



RETHINKING BIBLE PROPHECY IN THE LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY

'Eschatology' is the study of last things. Christians should never fear having their eschatological 'system' scrutinised by the plain teaching of the Bible. If you subscribe to the currently popular "Left Behind" system of eschatology, prepare to be challenged by Scripture and history. Moreover, prepare to gain a greater respect for the integrity of the Bible.

THE FUTURE OF ISRAEL REEXAMINED

PART ONE BY JAMES B. JORDAN

According to almost all Biblical expositors, Romans 11 predicts a future conversion to Christianity by the Jews as a nation. Premillennial expositors see this event as occurring during the tribulations they believe will come just before our Lord's return. Amillennial expositors hold the same view. Postmillennialists see the conversion of the Jews as the event that inaugurates the "latter-day glory."

There are a few who hold out against this interpretation of Romans 11. Some go with the opinion that the phrase "thus all Israel will be saved" in verse 26 refers to the Church, the new Israel of God. In general, this view holds that since the history of Old Testament Israel is fulfilled by the transformation of Israel into the Church, this is what verse 26 is referring to. This interpretation has relatively few advocates, however, since throughout Romans 9-11, "Israel" means the Jews. It is unlikely that Paul changes his meaning in Romans 11:26.

Others hold that the conversion of Israel as described in Romans 11 is not an event, but simply points to the fact that throughout the history of the New Covenant, Jews will be converting all along the way, and in this way the total sum of "all Israel will be saved." The problem with this view is that throughout the passage, events are what is being discussed. It is unlikely that Paul suddenly shifts to a generality in 11:26.



Thus, the "future conversion of Israel" interpretation continues to hold sway.

About three years ago I began to question this interpretation. It seems to me very odd that this is the only place in New Testament where a future conversion of the Jews is predicted. Almost every book in the New Testament speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem. Many speak of the gospel's going out to all the world and transforming it. Many also speak of our Lord's Final Advent at the end of the present age. But nowhere else is anything said about a future conversion of the Jews.

It occurred to me that perhaps Romans 11 predicts an event that was future to Paul, but not

future to us; to wit: that Romans 11 predicts a conversion of many Jews to Christ just before the destruction of Israel in A.D. 70. The more I thought about it, the more sense this interpretation made.

As I shared my thoughts with several theologian-friends, I found that others had begun to think along the same lines. I was encouraged to write up my new thoughts and publish them in this newsletter. I have been reluctant to do so, however, because so many other friends have strongly propounded the futurist view of Romans 11. Finally, however, I have been

If it is robbery to deprive the Jews of their nationalistic expectations, then it follows inevitably that the Jews who believe during "the Church age" ... are in a sense being penalised and punished. Their admission into the church is a kind of second-best. **Oswald T. Allis, in *Prophecy and the Church***

persuaded to share my thoughts with a wider audience.

Of course, for years I have taught the futurist view of Romans 11, arguing that the Jews and all the nations of the world (though not every individual) will be converted to Christ and that this event will usher in a period of prosperity (not perfection) for Christendom. This is the “Puritan” interpretation, and I have been an advocate of it for years. Now I no longer think it is correct. I ask my fellow “Puritans” to grant me the space to set out my thoughts, and to consider these things with me.

I believe that a postmillennial, or optimistic, view of the future course of Christian history is taught or assumed in many passages in the Bible. I used the entire second half of my book *Through New Eyes* to argue that an expansive view of the kingdom of God is woven into the warp and woof of Biblical revelation. The parables of the leaven and of the mustard seed are enough to show that Christianity is destined to grow and grow. And such Biblical predictions as that all nations will come to Zion to receive the truth, and that the knowledge of God will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea, establish in my mind that there will be a long period of gospel prosperity before the Lord’s final return. All nations will convert eventually, and this includes the Jews.

