

The Land of Israel and the Storyline of Earth's Redemption, Part One

I. INTRODUCTION: WHY THE LAND OF ISRAEL MATTERS

- A. It is important that believers understand the value and importance of the “Promised Land” of Israel today. To understand the importance and role of the land of Israel is to understand the storyline of redemption from the garden until today. As born-again believers, we want to be in the middle of the right story as it unfolds in the right way, according to God’s plans. Why?
- B. **Understanding the storyline of God helps us understand the character of God.** As we grow in the knowledge of God, who He is, and how He leads, we grow in our understanding of God’s faithfulness to honor His promises. The subject of the land, in one sense, can be understood simply in terms of “God told His friends that He would give something to them”, and His zeal to follow through on that promise even as His friends come short and even break their promises reveals God in breathtaking and glorious ways. From the beginnings of His relationship with Israel, the Lord told Israel that He would not cast them off forever even though they would sin against Him and He would have to punish their disobedience (*Deut. 4:26-31, Deut 31:6, Is.14:1, Is.41:8-9, Is.44:1-3, Is.49:14-16*).
1. Secondly, as we understand the storyline of God, and God’s “leadership style”, we grow in understanding of our dignity and significance in building and shaping His world with Him. Heaven is the abode of God, or “His place”, and His throne is His alone, but land is something that He shares with His people. The Bible speaks of the land as “our place” that, over time, becomes “the place” that He comes down to and shares *with us*. He brings “His home” to “our home” and joins the two together. The earth and the land of Israel become beautiful pictures of how an omnipotent God enjoys intimate partnership and union with His creation.
- C. **Understanding the storyline of God keeps us from creating our own storyline.** What we believe about the role of the land, the storyline of the earth’s redemption, and the kingdom of God impacts how we see ourselves and how we engage with the world around us. If we are the center of God’s unfolding story, for example, than our own nation replaces Israel as the most important nation in God’s end-time plans. Our view of the land of Israel influences our view of justice, the Second Coming, and the return of Jesus – and what He will do when He returns. The way in which we seek to bring about change in our generation, why we seek to bring about change, and where that change is ultimately going are all influenced by our view of the land and God’s kingdom.
1. “If you don't believe in the Israel land possession, you can't possibly believe in a total planet earth repossession. If no there Israel covenant (involving the land), you simply yield planet earth to the devil.” – Asher Intrader

- D. **Understanding the storyline of God helps us engage with confidence and joy in our small part.** There is a spiritual battle raging over the control of the land of Israel and the City of Jerusalem.
1. This battle will intensify as we approach the end times and culminate with all the nations of the earth seeking to eliminate the Jewish people from the land of Israel (*Psalm 2:1; Psalm 83:5; Joel 3:11; Zech.12:2; 14:2; Zeph.3:8*). God is building a praying church in the nations as a pre-emptive strike against the plans of the enemy. As the church connects in prayer with God's unchanging plans for the land and people of Israel, God will release fullness to the gentiles, salvation to Israel and restore Israel's inheritance. Our small prayers and labors in agreement with God's plans work together to transform the earth. How?

II. A THEOLOGY OF MANKIND, LOCATION, AND LAND

- A. To understand the significance of the land of Israel in God's redemptive story, it is helpful to first understand that God values *location* and *property*. The creation account speaks of the care and time God took, over seven days, to create the whole earth and all that is within it. The creation of man to dwell here was but one of the seven days (though a very important day to God!). When the Lord created the earth, He considered it "good". It was a good place for humanity to inhabit, and it was a good place for Him to dwell with us. Yet even within the whole of what He made, God designated a *specific geographic location* to serve as *property from which man would govern the rest of the earth*.
- B. God's pattern has been, from the foundations of the world, to begin with a specific geographic location and a specific person and work outwardly. In the New Testament and throughout church history, God begins with small groups and small places and begins to work outwardly to transform and impact the surrounding regions. Land, and our ownership and governance of it, has always mattered to God.
- C. In the garden, the connection of land and man begins as man is formed out of the very land, or dust, itself. "From dust we came, and from dust we shall return" (Gen. 3:19). Isaiah spoke of the Jews and the land of Israel as a "married" to one another in Isaiah 62:4. From the beginning, God has connected mankind to the earth. In doing so, God created a context from which mankind could serve, work, and build – as well as conquer, tame, and subdue. The earth became, in God's plans, the arena upon which man would express life and relationship, and the canvas upon which man would display his heart.
- D. The dignity and value of man is revealed in both the land he is given to govern and serve as well as the place that he established for God to inhabit. Man's connection with and governance over land has always been about this pattern of life: that mankind would transform and build a place for God and man to dwell together. Then, together, God and man would go forth to conquer, transform, and build until the whole earth expresses the glory and the beauty of the Lord.

