

ISRAEL UPDATE: Is God Turning His Back on Israel?

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More than 2,500 years ago, the Lord said through the prophet Zechariah, "I have a great jealousy for Jerusalem and Zion" (Zech. 1:14b), yet this was not because of His people's righteousness. To the contrary, they had just been exiled for their sin, and they were now being regathered because of God's mercy, not their goodness. Yet His heart still burned with holy jealousy for them.

Even while they were in Babylonian captivity, the prophet said, "for he who touches you touches the apple of His eye" (Zech. 2:8b). This is how deeply He loves His ancient covenant people, even when He rebukes them. As He said through Jeremiah, "Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spoke against him, I *surely do* remember him *still*; therefore My heart longs for him. I will surely have mercy on him, says the Lord" (Jer. 31:20).

That's why Isaiah cried out, "For the sake of Zion I will not keep silent, and for the sake of Jerusalem I will not rest until her righteousness goes forth as brightness and her salvation as a lamp that burns" (Isa. 62:1). And that's why the Lord Himself said, "I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem, who shall never hold their peace day nor night. You who remind the Lord, do not keep silent; give Him no rest until He establishes and makes Jerusalem a glory in the earth" (Isa. 62:6-7).

God's Heart Still Beats for Israel

Ultimately, Israel's salvation means the redemption of the world (see Rom. 11:11-15), and Yeshua (Jesus) will not return to earth until a Jewish Jerusalem welcomes Him back (see Matt. 23:37-39, Acts 3:19-21, Zech. 12:10-13:1). God's heart still beats for His ancient covenant people, even when they reject His Son and oppose the gospel. As Paul explained to the Romans, "As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sake, but as regarding the election, they are beloved for the sake of the patriarchs. For the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:28-29).

Ironically, many of us charismatics will quote Romans 11:29 in the context of spiritual gifts and callings, like the gift of healing or the calling to preach, pointing out that those gifts and callings are "irrevocable." But when it comes to God's calling of Israel, we somehow think He changed His mind or Israel sinned one too many times or He has replaced Israel with the church. None of these things is true, and even when Israel is alienated from God on a national level, Israel remains called and chosen.

Some of the godliest leaders in church history, including some of the most highly respected English Puritans in the 1600s, had a great heart for Israel. John Owen, who was the greatest of the Puritan theologians, wrote, "The Jews shall be gathered from all parts of the earth where they are scattered, and brought home into their homeland."

As to their importance in God's plan, Owen penned these amazing words: "There is not any promise anywhere of raising up a kingdom unto the Lord Jesus Christ in this world, but it is either expressed, or clearly intimated, that the beginning of it must be with the Jews."

Robert Leighton, a contemporary of Owen, wrote: "They forget a main point for the Church's glory, who pray not daily for the conversion [turning] of the Jews. ... Undoubtedly, that people of the Jews shall once more be commanded to arise and shine,

and their return shall be the riches of the Gentiles (Rom. 11:12), and that shall be a more glorious time than ever the Church of God did yet behold."

Were you aware that these men held such views?

Samuel Rutherford, a contemporary of Owen and Leighton, was one of the most spiritually minded Christian leaders of his era, and he longed to see the day Jesus and His Jewish people would embrace.

He wrote, "I could stay out of heaven many years to see that victorious triumphing Lord act that prophesied part of His soul conquering love, in taking into His kingdom the greater sister, that kirk [church] of the Jews. ... Oh, what joy and what glory would I judge it, if my heaven should be suspended till I might have leave to run on foot to be a witness of that marriage-glory, and see Christ put on the glory of His last-married bride, and His last marriage- love on earth; when He shall enlarge His love-bed, and set it upon the top of the mountains, and take in the Elder Sister, the Jews and the fulness of the Gentiles!"

The Israel-Revival Connection

What an incredible picture, and what an incredible description! Rutherford was actually willing to put off going to heaven if he could live to see this moment. How much more does God Himself long to see this happen?

That's why Rutherford wrote, "O to see the sight, next to Christ's Coming in the clouds, the most joyful! Our elder brethren the Jews and Christ fall upon one another's neck and kiss each other! They have been long asunder; they will be kind to one another when they meet. O day! O longed-for and lovely day, dawn! O sweet Jesus, let me see that sight, which will be as life from the dead, Thee and Thy ancient people in mutual embraces."

Two centuries later, in Scotland, there were godly Presbyterian leaders like Robert Murray M'Cheyne and Andrew and Horatius Bonar whose hearts also beat for Israel's salvation.

These Presbyterians were convinced that, as far as Israel was concerned, "Blessed is he that blesseth thee." So, in 1839, when revival broke out in the Scottish city of Kilsyth through the preaching of William C. Burns, M'Cheyne and his contemporaries felt they knew why.

There had been much prayer, fasting and sacrifice. There had been a powerful proclamation of the cross. But there was something else: 1839 was the year of M'Cheyne's Jewish mission to Palestine! That, they believed, was why special blessing came. That's why the Spirit was poured out.