What I now question is whether the Bible predicts a time when suddenly all nations will turn to Christ, an event capped off by the conversion of the Jews. All I see in the Bible is general progress over time. It may be that the Christianization of the world will proceed along the same lines it has for the past two millennia, gradually building toward the latter-day glory. On the other hand, there may be a crisis that ushers in the golden age; but if there is, I don’t think Romans 11 has anything to do with it.

I hope that I have set my postmillennial and Puritan brethren’s minds to rest by these comments.

Preterism

Before going further, I need to explain for any new readers that I am committed to the “preterist” approach to the interpretation of prophecy. The preterist school holds that most of the predictions in the New Testament concern the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Anything spoken of as “near” or “at

hand” was fulfilled in the first century, as was anything connected with special signs. Matthew 24-25 make it clear to me that there are no special signs of the Final Advent; the Master returns without warning “after a long time.”

In particular, the preterists maintain that the Book of Revelation was written around 65 A.D., and that it is mostly concerned with the destruction of Jerusalem. My own lectures through Revelation are available from Biblical Horizons. A thorough study of the dating of Revelation is available in Kenneth Gentry’s *Before Jerusalem Fell*, an excellent commentary on Revelation is available in David Chilton’s *Days of Vengeance*, and a fine introduction to the preterist view is Chilton’s *Paradise Restored*. (As my lectures on Revelation show, I don’t agree with Chilton at every point, particularly in his interpretation of Revelation 14:14-20.)

Preterism takes note of the fact that the Temple and Jerusalem are related typologically to the Church. In Revelation 2-3, Jesus promises to visit and inspect His churches from time to time. Each church is said to be in a city. Jesus threatens to eliminate churches that have apostatized, and to judge their cities. Then Revelation 4-19 show what Jesus is talking about by describing the destruction of the church (Temple) in the city Jerusalem. Moreover, the coming of Christ to pass judgment on the old covenant and the old creation in A.D. 70 is typologically related to His future coming to judge the new creation at the end of time. Thus, the view that most New Testament prophecy has been fulfilled in A.D. 70 does not make it irrelevant for us today at all.

There is a school of thought that goes by the name “consistent preterist.” Advocates of this view hold that every prophesied event in the Bible was fulfilled by A.D. 70, and that the Bible does not teach any Final Advent of Jesus Christ. The “consistent preterists” deny the resurrection of the physical body, and hold that this present world will continue forever and that there will be no such Last Judgment as the Church has taught.

This view was proposed by a few exegetes of the last century, most prominently by J. Stuart Russell, whose book *The Parousia* has been reprinted by Baker Book House. The most noted advocate of this viewpoint today is the Church of Christ theologian Max R. King. The

Church of Christ (USA) is a largely preterist denomination, and many of their theologians have done good work in the area of interpreting prophecy. Most are very unhappy with King’s extreme position, and within Church of Christ circles there is a growing body of literature arguing against “consistent preterism.” I have dealt with the “consistent preterist” viewpoint in my lectures on “The A.D. 70 Question,” and my lectures on Matthew 24 can be consulted for my thinking on that chapter.

I mention King because his recent book *The Cross and the Parousia of Christ* (Parkman Road Church of Christ, 4705 Parkman Road, Warren, OH; 1987) contains within it a helpful exposition of Romans 9-11. King’s theology is badly confused, and I cannot give a good recommendation to his book, but his discussion of Romans 9-11 I have found to be of some help. Since King believes every New Testament prophecy was fulfilled in the events around A.D. 70, he naturally sees Romans 11 as fulfilled then as well. On this latter point I think he is correct, though my interpretation of Romans 11 differs significantly from his.

Who Were the Jews?

Most Christians think of the Jews as a race of people descended from Abraham. In this section of this essay I want to call this assumption into question, by looking at the history of Israel in the Old Testament.