III. FROM EDEN TO THE REST OF THE EARTH

- A. This pattern was first expressed within Eden. Eden served as the “base” from which mankind would launch out of. One of the only biblical realities that prophecy reflects *back* towards, beyond the cross and the sacrifice of the Lamb is the Garden of Eden. Eden was the first “land promise” of God and the prototype for things to come.
- B. It is in the land that God established the first expression of “kingdom” on the earth – a purposeful statement meant to communicate key points of understanding related to His leadership and value system. To understand what Eden once expressed is to understand the fullness of what Peter meant when he spoke of “*the restoration of all things*” in Acts 3:19-21.
- C. The “land” in its original, untainted glory provides us a clear picture of the optimum context in the heart of God to commune with man in his perfect, sinless state – thus we receive from John the Apostle a clear picture at the end of Revelation of a *return* to the garden, or God’s paradise. The name Eden means, “*pleasure*” in Hebrew. The word of God begins with a clear picture of perfection at the beginning, then returning to that picture at the culmination of His plans. The greatest difference between the garden of Genesis 1-2 and the garden of Revelation 21-22 is the condition of the heart of mankind towards Him within His garden paradise.
- D. Within the land was *a Creator* (2:3): one of the most critical aspects of God’s nature revealed in the context of perfection is that He is a Creator – we know from much of the word that God can take that which is ruined, destroyed, defiled, or simply aged and “make all things new”, or *renewed*. In the garden, however, we see the Lord as the Creative One, who is filled with ideas that spring forth into a seemingly endless variety of expressions and creations, particularly related to life in nature and vegetation (“every herb” and “every tree” in 1:29-30) but also in the stunning diversity of the animal kingdom (2:20). Adam, the first man, reflects the creative nature of God in the manner in which he is able to name every living creature.
- E. Within the land was *God’s optimum design* (2:8): God “planted” the garden, and all that God established there and beyond He called good (1:25). The earth in its early state represented the optimum place for God to dwell with men face-to-face, that all that we were to do there in the normalcy of our daily interaction with creation and Creator would be beneficial to know Him, love Him, and commune with Him. The Divine Architect established a wild, untamed planet populated with the unknown, with enemies and threats, and with much to conquer. Then, in the midst of the untamed planet He planted a garden (“Pleasure”). He *purposely* did not cover the earth in its original design with pleasure and perfection, but established a kingdom in the midst of untamed wildness and hostility, and placed man whom He had formed within it.

- F. Within the land there were **responsibilities and duties** (2:15): it is fascinating that, within the confines of perfection and pleasure, God still created the garden kingdom to be tended to and kept by men – in other words, beyond the Adamic mandate that relates to government and leadership over the earth, the Lord in His image of paradise establishes the pattern of joyful, simple, day-to-day maintenance of tending and keeping the garden. Men are to be occupied in part, with the joy of caring for the garden planted by the Lord – that in their care of it they would treasure and value it rightly, for all time.
- G. Within the land there is **partnership** (2:18-24): the most time in the second chapter of Genesis is spent on declaring God's value in partnership within His kingdom, thus establishing it as one of the highest realities we can enjoy in Him, through Him, and with Him. Man should not be alone, but was made to fellowship in deep communion with God *and* one another; secondly, the detail of Eve's creation gives insight into the ultimate picture of what longs for the garden to be: the place where *two become one*.
- H. Beyond the land there is **mission, government, and dominion** (1:28): God's desire was for man to expand the borders of His kingdom; thus He gave man a mandate ("*Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it*") as well as government (leadership) and dominion (authority) over all of the created order ("*have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth*"; "*See, I have given you...*"). The increase of His government and peace will know no end (Isaiah 9:7) – the expansiveness of His kingdom is everlasting and forever.
- I. This pattern – from Eden to the rest of the earth – would be repeated later on with the establishment of the kingdom of Israel. Israel's promised, prophetic destiny was to be the "base" from which the Messiah would establish His government and "go forth" to the rest of the nations of the earth, filling the earth with the glory of God.

IV. FROM ISRAEL TO THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH

- A. Watching the nation of Israel always gives us insights into to the Lord's plan. This nation has always, and will continue to, stand as a type of "case study" of the way in which God deals with humanity. As His chosen people, they uniquely demonstrate through their history the way in which God interacts with the nations of the world. They stand at the very center of His redemptive purposes, and the sudden emergence of the Jewish state should not go unnoticed to the believer desiring to understand the signs surrounding the Lord's returning. According to Paul, it is instructive to remember two key points: the fathers of our faith were Jewish men; secondly, from these men, "*according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God.*" (Romans 9:5)

