never be able to experience the kingdom of God (cf. comments on 21:18-22). But a future generation in Israel will respond in saving faith to this same Messiah (Rom. 11:26-27), and to that future generation the kingdom will be given.¹

You may have noticed by now that we use the word "context" a lot around here. We repeat it often because a text taken out of its context very often becomes a pretext! Here in Matthew 21, the context shows us that the word "nation" (Gk., *ethnei*) in Verse 43 refers to that generation of Jewish leaders He was addressing in the first century (i.e., the Sanhedrin and its operatives)—not to the entire nation for all time. Just two verses later, Matthew says, *Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them* (v. 45). 

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ENDNOTES

¹ John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Vol. 2* (Wheaton: SP Publications, 1983), 70-71.

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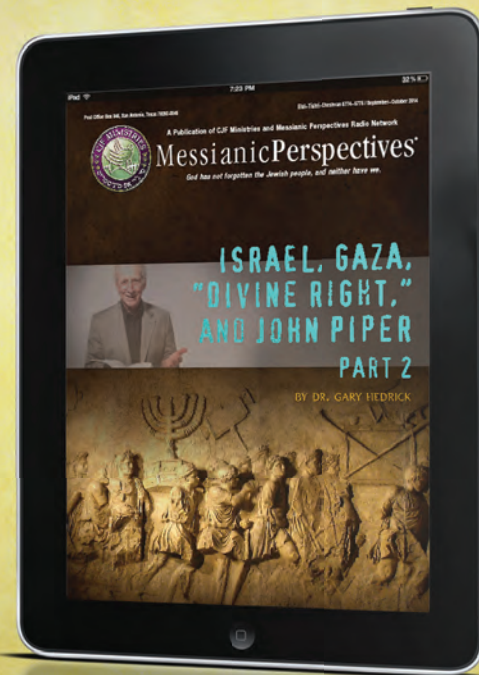
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