When God called Abraham and made him a priest to the gentile nations, He commanded him to use the sign of circumcision to mark out the Hebrews from the other nations. Abraham’s household at this time included at least 318 fighting men (Gen. 14:14), as well as their wives and children, and possibly many more servants. All of these men were circumcised. We see these servants mentioned in the book of Genesis several times (Gen. 26:19ff.; 32:16), and when Jacob went down to sojourn in Egypt, so many people went with him that he had to be given the whole land of Goshen to dwell in. Genesis 46 provides a list of only about 70 actual blood descendants of Abraham who went into Egypt. Thus, from the very beginning, the Israelites were defined by covenant, not by blood and race.

The same was true for each of the tribes within Israel. A Levite was not necessarily a blood descendant of Levi, but more

likely was a descendant of one of the patriarchs' servants who was part of Levi's company. Only a small percentage of Levites would actually have been descendants of Levi.

These several thousand people became over two million by the time of the Exodus 215 years later. Only a small percentage of the people who came out of Egypt had any racial connection with Abraham. Moreover, added to the company of Israel at this time was a vast mixed multitude, many of whom became circumcised members of the nation, and therefore members of individual tribes as well.

There was another admixture of converts in the time of David and Solomon. Think of Uriah the Hittite, for example. Then again, the book of Esther tells us that during and after the Exile many more gentiles became Jews (Esth. 8:17).

What this means is that very few of the Jews at the time of Christ had any of Abraham's blood in them. **They were a nation formed by covenant, not a race formed by blood.** True, Jesus Himself was a true blood descendant of Abraham, and His genealogy is important for theological reasons, but few other Jews could trace their genealogy to Abraham.

What I seek to establish by this survey is this: With the passing away of the Old Covenant, there is no longer any such a thing as a Jew in the Biblical sense, unless by "True Jews" we mean Christians. There is no covenant, and therefore there is no nation, no "race."

What, then, are modern Jews? Modern Jews are people who choose to think of themselves as descendants of Israel. Most modern Jews are not semites, but are descended from Eastern European tribes that converted to Judaism in the middle ages. Arthur Koestler's *The Thirteenth Tribe* provides much information about this. Modern Jews do not worship the God of the Old Testament. They are either secular humanists, or else Talmudists, and the Talmud has no more relation to the Old Testament than does the Quran or the Book of Mormon. Like the Quran and the Book of Mormon, the Talmud and Mishnah are designed to add to and reinterpret the Old Testament in such a way as to obliterate completely the revelation of God through Jesus Christ (compare Luke 24:27). The "God" of Judaism is as much a fiction as the "God" of Islam and the "God" of Mormonism.

It is entirely possible that there is not one drop of Abraham's blood in any modern Jew. Of the tiny percentage of Israel that had Abraham's blood in the first century, it is possible that all such either became Christians or were slain in the Jewish War of A.D. 70. No one can know for sure about something like this, and it does not matter in the slightest.

Modern Jews are a separate nation of people with a self-identity, spread out among many other nations. The closest analogy to them are the Gypsies. The only difference between Modern Jews and Gypsies is that the Modern Jews claim to have a relation to the Biblical Jews, a claim I maintain is false.

An analogy may help. Mormons think of themselves as Christians, and call themselves Christians, but they are not Christians. They are counterfeit Christians. Just so, Modern Jews think of themselves as Jews, but they are not Jews. They are counterfeits of Biblical Jews. I say this not to disparage them, but to be accurate. In fact, I shall argue later in this paper that this business of treating Jews as special is directly related to the persecutions the Jews have so frequently experienced.

Transformations

Let us return to history for another slant on this matter. When God called Israel out of Egypt, most of the people refused to follow Him and died in the wilderness. The old Hebrew people ceased to exist and were transformed into Israel, their new name. (I have discussed this succession of names in my book, *Through New Eyes*.) The Israel that entered the promised land was a new people made up of a mixture of Hebrews and converted gentiles, the mixed multitude. Their leaders were Joshua, a converted Hebrew, and Caleb, a converted gentile Kenizzite (Gen. 15:19; Josh. 14:6). (By "conversion" I mean that they entered the Mosaic Covenant.) According to Numbers 13:6, Caleb's family had not only been adopted into the tribe of Judah, but had risen to prominence in it.