- B. Now, in our day, a city Jesus, the Son of David, cares deeply about has re-emerged despite much opposition and impossible odds. This is the city that both David and Jesus called, “The City of the Great King” (Ps. 48:2; Matt. 5:35). Jerusalem is *His* city. As such, He has deep emotions and desires for the city and its destiny. He expressed those deep emotions in Matthew 23:37-39 when He lamented the city’s rejection of Him. He is jealous for Jerusalem to be what Isaiah called, “a praise in the earth”. (Is. 62:7) All throughout the prophets, we find passage after passage about Jerusalem and God’s desire to make the city great on the earth.
- C. The prophet Zechariah described God’s emotions for His city in this manner:
“Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘I am zealous for Zion with great zeal; with great fervor I am zealous for her.’ Thus says the Lord: ‘I will return to Zion, and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, the Mountain of the Lord of hosts, the Holy Mountain.’ (Zechariah 8:2-3)
- D. Thus, the primary importance of Israel and Jerusalem lies with the subject of God’s affections and stated intentions for this geographic location. It is easy for us to imagine the zeal and jealousy of the Lord for human beings, His most precious and special creation – but it is difficult for us to imagine or connect to the idea that God has zeal and emotion about geographic locations.
1. The end of the age drama is directly played out in context to events that are centered upon Israel and Jerusalem. God longs to orchestrate events all across the globe in relation to this land and people in order that He might return to the earth and dwell there forever. It is important that we connect to the fact that God has great zeal and passion not just for the Jewish people but also for the Jewish people in this specific geographic location *because* of His emotions and desires related to the people He would dwell with. He cares about the people – thus He cares about the place that He would prepare for them to dwell with them.
- E. Many other events that the Bible speaks about related to the end-times are those which can *only* take place if Israel is a sovereign state in the land with control of Jerusalem as their capital. In the days to come the emerging trends related to Israel and Jerusalem will continue to reflect the prophetic “destination” of the current course of history in a manner that will cause more and more believers to awaken to a new sobriety related to the times in which they live.

- F. Isaiah declares that the Lord will “*set up a banner for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah*” (Isaiah 11:12; cf. Ezekiel 37:1-12). Most of the prophetic scriptures about the re-gathering of the Israelites will be fulfilled *after* the Second Coming, after a time of great trouble for the Jews, which Jeremiah called “Jacob’s Trouble” (Jeremiah 30:7). However, there is also the scriptural reality of a gathering to a measure *before* the trouble that would shake the nation. For example, there is no purpose for the nations to surround Jerusalem with great rage to destroy it (Zechariah 12:1-4) as part of Satan’s rage against the Jewish race (Revelation 12:17) if there are no Jews inhabiting the city in that time.
- G. The Lord spoke clearly concerning the reestablishment of the Jewish state (Isaiah 66:7-8) prior to the trouble and the re-gathering of the Hebrews to Israel. We are seeing in our time other prophetic scriptures coming to pass, including the revival of the Hebrew language (Zephaniah 3:9), the resurgence of the military (Zechariah 12:6), the reoccupation of the city of Jerusalem (Zechariah 12:2-6), the reemergence of a remnant of Jewish believers in Jerusalem (Romans 9; 27; 11:5), and the hatred of all nations against Israel (Zechariah 12:2-3). All of these things are stirring in our lifetime, and the timing of the beginning of the fulfillment of these passages points to the urgency of the hour related to what these events lead to for the earth.
- H. Many other scriptures cannot be fulfilled apart from the Jewish control of Israel and Jerusalem. One of the most important prophetic scriptures in regards to God’s dealings with Israel and the nations at the end of the age is Daniel 9:24-27. Not only does this passage give specific timing indicators of the end, but it also gives several insights to the necessity of Israel’s control of the land in the last days. From this passage we can understand that Israel will be back in their land, with a functioning Temple, and make a covenant with the Antichrist. Daniel is told that “*he (Antichrist) shall confirm a covenant with many (unsaved Israel) for one week*” and that “*he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering*” (Daniel 9:27). There are two things, which must be implied in order for this passage to be literally fulfilled.
1. First, in order for “*the many*”, or the unsaved state of Israel, to make a covenant with the Antichrist necessitates that a sovereign, political state under the control of Jews is in a position to make a political covenant, or treaty. Secondly, this passage explicitly tells us that the Antichrist will “*bring an end to sacrifice and offering*”. If we are to believe in the future literal fulfillment of this prophecy (which we must because of the exact nature in which the earlier parts of this prophecy have already been fulfilled in Jesus) we must therefore conclude that there will be a functional Temple in the city of Jerusalem which offers the daily sacrifices and offerings in accordance to the law of Moses.

2. Another passage, which necessitated the people of Israel in the land before the end in order for its literal fulfillment, is Jesus' final words to the corporate leadership of Jerusalem. In Matthew 23:37-39 Jesus speaks His final words to the political leadership of the city of Jerusalem. He declares "*from now on you will not see Me until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'*" (Matthew 23:39) In other words, Jesus is declaring that the Jewish people will not see Him return to the city of Jerusalem until the Jewish leadership declares that He in fact is the one who has been sent from God for their deliverance. This, of course, demands an understanding of a reemergence of the political Jewish leadership in the city of Jerusalem before Christ's return.