

FUNDAMENTALISTS' SUPPORT FOR THE STATE OF ISRAEL

The best advice to those who received a tract, "Present Day Events and Their Meaning from the Bible" is to throw it away. The following comments should not be understood as espousing a political view of any kind. Their concern is the right understanding of the Bible.

Some of the right wing Fundamentalists' wrong assumptions are that Jesus Christ will return to establish an earthly kingdom in the present Jerusalem and establish an earthly peace from there. A view that some Arab nations will not survive the coming of Jesus Christ fits into this. They accept that all modern Israelis can all trace their ancestry back four thousand years to Abraham. They assume that the migration of Jews to Palestine as their homeland must have happened as part of God's plan for them. They accept that the establishment of the State of Israel has fulfilled prophecies that were really about the restoration of the Jews from captivity in Babylon or about the coming heavenly kingdom. They twine these views together with a belief that the Jews will be converted to belief in Jesus as their Messiah. They interpret Rev 17 and 18 as prophecies about a powerful trading group of European nations that will oppose this alleged rule of Jesus from the present Jerusalem. They tie their views to hope for a literal reign of Jesus Christ on earth for a thousand years. Most of them are Premillennialists. It is amazing that such Christian people think they are following God's will by supporting a state that is in principle opposed to faith in Jesus Christ, and many of whose people are atheists.

The support of right wing Christian Evangelicals for the modern state of Israel rests on a conviction that one of seven time periods or "dispensations" includes a literal battle of Armageddon (Rv 16:16). Some even regard the prospect of a nuclear war as a good thing, because they interpret Scripture as saying that all Jews must accept Jesus Christ or be killed in a literal battle of Armageddon. This view stems originally from C I Scofield, and it is still promoted by some television evangelists. Many will recognise names such as Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, and Hal Lindsey. The conviction that God still has an earthly plan for the Jews lay behind Christian support for Zionist Jews to migrate to Palestine. Some of these Christians support the view that the Israelis should destroy the present Muslim mosque on the site of Solomon's temple, one of Islam's most important shrines, and build a Jewish temple there, which they hope will provide a place where Christians will meet Jesus and enjoy eternal bliss.

The result is that the Christian faith is diverted in a political direction. These beliefs are not based on the Scriptures or on history either, for that matter. Gaza was one of the five Philistine cities that were traditional enemies of Israel. It may well be that peace between Israelis and Palestinians is going to be very difficult to achieve. However, the situation should not be muddled by false application of the Bible. These rightwing Fundamentalists say that in the Old Testament that Israel was God's chosen people, and they apply the conviction that they still are to hopes for the modern State of Israel. This is a factor in current military and financial support from the United States for the state of Israel. Our own secular media also promotes the view that Jews have an inherent right to land that they have taken from Palestinians who had lived there for well over a thousand years. Economic considerations play a role, certainly. However, Zionists, many of whom are atheists, have persuaded Christian Premillennialists in high government positions, particularly in America, to go along with the murder of Palestinians and the theft of Palestinian land for Israeli settlements under the assumption that such actions are helping God fulfil prophecy in the Bible.

Certainly, the state of Israel has achieved great things against tremendous odds. However, are these people the same as God's chosen people of the Old Testament?

An important answer to this is that the New Testament applies what the Old Testament says about Israel to the Church, the body of Christ, to all believers in Him of all times and places. Believers in Christ from all nations will indeed flock to the New Jerusalem in His heavenly kingdom after He returns (Isa 2; Eph 2:11-22).

The New Testament applies to the Church statements in the Old Testament about God's chosen people (1 Pt 2:9). All who believe in Christ, both from physical Israel and from the Gentiles, are members of God's spiritual Israel. That is the sense in which "All Israel will be saved" (Rm 11:26). Paul wrote: "You are all one in Christ Jesus. Moreover, if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants and heirs, according to the promise" (Gal 3:28-29). The Old Testament prophecies of peace, when the lion lies down with the lamb, children play at the viper's nest, nations beat their spears into pruning hooks and flock to Jerusalem must not be understood literally to be fulfilled during the order of this present world. They are figurative references to reconciliation between God and sinners through Jesus Christ, and the eternal peace of the life to come.

Another important principle must be the conviction that the same moral standards apply to God's people in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. As the Old Testament proclaimed God's judgment on those who killed innocent people and stole, that is still true of people who murder people because they are of a certain race and steal their land. God's promises to the people of the Old Testament were conditional, and such unrighteousness disqualified people who expected His favourable verdict. In the Old Testament the land of Canaan was promised to the people as Israel for ever. However, that was conditional, as the complete removal of the Northern Kingdom and the exile of the Southern Kingdom to Babylon for persistent wickedness demonstrated. Promises about the land of Canaan drop right out of the New Testament (Ac 1:6-8).

Christians have the conviction that the New Testament has superseded the priesthood and the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, even though these were said to be "for ever." These were shadows pointing forward to Christ, who has fulfilled them, and everything that continues for ever continues only through His permanent atonement and His heavenly kingdom.

It is also important to point out that the Gospel is unconditional. This important distinction must not be forgotten. People receive God's blessings solely through the merits of Jesus Christ, and God has no favourites on the basis of race or anything else.

The "Ar" in Armageddon comes from the Hebrew word "Har", which means "mountain." The valley of Megiddo and the stream Kishon was the scene of a decisive Israelite battle against the Canaanites under Jabin and Sisera. The Canaanites were strong, with nine hundred iron chariots. The Israelites had no spears or shields. God intervened to give a great victory to some Israelite tribes under Deborah and Barak (Jdg 4-5; note 5:19). Israelite strength and courage had little to do with the victory. God's thunderstorm and floodwater overwhelmed the Canaanites, and a woman's hand destroyed Jabin. "Armageddon" is used symbolically for the final victory of Christ against the anti-Christian world, the beast, and Satan. Christ will appear on clouds of glory to bring His oppressed people miraculous and lasting deliverance. That will close Satan's final short season (Rev 11:7-11; 20:7-10).

The true hope of every human being, Israelis included, is not national, but spiritual. It is faith in Jesus Christ as the Messiah and the only Saviour (Ac 28:17-29).