This event is directly analogous to the New Testament situation. The wilderness wanderings lasted 40 years, as did the span between A.D. 30 and 70. The Jews were called by Jesus and the apostles, and many converted (that is, they entered the New Covenant). Some reverted to Judaism, turning into apostate Judaizers, and like the apostates in Moses' day, they "died in the wilderness"

by A.D. 70. Meanwhile, many "mixed multitude" gentiles joined the kingdom. By A.D. 70, it was time to enter the promised land, and the old Jewish people ceased to exist, being transformed into Christians, their new name.

The same kind of event happened at the Exile. A study of the book of Ezekiel will show that God called His people out of Judea into the wilderness of exile, where He tabernacled with them. The people were given a choice: either move forward with God or perish by looking backward to the old ways. During the time of exile, as we have seen, many gentiles converted into the nation. By the time the Exile was over, and the people returned to the Promised Land, the old Israel ceased to exist, being transformed into Jews, their new name.

Let us return to the Mosaic transition and examine the phenomenon of "falling away." At Mount Sinai, all the people accepted the new Mosaic Covenant. Before too long, however, a large group of people were objecting to one of the most distinctive features of the Mosaic Covenant. During patriarchal times, any man might offer sacrifice at an altar to God, but the worship of the Tabernacle was "closer" to God and therefore holier and more dangerous. It is dangerous for a sinner to get too close to the Consuming Fire, and so the only people allowed to approach the new Mosaic altar were the priests, who were specially ordained and anointed for this purpose. God forbade all sacrifice except that conducted at the Tabernacle, which meant that the Hebrew people were no longer permitted to build and sacrifice at altars. As it became clear that the people had "lost" this "right," those who did not perceive that the Mosaic Covenant was in fact more glorious than the Abrahamic Covenant had been, rebelled. Their argument was that "all the people are holy and all are priests" (Ex. 19:6) and that Moses and Aaron were exalting themselves over the congregation (Numbers 16-17). They were drawing the wrong inferences from Exodus 19:6 because they were clinging to the older covenant.

This group of rebels is closely paralleled by the Judaizers of the New Testament era. The Judaizers were people who became Christians, and then realized that the leaders of the Christian community were changing the rules on them. Just as Korah, Dathan, and Abiram did not want to give up the old

Hebrew ways in order to become Israelites, so the Judaizers did not want to give up the old Jewish ways in order to become Christians. Just as Korah and Company accused Moses and Aaron of inventing their own religion, so the Judaizers accused Paul. Just as many of the Israelites in Moses' day wanted to return to Egypt, so the Judaizers wanted to return to Judaism. This is the "falling away" to which the New Testament refers a number of times.

Korah and his followers were killed, and the rebels of Moses' day died during the 40 years in the wilderness. Their beliefs, however, continued to find expression in Israel. From the time of the Conquest under Joshua to the Exile under Nebuchadnezzar, there were many people who insisted on worshipping "God" on high places. They insisted that they, and not those who served the Tabernacle/Temple, were the true Hebrews. They insisted that they were the true sons of Abraham, and that the promised land belonged to them. They worshipped God, they claimed, in the same way Abraham and the patriarchs did: at altars they made themselves

with sacrifices they offered themselves. They claimed that they were preserving the old ways, but the prophets said they were idolaters who had become corrupted with paganism.

How true was the claim of the "high placers"? It was not true at all. The true sons of Abraham were those who accepted the Mosaic Covenant. The true owners of the promised land were those who moved into the new covenant at Mount Sinai, and who set aside patriarchal worship for something better. At the Exile, God removed the "high placers" permanently from His land, and gave it to those who would be loyal to the Temple worship.