M'Cheyne was sure this was to be a lasting pattern: The salvation of the Jewish people meant restoration for the church.

According to Andrew Bonar, speaking in 1889, "Israel is the 'everlasting nation' who are to be life from the dead to all nations. And the sure word of prophecy declares, 'He that scattereth Israel shall gather them.' 'I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me for ever.' 'Yea, I will rejoice over them, and will plant them in their own land assuredly, with all My heart, and with all My soul.'"

And he quoted this poem as well: "Crowned with her fairest hope, the Church shall triumph with her Lord, And earth her jubilee shall keep, when Israel is restored."

Six Truths We Must Recognize

We have no way of knowing how these leaders would have responded to the nation of Israel today, since they envisioned the physical regathering of the Jewish people in conjunction with their spiritual regathering. In other words, they did not

envision a reconstituted Jewish state outside of Jewish faith in the Messiah and His return to earth. So it would be misleading for me to call them "Christian Zionists."

But we can say for sure that they all recognized that: 1) the Jewish people were still called by God, on a national level; 2) the Old Testament promises to Israel were never rescinded; 3) the church had not displaced Israel in God's plan of salvation; 4) there would be a national, Jewish turning to Israel at the end of the age; 5) the Jewish people would be regathered to their ancient homeland; and 6) this would be an event of incredible importance for the whole world.

That is saying a lot!

And because these men were near to God's heart, they had an intense love for the Jewish people and prayed regularly for their salvation. They knew how significant this was—to the Lord, to the church and to the nations.

At the least then, even if you have a problem with the modern state of Israel and have a hard time seeing how it fulfills biblical prophecy, by all means ask God for His passionate heart for the Jewish people—for their salvation and redemption. This matters to the Lord, and it should matter to each of us.

Charles Spurgeon also saw the importance of Israel's redemption, including their return to the land. He said, "I think we do not attach sufficient importance to the restoration of the Jews. We do not think enough about it. But certainly, if there is anything promised in the Bible it is this. I imagine that you cannot read the Bible without seeing clearly that there is to be an actual restoration of the children of Israel."

Spurgeon continued, "For when the Jews are restored, the fullness of the Gentiles shall be gathered in; and as soon as they return, then Jesus will come upon Mount Zion with his

ancients gloriously, and the halcyon days of the Millennium shall then dawn; we shall then know every man to be a brother and a friend; Christ shall rule with universal sway.”

You will be hard-pressed to find a more Jesus-centered preacher than Spurgeon, yet He too saw the importance of Israel’s salvation, including their eventual return to the land. Perhaps he understood something many of us do not understand? Perhaps we’re looking at things in the natural realm, and God is at work in the spiritual realm?

Again, I’m not making Spurgeon into a Christian Zionist. I’m simply saying that for him, it was as clear as anything else in the Bible that the Jewish people would be restored to the land and with that, Jesus would return.

One of the greatest preachers of the last century was D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, and he had this to say about Israel’s salvation: “It is remarkable that, although they [the Jews] were without their country for so many centuries, and nations did their utmost to destroy them completely, this nation has been preserved. The only real explanation of this is that God has not finished with them and that there is a day coming when this ‘fullness of Israel’ is going to be brought back to salvation ... and so God’s ultimate promise to Abraham is going to receive a wonderful fulfillment.”

Lloyd-Jones was not a dispensationalist, and he did not see the modern restoration of the Jewish people to the land of Israel the way many dispensationalists do, as if Israel were on one track and the church on another. But he certainly witnessed God’s preservation of the Jewish people through the horrors of the Holocaust, and it was clear to him that “God has not finished with them and that there is a day coming when this ‘fullness of Israel’ is going to be brought back to salvation.”

We could debate the meaning of “the fullness of Israel,” but

we cannot debate that for Lloyd-Jones, the Jews as a people were still loved by God and kept by Him for an ultimate divine purpose, even if alienated from Him in the present.

God Won't Break His Promise to Israel

There was a reason Paul's heart was continually broken for his people, to the point that he was willing to forfeit his own salvation if that would bring Israel salvation. And note carefully what he wrote to the Romans: "For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brothers, my kinsmen by race, who are Israelites, to whom belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, *and the promises*, to whom belong the patriarchs, and from whom, according to the flesh, is Christ, who is over all, God forever blessed. Amen" (Rom. 9:3-5, emphasis mine).

Did you catch that? The promises are still Israel's promises. They have not been forfeited, and they have not been given to someone else. By the grace and goodness of God, those promises will be fulfilled, and they include a massive turning of the Jewish people to the Messiah and their physical restoration to the land. At that time, God says through Jeremiah, "I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people" (Jer. 31:1b).

What a glorious day that will be! 

Michael L. Brown, PhD, is host of the nationally syndicated talk radio show *The Line of Fire* and is president of *FIRE School of Ministry*. His recent new book, *Turn the Tide: How to Ignite a Cultural Awakening*, is available on . His new autobiography, *Living In the Line of Fire*, releases in March 2025 and is available for pre-release purchase on now.