

Greg Laurie: Prophecy Was Not Given to Scare Us but to Prepare Us

You can hardly pick up a newspaper, go to a news website or turn on the television without some mention of conflict in the Middle East, and more specifically, conflicts involving Israel. Why is this? The answer is quite simple: Israel is in the eye of the hurricane of the great events of the end times.

Israel occupies center stage in God's drama of the ages. She and other players are behind the prophetic curtain, and they are hitting their marks. The curtain on this drama has not yet opened, but it will soon. It all was predicted long ago by the Hebrew prophets.

One of the signs of the end, a supersign, if you will, is the miracle of Israel, the regathering of the Jewish people back to their homeland. In the Old Testament book of Ezekiel, God instructed the prophet to go to a graveyard. As Ezekiel stood there, bodies burst out of graves, bones came together, muscle was attached to bone, and flesh was attached to muscle. Then God told Ezekiel what it all meant:

"Then He said to me, 'Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. ... "Pay attention, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves and bring you into the land of Israel. Then you 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 I shall put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I shall place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I the Lord have spoken and performed it, says the Lord"' (Ezek. 37:11-14).

Could God have been any more specific? Yet during World War II, who would have thought such a thing was possible? If you

were a Jew living in the Warsaw ghetto, would you have believed such a thing could happen? If you were a Jewish prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp, would you have ever thought there would be a homeland for your people again?

There was a time when a return of the Jewish people to their homeland seemed unthinkable, impossible. But God said it would happen. And it did. On May 14, 1948, a modern-day miracle took place: the establishment of the nation of Israel.

David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, made this statement that day: "Ezekiel 37 has been fulfilled, and the nation Israel is hearing the footsteps of the Messiah."

And on April 11, 2010, on the eve of Holocaust Remembrance Day, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made this statement:

We are not here by chance. We returned to this land because it is our land; we returned to Zion because it is our city. We are paving roads north and south, and transforming a barren land into a flourishing garden. This is our answer to those who seek our destruction.

As the prophet Isaiah said:

"Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall be to the LORD for a memorial, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."

Here is this modern miracle called Israel, yet it is such a small piece of land. Think of all the nations in the world and all the cities in the world. Why do we hear so much about Israel? The entire nation is about the size of New Jersey. In land area, it ranks 154th among the nations of the world. In fact, 32 nations of Israel could fit inside the state of Texas.

Yet those who have sought to eradicate or destroy the Jewish

people or their nation have paid a heavy price, because God made this promise long ago: "I will bless them who bless you and curse him who curses you, and in you all families of the earth will be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). The nations that have tried to destroy Israel lay on the ash heap of history today.

One of the reasons God has blessed the United States of America is because we have stood by the Jewish people, and we have stood by the state of Israel. In fact, I believe the United States needs Israel more than Israel needs the United States. We have been a great ally for Israel. We have done a lot for them. As a result, God has blessed us. One of the reasons God has blessed our nation is because we have blessed Israel. We need Israel because we need the blessing of God. That is why I have great concern over the new tension we have with Israel today.

When the disciples asked Jesus, "What sign will signal your return and the end of the world?" he told them, "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: When its branch becomes tender and grows leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you shall see all these things, you know that it is near, even at the doors. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place" (Matthew 24:32-34).

On more than one occasion in the Bible, Israel is compared to a fig tree. In Hosea 9:10 God says, "Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel. Like the first fruit on the fig tree in its first season, I saw your fathers. But they went to Baal Peor and consecrated themselves to a *thing of* shame, and they became an abomination like *the thing* they loved." Joel and Jeremiah also refer to Israel as a fig tree.

Jesus was saying that the rebirth of Israel is a sign of the end. But it is not just a sign—it is a supersign.

God promised that the Jewish people would be scattered and

regathered. That has happened. God promised they would return to the land of Israel. That has happened. God promised they would become a nation again. That has happened. God promised that Jerusalem would be their capital. That too has happened. There is a lot that has already happened. And there are still some things yet in the future that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 24 and elsewhere.

These are signs of the times that Christ told us we should be looking for. However, Bible prophecy was not given to scare us but to prepare us. The more we know about the next world, the better we will live in this one. {eoa}

Greg Laurie *is the pastor at the 15,000-member Harvest Christian Fellowship in Riverside, California, and president of Harvest Crusades.*