The same is true in the New Covenant. The Judaizers and those Jews who would not accept Jesus were killed at the end of the 40-year "wilderness" period from A.D. 30-70. Their beliefs, however, continued to find expression among the Jews who survived. The Ebionites carried on the heresies of the Judaizers, and the Talmudic Jews carried on the heresies of the Pharisees. They insist that they, and not the Christians, are the true Jews. They insist that they are the true

sons of Abraham, and that the promised land belongs to them. They worship God, they claim, in the same way the Jews of Jesus' day did: through Passover and synagogue. They claim that they preserve the old ways, but the New Testament and the Christian religion say that they are idolaters who have become corrupted with paganism.

How true is the claim of post-New Covenant Judaism? It is not true at all. The true sons of Abraham, and of the Biblical Jews, are those who accept the New Covenant. The true owners of the promised land are those who moved into the New Covenant with Jesus, and who set aside Passover and synagogue for something better. At the Holocaust (A.D. 70), God removed the "Jews" from His land, and gave legal title to it to those who would be loyal to Him. (Notice that Modern Jews occupy the land of Palestine only because the Christian West supplies them with money, arms, technology, and legal treaties. The Promised Land belongs to the sons of Abraham—Christians—and the only reason Modern Jews are there today is because Christians let them be.)

"It's Time to Fold 'Em"

BY GARY DEMAR

"If you're gonna play the game, boy, ya gotta learn to play it right. You got to know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em, Know when to walk away and know when to run."

Kenny Rogers' "The Gambler" has sold millions of copies since its 1978 release and spawned five made-for-TV movies. But the song's appeal is in its no-nonsense philosophy. When there is no way to win, it's time to walk away from the game. The game is over for Israel. Let me explain. In Tim LaHaye's pre-tribulational rapture novel *The Remnant* the Jews are in for a hellacious future. Two-thirds of the Jews living in Israel will be slaughtered. LaHaye is not alone in holding this noxious position. John Hagee, a popular prophecy writer, states in a World Net Daily column:

Jerusalem today is a detonating device with no fail-safe system. It's a loaded pistol at an international poker dispute with all players demanding control. It's a driverless coach careening toward a blind curve—the collision of which will birth World War III.

You see, there's nothing anyone can do about WW III. According to Hagee, it's a prophetic inevitability. It's this fatalistic futuristic perspective that has kept the heads of Jews on the chopping block for 2000 years since there's still one more holocaust that Jews will have to go through.

Even so, evangelicals are spending millions of dollars to help Jews return to Israel. In so doing, says the Rev. James M. Hutchens, president of Israel/USA, "we believe we are fulfilling a divine calling . . . to assist the Jewish people in their physical

return and restoration of the land of Israel." Like Hagee and LaHaye, Hutchens maintains that "There will be no peace until the Messiah comes."

The views of these men are alarming to some Jewish leaders, as they should be. Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, asks, "To what extent will a theological view that calls for Armageddon in the Middle East lead [evangelicals] to support policies that may move in that direction, rather than toward stability and peaceful coexistence?" The most probable scenario is that prophetic futurists will sit back and do nothing as they see Israel go up in smoke. What can they do? The Bible predicts it. "There will be no peace until the Messiah comes."

Given this inevitable scenario, what should Jews do? Leave Israel. Under the New Covenant, your land is meaningless. It has no more theological importance than Rhode Island. Under LaHaye, Hagee, and Hutchens' prophetic model, odds are you'll be dead if you stay. If not you, then certainly someone in your family will die. But if you leave, the Muslims won't have a common enemy to unify them. Let them destroy one another. Remember, Iran's war with Iraq and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait? There is no unity among these Muslim nations with Israel gone.

Then what? Come to America! Maybe we can convince Congress and the President to carve out a parcel of land in one of our National Monuments for you to settle. America is the safest place on earth for you. Once the Muslims kill themselves off, if you still think your barren strip of land is important, then you can go back. So take a lesson from Kenny. If you're gonna play the game, ya gotta learn to play it right. You got to know when to hold on to the land and when to run. It's time to run.